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Qualitative Investigation of Young Children's Music Preferences

Kathryn Roulston
The University of Georgia

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Abstract

This qualitative study examined young children's music preferences through group conversations with children, interviews with parents, and non-participant observation of classroom settings in daycare and elementary classrooms. Data were analyzed inductively to generate themes, and revealed that (1) children expressed distinct preferences for an eclectic range of music from very early ages; (2) rock and popular music were frequently mentioned as preferred styles by parents and children, with movie and television soundtracks high in popularity; (3) music listening was characterized by a reliance on diverse technologies, with listening inextricably interwoven with viewing; and (4) music listening and experiences in the home described by children and parents varied considerably from what was offered in the school and daycare settings. Findings from this study contribute to an understanding of young children's music preferences and listening habits in contemporary Western society.

Introduction

> The week's theme in the older toddlers' room at the daycare center was "The Zoo." Decorated with pictures of camels, monkeys and gorillas, along with stuffed animals and puppets, the spacious room displayed a large sign proclaiming, "Welcome to the Pearson[1] Zoo. Rides $5.00." One of the teachers, Mrs. Jones, adjusted the volume of a stereo in the corner, ensuring that the song lyrics about animals could be heard across the room. As a new track began, a child, Irene, shouted in recognition. Mrs. Jones clapped to the beat of the music as one of the boys, Reilly, stamped his feet. During the lyrics of "Monkey in the bed," Mrs. Jones imitated monkey sounds to a child she was holding. While Mrs. Jones moved her body rhythmically to the music, Irene played with a monkey puppet she had put on during the song. When a song about a lion began, Irene cried out, "Lion!" and ran to one of the cupboards, where she rummaged around, emerging from her search with a long, stuffed tail. Returning to Mrs. Jones, Irene said, "I want to be a lion." Mrs. Jones attached the tail to the back of Irene's dress with a safety pin. Later, Irene asked Mrs. Jones to play a favorite song. As she examined the album sleeve, Mrs. Jones responded, "The truth about lions – is that what you want to hear?" Turning to Irene, she asked, "What's the tiger song?" Irene repeated her request, "I want the tiger song." Mrs. Jones answered, "I have a feeling I'm not able to help you out." (From Fieldnotes, 9.00-10.30 am, 3-4 year-old classroom, April 19, 2002).

On the occasion described in this vignette, neither Mrs. Jones, nor another teacher, Mrs. Ellis, was able to locate the song that Irene had specifically requested. Yet in the morning sessions I observed at this daycare center, music was frequently audible. Daycare providers used music in multiple ways – as background music to free play activities; in group singing activities; and as a way to facilitate specific activities, such as cleaning up, or assembling children in a particular area for the next activity of the day. For example, through singing the words, "Clean up clean up/Everybody everywhere/Clean up clean up/Everybody do your share," and leading children in tidying up activities, Mrs. Jones signaled the conclusion of free play shortly after the event described above, and indicated the prospect of another activity after clean up had been completed. In my observations in elementary and daycare settings, it was adults who commonly selected and chose the music for the day. Occasions for children to offer suggestions for songs they would like to sing or listen to were rare in my observations.

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[1] All personal and place names in this article are pseudonyms.

In this paper I report findings from a qualitative study that examined parents' accounts of their children's demonstrations of music preference. The study also investigated what young children themselves identified as preferred music. I begin by reviewing relevant research that has focused on the topic of children's music preferences.

Literature Review

Over the past 30 years, music preference[2] has been investigated from numerous perspectives by researchers in music education. These include listeners' preferences for music activities, opinions and preferences toward various music styles or songs, listeners' preferences with regard to specific musical characteristics, and variables affecting music preference. Rather than repeat Demorest and Schultz's (2004) comprehensive review of the literature on music preference, I recapitulate some assertions that may be made on the basis of prior research with specific emphasis on children's music preferences. First, researchers have found that popular and rock styles of music are popular among elementary children (see for example, Brittin, 2000; Greer et al., 1974; Jellison & Flowers, 1991; LeBlanc, 1979, 1981) and that the preference for rock music increased with age. Second, when tested, younger children routinely gave higher preference scores for audio-taped music excerpts that they listened to, and responded more positively to the music excerpts presented than older children (see Brittin, 2000; LeBlanc et al., 1988, LeBlanc et al., 1996; Montgomery, 1996). Third, with respect to characteristics of most preferred music, studies have shown that children prefer music (in a variety of styles) performed in faster tempi (LeBlanc, 1981, LeBlanc et al, 1988; Montgomery, 1996), giving preference to familiar, as opposed to unfamiliar, music (Demorest & Schultz, 2004). Fourth, significant variables in music preference include age, country and gender (LeBlanc et al., 1999), and the race of the listener and the performer (McCrary, 1993). In contrast, Sims' and Cassidy's study (1997) demonstrated that the absence or presence of lyrics did not appear to affect young children's music preferences, and was not a significant variable impacting music preference.

