

Arts Express: Performance, Community, and Creativity for Children with Exceptionalities

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ABSTRACT

This article embraces and celebrates the active, social, and performative nature of music-making in the work of community music therapists and community musicians, professionals who challenge conventions within Western art music and strive to provide all individuals with the opportunity to express themselves artistically. Drawing on these disciplines as well as Small's (1998) ecological concept of *musicking* as a framework, this paper explores the significance of Arts Express, which melds a university course with an inclusive summer camp and performance opportunity for children each summer. Arts Express embodies a relational view of music-making and artistic experience and celebrates creative self-expression as a fundamental human right. Its influence extends far beyond its benefits for the children who attend camp and perform at the program's cumulative recital.

Keywords: community music, community music therapy, special education, performance, Christopher Small, university education, community service learning

Arts Express: Introduction, Theory, and Professional Frameworks

The active, social, and performative nature of music-making is embraced and celebrated in the work of community music therapists and community musicians, professionals whose work is often guided by a mandate to provide opportunities for active musical engagement to individuals who would otherwise not have access (Ansdell 2014; Higgins 2012). The "Arts Express" program, which melds a university

course with an inclusive creative arts day camp, immerses participants in creative exploration, learning, and performance in four creative arts. Situated within a university department of music therapy and coordinated by music therapists since its outset, the program blends principles and practices from the disciplines of community music and community music therapy, and is situated theoretically within Small's (1998) ecological *musicking* framework, validating its focus upon music as an active and social pursuit.

Arts Express provides opportunity for engagement in visual art, drama, and dance in addition to music, and this presentation of disciplinary and theoretical frameworks specific to music is undertaken with the assumption that the similarities among the creative arts are greater than the differences, and that the personal and communal significance of musical experiences is parallel to that within other artistic mediums. As these musical frameworks are presented and discussed, the reader is invited to consider connections and distinctions between various forms of artistic expression.



University students, campers, and volunteers - The dress rehearsal
(Photo by Chloe Ellingson, The Waterloo Region Record
Note: Photos are displayed with the consent of children and their families.)

Musicking and its properties

Within Western culture, the eighteenth century and onwards has been marked by an increasing separation between music-making and everyday life along with cultivation of so-called expert musicians and striving for aesthetic “purity” in composition (Goehr 2007, Small 1998). “The result has been a highly elitist art form, ideologically separated from ‘low culture’ through an aesthetic discourse where music is constructed as autonomous and universal, complex and original” (Ruud 2004, 13). Within this tradition, the “created art object” (Small 1998, 4) is valued above its active creation or perception, and performance is a “one-way system of communication, running from composer to individual listener through the medium of the performer” (6). The performer works in servitude to the work itself; the performer’s personal experience of performing is unimportant.

As an alternative to finding music’s meaning within pre-composed works, Small (1998) proposes that “the act of musicking establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies” (13). This social and ecological perspective validates the work of music therapists and community musicians, work that celebrates the role of every person involved and the interactions between them, recognizes that all musicking is context-bound, and views artistic product as one focus among many. Given the permeation of Western culture’s obsession with musical works, it is no wonder that these professionals are the “boundary-walkers” within the broader music profession (Higgins 2012, 6).

In bringing Small’s perspective on musicking to the foreground, the intention is not to entirely reject the importance of musical works themselves. Laurence (2005), for example, describes her acceptance of Small’s emphasis upon “agentic, human activity” (97) while also countering: “I cannot do without the actual notion of *the music*. . . . I still need a term to distinguish quite simply the actual sound patterns” (96). Music therapists and community musicians need not entirely disregard music’s “actual sound patterns,” but rather, Small’s work provides an ideal

perspective from which also to validate the social aspects of their work. With regards to music's capacity to "help," whether in music therapy or in everyday life, Ansdell (2014) writes: "Taking Small's perspective seriously requires us to acknowledge that the smallest sound or musical gesture is potentially related to the overall outcome. . . . Musicking is therefore necessarily both an aesthetic and an ethical matter" (31). As will be evident, the Arts Express program validates both the aesthetic and the relational/ethical nature of artistic engagement.

An embracing of Small's (1998) call to challenge the elitist veneration of musical works perpetuated within classically based systems is certainly not new. For example, informal learning practices invite varied repertoire into the classroom along with non-classically based processes by which to learn it (Wright 2013, 2011; Green, 2005). However, in the Canadian and broader North American context in which Arts Express takes place, cultivation and presentation of traditional performance ensembles remains a major focus of music education, and many students in formal music education systems will have very little opportunity to compose, improvise, or choose their own repertoire (Bolden 2014; Friesen 2013; Regelski 2013; Tobias 2013; Countryman and Rose 2009; Kratus 2007). Ensemble-based programs often promote hierarchical systems of interaction while focusing upon the achievement of a pre-specified musical product at the expense of creativity. Societally, the dominance of this approach to music education reproduces particular ideologies about which musics and musical-experiences are most valuable (Green 2012). Regelski (2013) explains that dominance "is a matter of social, political, and economic *power*, even *hegemony*. Thus, it can fairly be said that the dominant culture at stake in much school music is that of the conservatory and university school of music" (38, italics his). Small's concept of musicking remains relevant and to an extent still novel within North America. Its relevance is heightened for individuals who face barriers to participation in conventional music education settings, including individuals with disabilities (Lubet, 2009).

While noting that many musical traditions and genres have vastly different performance norms than those reproduced by the classical concert hall, Arts Express is run by a university faculty of music and its final performance takes place on a concert hall stage. The program's situatedness within the concert hall is a primary rationale for the use of Small's theory in this paper and the assertion that Arts Express subverts established norms. The program is also rooted within principles of community music and community music therapy, two areas of professional practice that challenge many of the traditional views of musical experience perpetuated within the Western classical tradition and North American systems of music education.

Community Music

A field that "vigorously and . . . robustly resist[s] categorization" (Veblen 2012, 1), community music has largely developed in response to institutionalized learning contexts; formal documentation is recent and definitions vary widely (Higgins 2012; Veblen 2008 & 2012; Ansdell 2002). Linking the formalization of community music to ideology of the time, Ansdell states, "Not until the 1960s–70s . . . were attempts made to consciously articulate this link between the social and the musical amongst people *not* defining themselves as 'music therapists'" (para. 26). Veblen (2012) describes community music as "informal music making, which includes teaching and learning dimensions" (1). It takes place in a wide variety of settings, and is "local, personal, political, multifaceted, and above all, fluid" (1).

Community musicians are committed to a philosophy of practice in which *everyone* has the right to be included in active music-making (Higgins 2012; Veblen 2008, 2012). In light of the barriers than many individuals face in accessing inclusive musical experiences, Higgins emphasizes the importance of fostering "excellence in both the processes and products of music making relative to individual goals of participants" (5). Both Higgins and Veblen explain that participants' personal growth and social well-being are just as valuable as their

musical growth, whereas others state that community musicians vary in this regard (O'Grady and McFerran 2007; Ansdell 2002). Community music initiatives may focus on goals such as social inclusion, creativity and personal expression, development of individual and/or collective identities, and overall well-being (Higgins 2012, Bowman 2009, Veblen 2008, Lynch and Allen 2007).

Higgins' (2012) definition of community music resonates with Small's emphasis on the relational nature of musicking, and many community musicians challenge the typical role of the musician within the community (Higgins 2012). For example, Cohen's Oakdale Community Choir invites prison inmates to sing alongside individuals from the surrounding community (Cohen and Silverman 2012), and DeVito's Sidney Lanier Community Music Program provides music education, performance and collaboration opportunities for children with disabilities (DeVito and Gill 2012). Arts Express, in its provision of arts-based experiences to children who often do not have access to such opportunities, is a strong example of community arts practice. Situated within a department of music therapy, it is also deeply connected to community music therapy.

Community Music Therapy

Ansdell (2002) describes the "belief in musicking as a means of working with people" (para. 32) as the origin of both community music and music therapy. From there, music therapy's development was highly influenced by the natural science paradigm and a striving for recognition within academic and medical systems (Stige, Ansdell, Elefant and Pavlicevic 2010; Pavlicevic and Ansdell 2004; Ruud 2004; Ansdell 2002). Ansdell proposes "community music therapy" as a point of connection between the two professions; its emergence, a paradigm shift for music therapists, came from recognition that "the biomedical model of illness did not allow therapists to consider or challenge social and material conditions, social networks or cultural contexts" (Ruud 2004, 11). Similar to Bowman's (2009) reminder that music not only exists within community but also *creates* community, Stige et al. (2010) state that community music therapy "goes beyond conceptions of music therapy in

community settings to also embrace music therapy *as* community and music therapy *for* community development” (10). In existence nearly a decade before the area of community music therapy became commonplace within the discipline, the Arts Express program has had to, from its inception, work flexibly, in community, with a strong awareness of context.

Conventional music therapy, largely based in models of medicine and/or psychotherapy, focuses upon a client’s treatment process within the boundaries of a therapeutic space and relationship; as a result, many music therapists are hesitant or even opposed to incorporating performance into their work (Aigen 2014; Pavlicevic and Ansdell 2004, Ansdell 2002, Stige 2002). On the other hand, early pioneers in the field, such as Paul Nordoff and Clive Robbins, Juliette Alvin, Florence Tyson, and Fran Herman, utilized public forms of music-making within their clinical work (Stige et al. 2010, Buchanan 2009, Pavlicevic and Ansdell 2004, Proctor 2004, Stige 2002). Music is a public art form, after all, and it can be argued that to limit music therapy to the confines of a private room in fact limits the creative and communal potential within music. Young and Nicol (2011) present a strong rationale for the use of performance within music therapy when relevant and safe. For example, Maratos (2004) facilitated the rehearsal and performance of an original operetta by both patients and staff at a psychiatric hospital by patients and staff, and Mitchell (2011) organized a yearly “Coffee House” at an adolescent mental health treatment facility, in which both staff and residents performed using a variety of arts media. Through a lens that frames the view that “*performance is the primary process of musicking*” (Small 1998, 113, italics in original), it would follow that incorporation of performance into music therapy, when appropriate, is a medium for experiencing music’s full therapeutic potential; community music therapy thus embraces “the whole idea of music” (Proctor 2004, 224). Small’s concept of musicking is fitting.