Research concerning children's music preferences in music education has generally been confined to educational settings, with researchers investigating children's preferences for different types of music used in classrooms, and surveying school students' responses to different music. Yet, some researchers have begun to look beyond school settings to the home when examining the kinds of musical activities and media that children and young people are exposed to on a daily basis. For example, in a number of survey studies, Custodero and her colleagues have examined parents' descriptions of musical engagement in home settings with children from birth to three years (Custodero, Britto & Brooks-Gunn,

[2] I use Price's (1986) definition of "preference" as "an act of choosing, esteeming, or giving advantage to one thing over another. Propensity toward something" (p. 154).

2003; Custodero, Britto & Xin, 2002; Custodero & Johnson-Green, 2003; Johnson-Green & Custodero, 2002). Custodero (2006) has also provided in-depth ethnographic accounts of the singing practices of families with young children. These studies provide substantial insight into family practices with respect to musical activities such as singing and music listening. Young children's preference for songs is dealt with specifically in Johnson-Green and Custodero (2002). In an on-line survey of 141 parents who had visited ZERO TO THREE's website, the authors found that parents reported "Itsy Bitsy Spider" as the favorite song of America's babies. In this article, the authors include parents' descriptions of how they use music with children in everyday activities. No styles of music outside traditional children's songs are mentioned in this article; however Johnson-Green and Custodero (2002) note the "powerful response that music in the media elicits from young children" (p. 48). Other researchers have investigated young people's descriptions of their involvement in arts activities. While not specifically focusing on music, Barrett and Smigiel (2003) surveyed and interviewed young people aged 5-15 in Australia, examining 330 children's descriptions of their engagement with the arts in home settings. Their report from the first phase of the study includes children's descriptions of listening to music, singing, and playing instruments with other family members.

In the UK, Lamont, Hargreaves, Marshall and Tarrant (2003) surveyed 1,479 young people aged 8-14 years, interviewed 42 head and music teachers, and conducted focus groups with 134 pupils from primary and secondary schools. Of interest here is the finding that almost all of the young people involved reported listening to music (radio, CDs and tapes), with Year 9 pupils reporting listening to music up to 13 hours each week (p. 237). The most popular styles reported by young people were pop, dance, rock, and R&B, with only 10% referring to classical or jazz music in responses. In another UK study of 684 children in 6th and 7th grades, O'Neill, Sloboda, Boulton & Ryan (2002) also reported that almost all of the participants (98%) reported moderate to high levels of engagement in music listening, with a steady increase over time. Findings from these studies suggest that children and young people are highly engaged in musical activities outside school settings – with music listening increasing with age.

Yet, there is still much to be learned about the music preferences of young children. Walsh (2002, p. 101) wisely notes that "children and times change rapidly." The study reported in this paper seeks to contribute to an understanding of young children's music preferences by exploring the topic via (1) observations of children in an early childhood daycare center and elementary school; (2) interviews with parents of 5-8 year-old children; and (3) group conversations with young children. While previous research relies heavily on quantitative procedures and large-scale survey designs in order to gain generalizable knowledge, the present study seeks to gain in-depth descriptions that provide some sense of young children's music preferences within a specific cultural and historical context: the south-east United States in the early 21st Century.

Research Design and Methods

This interpretive qualitative case study focused on young children in two settings – one daycare center and one elementary school – and aimed to provide an understanding of the following research questions:

1. What types of music do young children in these settings prefer to listen to?
2. What have parents of children in these settings observed about their children's musical preferences?
3. What types of music do these parents provide for young children, and how do they choose this music?

As a former elementary music teacher in Australia, I had experience working with young children, and was very familiar with the kinds of musical activities that might be expected in early childhood settings. Yet, at the time of the study, I was a newcomer to the US, and I wanted to design a study to explore different kinds of early childhood settings in order to become better acquainted with the everyday activities involved in working with young children both prior to, and in an elementary school setting. I gained approval from my university's Institutional Review Board in early 2002 for a study for which I selected two research settings –a daycare center, and an elementary school. I began by recruiting participants through a local daycare center in the Spring semester 2002; and in the Fall semester of the same year, I located an elementary school some distance away. Both settings were selected on the basis that the administrators and teachers concerned were willing to allow me to observe classrooms, and assist with the recruitment of parents for the study. Letters describing the study were distributed by teachers in two classrooms in the daycare setting (3-4 year old & 4-5 year old), and three classrooms in the elementary school (Kindergarten, first, and second grade). Criterion sampling was used for both parents and children in the study – parents were selected on the basis of having children between ages 3-8 enrolled in any of the five classes listed above.

Data generation and analysis

As a non-participant observer I took field notes at the daycare center (situated in a city of approximately 120,000 residents) when visiting on 15 different days in the months of March, April, May and July.[3] This particular day-care facility serves as both a training facility for early childcare providers, and a research center. Parents enroll their children on the condition that children will be observed by students enrolled at a local university, and researchers who seek to study topics concerning early childhood. In all, I observed 6 groups in the center with children ranging in age from 12 months to 5 years, focusing my observations in the 3-4 year-old and 4-5 year-old classrooms. I interviewed all five parents who volunteered to participate in the study. One couple who I interviewed together was

[3] My Summer teaching schedule prohibited me from being available for site visits during the month of June.

Hispanic, and the other three parents were Caucasian. All parents were college-educated. Of these parents' four children at the daycare center, one was in the 4-5 year-old group (2001-02), and three were in the 3-4 year-olds group (2002-03). Interviews were of approximately 30-45 minutes' duration (interview questions are included in Appendix 1). I did not carry out group conversations with children in the day-care setting,[4] since as a researcher I was unknown to the children. My observations were undertaken via one-way viewing facilities adjacent to all the classrooms, and I did not participate in any activities within the classrooms.

This contrasts with the observations I undertook in the elementary setting. There, I sat at the back of the classroom on repeated occasions. By the time I talked with the children in the elementary school at the end of the semester, they recognized me as a repeated visitor to their classroom. I first visited an elementary school in a rural area adjacent to the city in September 2002, where I took field notes of observations in three classes — Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades — during their regular 50-minute music lessons from October to December 2002. Twenty-nine parents gave permission for their children to participate in conversations with me. Of the 13 parents who initially volunteered to be interviewed, I was able to arrange interviews with six parents[5]of the children observed and interviewed, including one parent of a child in Kindergarten, three parents of 1st graders, and two parents of 2nd graders. In November, I audio- and video- recorded 15-20-minute conversations with small groups of 3-4 children in Kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades (see Appendix 2 for topics). In all, I talked with 12 girls and 12 boys,[6] including two 5-year olds, ten 6-year olds, eight 7-year olds and four 8-year olds. Five of the six parents interviewed in this part of the study were college educated, several had advanced degrees, and all were Caucasian.

Data storage, retrieval and an analysis were aided by the use of a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) package, NVivo 2. I began by reading electronic versions of transcripts and field notes, and applying preliminary codes or labels in NVivo2. Codes were sorted into larger categories (for example, the category "preferences" included "preferred singers," "preferred styles," "preferred instruments," "preferred songs," and "dispreferred music"). Other categories included "children's attributes" (this category included parents' descriptions and recollections of their children's behaviors and activities

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[4] With the permission of her mother, I did attempt to conduct a conversation with 3-year-old Amy, in order to see what might happen. My conversation with Amy, however, did not yield useful data. Although the mother was present, Amy was more intent on asking questions, and commenting on the state of the room we were in or her friends and toys. Clearly, if researchers are to interview children of this age, they would need to have had a good deal of interaction with the children concerned *prior* to any research conversation. Simply stepping out from behind one-way glass will not do!

[5] Contact information was incomplete for some parents; and others were too busy to participate.

[6] Five children were absent from school on the days conversations took place.

related to musical activities and music listening); "mediums for listening" (this category included the various mediums used by children and their families for listening to music); "listening habits" (this category included descriptions of routines for music listening such as bedtime or traveling, and descriptions of children's routine behaviors while listening to music), and "family listening" (this category included descriptions of siblings' musical activities, parents' descriptions of their involvement in musical activities; and descriptions of music listening in the home).

Once I had completed preliminary coding, I sorted all data into specific categories. I developed themes through an iterative process of re-reading the data, considering each of the research questions, and considering what stood out in the data (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). In developing the themes presented below, I searched for data that did not support preliminary assertions by re-reading transcripts throughout the analytic process. In the next section, I present findings supported by excerpts from the data set that represent views expressed by participants of the study.

Findings

In this section, I discuss the following themes: (1) parents' descriptions of their children's early demonstrations of music preference; (2) young children's demonstrated preferences for music; (3) technologies of listening; and (4) music preference in the classroom and home.

Children's Early Demonstrations of Music Preference

Parents described memories of their children displaying preferences for specific kinds of music from early ages. Children demonstrated their preference to both parents and teachers by expressing dislike for certain kinds of music, songs and/or singers and making requests for other kinds of music. Parents reported their children's active engagement in music, aural recognition of instrumental and vocal music from an early age, and specific requests for music (frequently characterized by repetitious listening of the same song) from as early as 10 months to 2 and 3 years of age. For example, one mother described the first time she recalled her daughter displaying an interest in a specific kind of music.

> She is a real rock and roll kid I guess. Ever since she was a baby, well when she was a baby the first thing that she really showed an interest in was *Raffi*. We had this one tape I remember. We were driving to Florida for Thanksgiving, so I guess she was 8, 10 months old, 9 months old? She would be crying and crying, crying, and the only thing that would make her stop crying would be to put in this tape. So we had to listen to *Raffi* over and over and over for the whole 8 hour trip…So that was kind of her first real, putting her foot down about music. And now….she loves *The Beatles*. (Mother of 3-year-old daughter, Amy)

Another mother recalled that her son began to make requests for certain kinds of music at the age of two:

> When he turned two he started …. asking for things….Like he would say…if we were going to bed, he would be…"I want night-night music" or "I want Mozart at Midnight." That's the name of that record. Or in the car …. cowboy songs he'll start singing it to himself, he'll be like "Oh, dosey yo do" and then he'll go, "I want to listen to cowboy songs," so he'll start singing to himself and then ask for it. (Mother of 3-year-old son, Aaron)

Sometimes these accounts included descriptions of feats of aural recognition, as in the following narrative:

> I think Amanda was two and we were riding around looking at Christmas lights with my mom and we were listening to Christmas music and Tchaikovsky's *Sleeping Beauty* came on the radio and she said "Gand gom," which is my mom, and my mom said, "What Amanda?" And she said, "*Sleeping Beauty,"* and my mom said, "Oh, okay." My mom looked at me and said, "What is she talking about?" I said, "She's letting you know that's the music from *Sleeping Beauty*." My mom was like, "You're kidding me." I said, "No." …. We had the Disney collection so she had already seen *Sleeping Beauty* and that was her favorite one at the time. A good many times if she listens to music enough she can tell you what movie she's heard it from or if she saw it on TV or off the radio. (Mother of 6-year-old daughter, Amanda)

Parents described children being particular in expressing their musical preference; for example, Amanda's mother described her daughter specifying particular tracks to be played on the way to preschool.

> There's been a couple of times – like certain CDs or tapes where she'll say "Rewind it to this song." She won't listen to every song. There's certain songs and we have worn out tapes just skipping songs. Two years ago….she was in a Christian preschool…but every morning when we got in the car she would pull out her tape. We'd have five Christian tapes of kids' songs and she'd pull one out every morning and say "Play this mama." It was just over and over every morning and on the way home it was the same thing "Play this mama." Like I said, there was no particular artist or particular group, she just knew what she liked and that's what she wanted to hear.

Parents also provided descriptions of their children telling them what kind of music they did not like to listen to, and it appears that children boldly display their opinions when music does not appeal to them. For example, another mother said:

> Most of the time we listen to the [Christian radio station] but there are some times -- like when the 80s music comes on, me and my husband will be singing it, and he's [Brandon] like, "Not again. Not again." (Mother of 6-year old son, Brandon)

One father commented:

> There was one time, too, when we were playing classical and he said something like "I don't like that," or something like that. He doesn't like slow, soft songs except for certain songs like *Swan Lake*. That appeals to him, but instrumental classical music doesn't. (Father of 6-year old son, Richard)

This father also spoke of how his son, to his parents' surprise, rejected the country music that they were listening to:

> I don't remember exactly what he said. I just remember him saying "Turn it off," and then "That music is yucky," or "That music is stupid," or something like that.

Another mother mentioned her attempts to encourage her three young daughters to listen to classical music, with no success:

> I just could never get them to listen to it. You know, you hear of the Mozart theory and all that kind of stuff but I just couldn't get them interested. (Mother of 5-year old daughter, Alecia)

Commenting that her child identified lullabies with bedtime music, and was not interested in listening to that kind of music during the day, one mother said:

> Yeah, and I have thought about trying to get her to listen to more classical music, but she doesn't. I think that she likes to listen to singing. (Mother of 3-year-old daughter, Amy)

Even music specifically marketed for children may not necessarily be appreciated by members of the intended audience, as one father explained. Below, he commented on his daughter's response to a CD he had bought.

> I bought her one called -- I forget what it is -- where a guy actually wrote lyrics to a lot of classical pieces and she didn't like it at all; didn't take to it at all…I thought she would because the lyrics were pretty silly, pretty funny but she didn't like it. (Father of 4-year-old daughter, Leanne)

Parents readily described their children expressing specific preferences for certain kinds of music or songs from an early age, together with distaste for other kinds of music. While parents readily described their children expressing specific preferences for certain kinds of music or songs from an early age, together with distaste for other kinds of music, children also spoke about the kinds of music that they like to listen to.

Young Children's Preferences for Music

The children who participated in this study expressed preference for a wide range of musical styles, and parents spoke of providing very different listening experiences in their homes. As one would expect, analysis of interview transcripts showed that children's

listening experiences in the home appeared to depend on parents' own listening preferences, although older siblings and peers also provided access to other styles of music – of which parents did not necessarily approve. One parent commented:

> He's obviously influenced by us. Ever since he was very little we've always played music in the car and stuff like that and I guess that's kind of probably where he heard it and still hears it most. Ever since he was very little we used to refer to him as [a] head banging baby because he would be bopping in the back in his little car seat when he was two-years-old…. he loves The Beatles. He loves the [Rolling] Stones. Now his big thing has been the *B52s*. He got a *B52s* CD two years ago. (Father of 6-year-old son, Richard)

Parents interviewed mentioned listening to a wide range of music styles themselves – including Christian music, marching band, gospel, blues, folk, Celtic, country and western, rockabilly, jazz, opera, classical, popular and rock styles. In the case of two families involved in the study, parents had made specific efforts to expose their children to music of their child's ethnic heritage (in this case Latin America and China).

Similarly to several others, parents of three-year-old Maria said that she liked "all kinds" of music, which they listed:

> Researcher: I was just wondering if you could describe the kinds of music that Maria listens to.
>
> Father: All kinds….All kinds of music, yeah from kids' songs that are associated with stories to Marengo, salsa, disco.
>
> Mother: She likes Janet Jackson a lot. (laughter)
>
> Father: I think she likes music that has a beat…And she likes to dance. She's quite a party dancer.

An emphasis on the beat was mentioned by another parent, who, when asked what kind of music her 7-year old daughter preferred said, "Oh gosh, they are usually just upbeat. Catchy lyrics, just really upbeat songs I would have to say." An emphasis on "beat" or "rhythm" in children's preferred music was described by six parents interviewed.

Eight parents spoke of providing "Children's Music" for their children, and which their children enjoyed. These included popular performers such as *Raffi* and *The Wiggles*; music from television series such as *Barney, Sesame Street, Thomas the Tank Engine*, and *Bob the Builder*; collections of traditional "hit" songs for toddlers and kids; collections of Disney tunes for children; and Holiday music (Christmas and Halloween music). In my conversations with children, nine mentioned their enjoyment of listening to Christmas songs, music from *Barney* and other children's programs, and Disney movies.

Parents and children frequently mentioned numerous singers and bands as children's preferred musicians (these included singers from the 1950s onward: a range including Elvis

Presley, Jimmy Hendrix, The Beatles, The Who, James Taylor, Emmy Lou Harris, The Rolling Stones, Backstreet Boys, N'Sync, Janet Jackson, Shania Twain, Britney Spears, Ricky Martin, REM and Aaron Carter). Two parents also spoke of their children making requests for and enjoying the music of Beethoven and Mozart, and a third said that her son, who was learning violin via the Suzuki method, enjoyed listening to classical violin music.

As did parents, children also mentioned names of specific bands and singers, often in combination with other styles (such as rap or rock). For example:

> My sister has a CD with fairy tales on it, but I usually listen [to] it in the summer. And I usually listen to *Backstreet Boys* and *N'Sync* the most….they have this new CD I want, and I am hoping that I can get it. It's got all kind of neat songs on it that I want to hear. (7-year-old Michael)

> Well I kind of like to listen to rock stars, and I kind of like to listen to Christmas music and all of that. (8-year-old Christopher)

A number of children also spoke about listening to their parents' music, or listening to music with their parents. For example, Claire talked about listening to an Australian band, *The Vines*.

> My favorite song is *The Vines* because my mama usually turns it on a lot and I just turn it down when it gets really loud and I like to listen to it. (6-year old Claire)

Some of the children in the study had access to live music in cases where parents are regular concertgoers or musicians, or the child had a sibling who played in a band or at school. Only one child participating in the study was undertaking formal music lessons, begun at his request.

These particular young children were exposed to a diversity of music styles in home settings. The eclectic mix of music described in this study seems to reflect the variety in styles and genres that also appeared in parents' descriptions of the kinds of music that they enjoyed. The impact of a dazzling array of media choices was also apparent in the data, as parents and children described listening to live music, recorded music via audio-tapes and CDs, as well as that heard on children's television programming.

Technologies of Listening

Data analyzed for this study showed that these young children's music listening is characterized by a reliance on diverse technologies. Listening was frequently described as inextricably interwoven with *viewing* – of television and movies, and favorite videos and DVDs. Soundtracks from movies and television shows were high in popularity among children with whom I spoke, and were often described by parents and children as a source of music listening in the home or while traveling in the car. Children spoke of access to music in the home via a variety of means, including audiocassettes, videos, CDs, DVDs, portable

listening devices (such as Walkman™ and Hitclips™[7]), radio, television, and internet. Many children had their own listening devices in their bedrooms (such as CD or audiocassette players). Television was commonly mentioned as a source of music listening by parents and children; with the car repeatedly reported as a primary place for listening to music (using radio, audiotapes, or CDs). For participants of this study, music was embedded in daily life in multiple ways – through audio taped stories, movie soundtracks (ranging from The Sound of Music, Shrek, Aladdin, Jimmy Neutron, Beauty and the Beast, and The Little Mermaid), television viewing (cartoons, children's programs such as Thomas the Tank Engine, Barney, Bob the Builder, and The Wiggles), radio listening, and personal use of CDs, DVDs and audiotapes. One parent spoke about three common media used by her daughter in their household:

> She's got her own walkman. My parents gave her a little walkman and so we got some of the music on tapes and so she walks around with tapes and everything. We have a stereo that we'll turn on too and sometimes we'll just- like first thing in the morning I always turn the radio on when we get up in the mornings and get ready for school so we listen to the radio too. (Mother of 6-year-old Amanda)

Children also spoke about their use of multiple media devices via which they engaged in music listening activities. Seven-year-old Serena talked about the radio on her bicycle:

> I have one on my bike….It has a little pocket you can put one in and you can change the channels and turn it up and stuff.

Six-year-old Eric spoke of his enjoyment for the soundtrack of a favorite cartoon:

> I like *Pokemon* music when we're watching it. I like it when they're fighting Team Rocket. That's really cool. (Eric bursts into song at this point in the conversation)

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[7] Hasbro Inc., who market these micro-players to children, describe the history of HitClips™ as follows: "One of Hasbro's "hits" in 2000 was Tiger Electronic's HITCLIPS. Tapping the revival of teen pop-stars, HITCLIPS are micro-music players that can be clipped onto a child's clothing or backpack and play a portion of a song that's stored on a chip the size of a postage stamp. Hasbro's Tiger group lined up some of the year's most popular artists, including Britney Spears and 'N Sync. The product was not only a success with kids, but with the music industry as well, since it created a whole new platform on which kids could enjoy their favorite artist. HITCLIPS have gone on to sell more than 12 million hit clips since its introduction. In 2000, Hasbro teamed with the Walt Disney Company, becoming the "master toy licensee for all of Disney's event films, in addition to some classic properties, and was named as the official toy and game company for Walt DisneyWorld, Disneyland and Euro Disney."
(http://www.hasbro.com/pl/page.corporate_history_hasbro/dn/default.cfm)

Only one parent in this study spoke of her child listening to songs via internet. In this case, 3-year-old Aaron enjoyed listening to songs on the Arthur website.[8] While one parent mentioned that her 7-year-old daughter had requested Hitclips™ for Christmas, Hitclips™ were also mentioned by children. Six-year-old Robert, for example, discussed some of the current Hitclips™ offerings with 6-year-old Melanie:

> Robert: They have Britney Spears, Aaron Carter, [the song] "Who Let the Dogs Out."
>
> Melanie: Oh, yeah, I love "Who Let the Dogs Out."
>
> Robert: Me too.

The young children in this particular study frequently chose what music they listened to, and how they listened to it from an early age. This included listening to music of their choice privately in their bedroom, or taking music with them using a variety of portable devices, or while traveling in the car. One mother of a 7-year-old daughter and 3-year-old son described a regular routine:

> We can be in the car and [the children] say, "Oh let's hear number one. Okay, now number seven." So they learn very quickly which tracks are which numbers.

Another mother described a similar listening ritual:

> … from the time she could speak real[ly] well, if we were in the car she would say "Turn the radio on." And, automatically, when we would get home from daycare she would go pick a movie out and she would automatically do it over and over. And there were times that she would not watch the movie but she would walk around and if you cut it off she would say "Turn it on," so she liked to listen more than actually sit and watch. She's still that way to this day. She doesn't sit still very long. (Mother of 6-year-old Amanda)

Technologies of listening continue to proliferate – as multinational corporations introduce new ways of listening to music through handheld devices, and provide multiple means of accessing niche music markets (such as satellite radio, MP3 players and internet). What is evident from this study is that the young children participating were exposed to multiple ways of listening to music, some of which could possibly contribute to a private and individual listener, selecting specific music in different contexts for different purposes.

Music Preference in the Classroom and Home

In my observations, it appeared that children were offered little choice in the kinds of music they listened to in either the daycare center, or in the elementary music classroom.

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[8] http://pbskids.org/arthur/

This is to be expected, given that the responsibility for planning activities and selecting resources belongs to teachers, not students. A review of field notes of observations, and transcriptions of classroom interaction revealed that in the elementary music lessons, the music teacher was responsible for the selection of music in all classes observed, and there were no occasions in which children could express their music preferences by making specific requests.[9] In the daycare center, however, I observed six occasions when teachers asked students whether they would like to participate in a specific musical activity.[10] This usually followed a singing or movement activity, after which the teacher would ask the children if they would like to repeat the activity. On four occasions when the children's response was either "yes" (n=2) or "no" (n=2), the proposed activity was initiated immediately by the teacher. In a further two cases, children did not respond verbally, but responded by complying to the teacher's question as an instruction. (For example, Teacher: Can we do it one more time? I love this song. Children: (No response) *The activity* ***was*** *repeated*.) On one occasion when a teacher overrode the stated preference of the children,[11] I observed the following exchange in a daycare classroom:

> The teacher had been singing "The Old Woman who Swallowed a Fly." Various children were assigned felt cut-outs of the animals named in the song, and, as each new character was mentioned, children took their cut-out to a felt board arranged by the teacher. At the completion of the song, the following exchange occurred:
>
> Teacher: This is a silly song of course. I really like that. Can we do it one more time?
>
> Children: (in chorus) NO NO!
>
> Teacher: Do you want to do it again?
>
> Children (in chorus) NOOOO!!
>
> The teacher continued the activity by assigning the felt cut-outs to a different set of children, and proceeded to repeat the song.
>
> (Field notes, Head Start Classroom, April 26, 2002)

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[9] Given the short period of time in which elementary music specialists must deliver music curriculum, this is not a surprising finding. Music lessons observed were highly structured, and encompassed a wide variety of activities across the semester, including music appreciation, playing instruments, notation and music theory, singing and movement, and composition.

[10] Obviously, asking children if they would like to participate in an activity, or repeat it does not necessarily provide children with opportunities to display their music preferences.

[11] In reporting this example, I am not indicating that teachers *should* cater to reported music preferences. Nor should teachers refrain from using music that children initially respond to negatively. This example is useful for showing some of the routine ways in which a teacher might enact musical activities in early childhood educational programs, and may provide a point of departure for discussion on how teachers introduce activities and ask questions, among other issues.

In structured classroom activities, it appeared that there is little opportunity for children to express specific music preferences. On two occasions, however, I observed children initiating requests for preferred music as they interacted with their teachers. In one example that is described in the opening narrative to this paper, two daycare teachers went to great pains to attempt to satisfy one child's specific song request. On this day, 3-year old Irene had requested a song about tigers during free play. After a visit to another classroom to find the CD, one teacher returned empty-handed, while Irene became increasingly angry, stamping her feet, screaming, and throwing herself on the floor. Irene was eventually quieted, although her song request remained unfilled. In another lesson, a teacher was observed satisfying children's requests for a specific song. In the 4-5 year-olds classroom one morning I observed the following exchange:

> Teacher: I was trying to find a song for us to sing.
>
> Several children call out their request for "Wizard Broom."
>
> Teacher: Would you all like to hear the Wizard Broom?
>
> Teaching assistant: It's on the pink CD Miss B.
>
> (Field notes, 4-5 year-olds classroom, April 19, 2002)

In fact, the example shown above is the only occasion that I observed in which children initiated a request for a particular song that was satisfied by their teacher.[12]

All parents and children in this study reported frequent music listening in the home. Music listening was described as an enjoyable, relaxing and entertaining activity. For two families in this study, music was described as a way to maintain links to ethnic origins for children who were born overseas, or born to immigrants to the US. The division between "school" music and "home" music seemed to be apparent from the earliest ages in the types of musical activities and music listening experiences described.[13] The exception to this was Holiday music (for example, Halloween and Christmas music). Parents spoke of playing Holiday music in the home and car, and one third of the children I spoke with mentioned this type of music as a preferred style. Holiday music was also observed to be a key component of musical activities in daycare and elementary classrooms.

This contrast between the music provided in the home and school setting surfaced in one of the conversations I had with a group of children. Here, 7-year-old James implied that the music he listened to in the home was quite different to the "plain non-singing music" he was exposed to in the music classroom.

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[12] Extensive ethnographic field work would be needed to see if the morning sessions that I observed were typical of interactions throughout the day and when requests were fulfilled (that is, during unstructured time, or in other points in the school day).

[13] Since I did not observe activities in home settings, no assertions may be made as to what actually happens there.

Researcher: Are there any kinds of music that you like to listen to at home?

James: Yes

Researcher: Alright. What can you tell me about that music?

James: Some of it is silly.

Researcher: The music that you listen to at home?

James: We don't have just plain non-singing music at home.

In this short excerpt, James distinguished the kinds of music he regularly listened to at home from the "plain non-singing music" he had been exposed to in the music classroom. In James' music classroom, the initial activity was frequently movement to instrumental music, and James' music teacher also included regular music listening activities involving recorded music of different styles.

Parents described the daycare center and as a space that provided exposure for their children to different kinds of music than they would otherwise listen to at home. For example, the father of a 4-year-old daughter commented that she would immediately respond to a "techno funk kind of music" played at the daycare center, whereas she would refer to his own preferred Celtic and Classical music as "boring." Other parents also described their children "picking up" knowledge about other styles of music from peers. Mother of 3-year-old Amy commented that

> …she picks up things from some of the other kids. She knows a *Britney Spears* song because there is a little boy here who has an older sister and so he knows the song and so she started singing it.

The mother of 8-year-old Christopher spoke of trying to shield her children from certain kinds of music in the home, while acknowledging that her son learned about them from his peers at school.

> The kids in the class, they talk about Britney Spear*s* and they talk about these people. [Christopher] knows them and that is the only way he could know them because we've never listened to them. We've never seen them. We don't watch MTV…those channels are blocked out on my TV.

Data suggests that the young children in this study were exposed to different kinds of music at the daycare center and elementary school than they might otherwise hear at home. Sometimes, transmission of music that parents disliked and disapproved of occurred through other children, and sometimes through teachers. Similarly, in the music classroom I observed, the children were exposed to music with which they were often unfamiliar (for example classical and Native American music).

In contrast to the home, the classroom experiences of music that I observed offered different opportunities in terms of musical activities. For example, in the daycare center, children had access to musical instruments during free play time, and in the elementary school, playing Orff-Schulwerk instruments was a regular classroom activity. While several parents had provided musical instruments for their children, this was not widespread in the sample for this study. In only one case was a child receiving tuition on an instrument (violin), although several parents described their child playing instruments and making up songs in the home.

Discussion and Conclusions

This study of young children's music preferences provides evidence for a number of intriguing issues of interest to those involved in music education, including parents, and music and arts teachers in schools. Below I review these issues, and suggest relevant topics for future research.

First, descriptions offered by children and parents in this study indicate that these particular young children were exposed to diversity in the styles of music available from an early age, and an array of listening options – from personal listening devices to music via the internet. Prior to school age, parents described governing the kinds of music that their children were exposed to, although some also spoke about their children being exposed to different kinds of music in daycare and school settings than offered in the home. In this study, it was apparent that parents, child-care workers and teachers did expose children in their care to a wide variety of musical styles.[14] Future research using maximum variation sampling of families with diverse educational, cultural, and racial backgrounds would shed further light on whether these observations are similar for children in other geographical areas.

Second, findings from this study show that these children listened to music via an array of technologies, including portable music listening devices, some of which are marketed specifically to children (for example, Hitclips™). Both young children and parents in this study described listening to music as an accompaniment to the viewing of television programs, internet websites, games, and movies. In this study, I observed the music teacher taking advantage of this orientation towards the viewing aspect of music listening. As a reward for good classroom behavior, her classes watched a Disney video entitled "Kids Songs" at the end of the week-long block in which they attended music lessons.[15] Again, further research in music classrooms in both daycare and elementary settings would show if this is unique to this particular teacher's classroom.

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[14] See Custodero (2006) for an account of family singing practices with 3-year-old children.
[15] In this school, music was scheduled for each class on a rotating basis. Classes received 50-minutes of music instruction for a period of five consecutive days each 3-4 weeks.

In the Western art music tradition, the focus on music listening has historically focused on live music performance in concert halls. Yet today, music listening technologies that facilitate private and individual listening proliferate. For example, college students are likely to listen to their favorite music via their computers (Carnevale, 2003). Private spaces for listening offered by new technologies in which individuals are able to express individual choice may well change the way children listen to and respond to music. Further research can examine how music educators might take advantage of these new technologies in the classroom. Given that pervasive technologies such as cell phones, MP3 players, and portable DVD players now feature options for video replay, the associations that young listeners make between *listening* and *viewing*, along with how children incorporate a variety of listening technologies into everyday life are likely to provide fruitful avenues for further investigation.

Third, with increasing cultural and ethnic diversity in the U.S. and other Western societies, the variation of children's listening backgrounds represented in any single classroom is likely to continue to expand. Arts educators are faced with the tasks of appreciating the ethnic and cultural diversity present in their school communities within arts education programs, while providing the kind of focused instruction for each child that leads to the development of artistic selves (Walsh, 2002). Explorations and detailed accounts of how arts educators have effectively balanced these goals within arts education program are warranted.

Fourth, the marketing of products to children via television and movie blockbusters surfaced in the descriptions provided by parents and children in this study of children living in and near one small city in the southern United States.. Global markets for music, film and television are producing children's musical and artistic preferences in particular ways that are being constantly remade.[16] Savvy arts educators will be aware of such trends, and select and use media in innovative ways to enhance arts learning.

Finally, in this study, all parents spoke of not wanting their children to listen to certain kinds of music, particularly those with references to violence and profanity. Yet the children in this study were consumers of recorded music, films, television, and other kinds of products prior to enrolling in elementary school. Music educators might heed Weber and Singer's (2004) advice concerning children under the age of two:

> Children under 2 are television and media viewers. Media are part of infants' and toddlers' daily life. We now need to determine whether media can be integrated into the

[16] In the *New York Times* (October 16, 2006), a study by Edison Media Research is reported as finding that average radio listening hours among teenagers (12-17-year olds) has dropped. With respect to children under 12, Larry Rosin, president of Edison Media Research is quoted as saying "Nobody is targeting them except Radio Disney." Retrieved October 18, 2006 from http://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/16/technology/16drill.html?pagewanted=print
In a further example, a November 26, 2006 article in the *New York Times*, describes a new market for recordings catering to young children with parents in there 30s and 40s. One label, *Baby Rock*, attempts to cater to parents and toddlers with renditions of lullabies in the style of *The Cure*, *The Beach Boys*, and *Metallica*.

> lives of very young children in developmentally appropriate ways. If the answer is yes, we then need to discover what types of media can best support infants' and toddlers' development (p. 36).

Since the present study was exploratory in nature and involved a small sample size, further research might explore how new technologies have impacted children's music preferences and their participation in school music programs. Research in this area is needed if we are to develop a more complete understanding of children's musical preferences and listening habits, and by extension, how children develop as composers, singers, and performers. Readers may compare their own experiences and knowledge with the views and voices represented in this article. By presenting what these individuals have to say, I hope that other educators and researchers might ask different questions of parents, themselves, and children concerning the development of music preferences, and more broadly, artistic selves. Such research will contribute to an understanding of how arts educators might plan for effective learning and teaching of the arts in early and middle childhood classrooms. This kind of knowledge is essential if arts educators are to adequately prepare students for the arts in later schooling, as well as for the variety of artistic experiences that lie beyond formal school settings.

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About the Author

Kathryn Roulston is an associate professor of Qualitative Research in the Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy at the University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. Her research interests include qualitative research methodology, applications of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis to the study of talk-in-interaction, and topics in music education.

Appendix 1: Interview Guide—Parents

Tell me about the kinds of music your child listens to.

Possible probes: styles: classical, popular, rock etc.

When did your child first display a preference in music?

In what places does your child listen to music?

Possible probes: bedroom, living room, concerts, church etc.

How does your child prefer to listen to music?

Possible probes: portable devices, stereo, TV, internet etc.

When do you notice your child listening to music?

If you were purchasing music for your child, how you would select it?

Tell me what you have noticed about your child's favorite singers and/or songs.

What have you observed your child doing when they listen to music?

Tell me what you have noticed about your child's responses to music.

Are there any particular kinds of music that you would not want your child to listen to?

Is there anything that you would like to talk about that I haven't asked you?

Appendix 2: Interview Guide—Elementary school children

Tell me about the music you like to listen to at school.

Tell me about the music you like to listen to at home.

What ways do you use to listen to music?
Possible probes: radio, TV, video, CD, live, internet etc.

In what places do you like to listen to music?
Possible probes: bedroom, living room, concerts, church etc

When is your favorite time to listen to music?

Tell me about the music you own/have at home.

If you had some money to spend on music, what would you buy?

Tell me about your favorite singers.

Tell me about your favorite songs.

What do you like to do when you listen to music?

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