There is considerable overlap between community music and community music therapy (Ansdell 2002); in many cases, the two practices would be nearly

indistinguishable were it not for the facilitator's credentials in music therapy. Both are marked by a focus on process, both aim to bring music to individuals who may face barriers in accessing it, and both aim to reflect and respond to context (Veblen 2012, O'Grady and McFerran 2007, Pavlicevic and Ansdell 2004). O'Grady and McFerran also note that both are "opposed to the aesthetic standards of 'high' culture" (15). Recognizing points of overlap and distinction, the influence of both disciplines upon Arts Express is evident, as it aims to promote creativity and empowerment while balancing the exploration of artistic process with the achievement of artistic product. The fact that Arts Express does not fit clearly into one particular professional framework emphasizes the flexibility and fluidity inherent within these practices.



Dance performance practice - Building a "lighthouse"

Description of Arts Express

Each spring semester, between 12–20 university students register for “Inclusive Arts for Children,” a course offered through Wilfrid Laurier University’s department of music therapy. Academic material is based in theory from the creative arts therapies, and also covers adaptation and leadership techniques for working with individuals with exceptionalities and for promoting inclusivity. The course emphasizes experiential learning and creativity in music, drama, dance, and art, and aims to develop students’ capacity for reflexivity, in connection with its designation as a Community Service Learning course (Wilfrid Laurier University 2012).

After twelve course sessions are complete, the university students become leaders at the Arts Express camp for a week, facilitating sessions in the arts based on assignments and planning completed during the course. The campers also have allotted time for outdoor play, swimming, and creative play and relaxation in the sensory room created by the university students. The camp culminates with a dress rehearsal and performance at the university’s recital hall, complete with professional sound and lighting. The audience consistently exceeds 200, and includes family and friends of the campers and university students, children from various community programs, faculty and administration from local post-secondary institutions, and professionals from various community institutions. The camp is always filled to capacity, with at least forty children registered with more on a waiting list. The campers range in age from 6-14, and many have diagnoses such as autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy, or global developmental delay. A smaller number of campers have no diagnosed special needs, and attend camp because they have a friend or sibling who does.

The Arts Express program was initiated in 1993 by Dr. Rosemary Fischer (Wilfrid Laurier University), Dr. Leslie O’Dell (Wilfrid Laurier University), Dr. Ruth Priddle (University of Waterloo) and Lana-Lee Hardacre (Conestoga College), and since its outset has benefited from the support of these post-secondary institutions; in particular, the Faculty of Music at Wilfrid Laurier University yearly funds the

course and hires its instructors. In addition, Arts Express relies on collaboration and support from a local child development centre, KidsAbility, a beautiful and accessible facility that donates the space in which to run the camp portion of Arts Express, including classrooms, a large and sunlit gymnasium, a swimming pool and an outdoor playground. KidsAbility also provides a recreation therapist who provides site-specific training and instruction for the university students and also coordinates program volunteers.

On July 10, 2015, forty children and their leaders, students from two local universities, danced, acted, played musical instruments, and sang on stage at Wilfrid Laurier University's Maureen Forrester Recital Hall, marking the grand finale of an intensely creative week together. With assistance from volunteers and workers, many of these impassioned performers stood or sat tall, beaming, and perhaps waving to a proud parent in the audience. One young girl, soaking up her audience's appreciation, spontaneously walked to centre stage and began taking bows mid-performance. Another performer, much more cautious, walked to his position on stage alongside his service dog. Excitement and nervous energy were palpable in the air, and as the group's final song and dance came to a close, resounding applause erupted throughout the hall. The audience and performers then made their way to the recital hall's foyer, in order to browse a display of hundreds of pieces of art created over the past week. A program situated somewhere along the boundary between the fields of community music and community music therapy, Arts Express embodies a relational view of musicking and artistic experience, celebrates creative self-expression as a fundamental human right, and influences far more individuals than the children who attend camp and perform at this cumulative recital.



In the art room – messes are encouraged
(Photo by Jonathan Bielaski, Light Imaging)

New roles and relationships: Artistic expression and human rights

On the final day of camp in July of 2011, one kind and thoughtful ten-year-old girl, with a passion for music and dance and a diagnosis of Down syndrome, was nervous to perform. Her camp leader gently validated this young girl's fears and reassured her that she did not need to perform. She also suggested strategies for coping with anxiety and reminded her that her friends and leaders were there to support her. This camper had taken dance lessons before, and had always faced anxiety whenever the opportunity to perform had arisen; she had never before made it onto a stage. That afternoon, hand-in-hand with her leader, she stood proudly on stage, beaming, waving to her parents. The tears in their eyes were visible; this confidence and self-assuredness in their daughter was new. She would remember this day and build on her success; she did not hesitate when walking onto the stage the following four summers. At that same performance, a ten-year-old boy went to the

microphone and led his group in their camp song. This child's diagnosis of autism makes the sensory experience of performing extraordinarily challenging. After the recital his Mom too would be in tears, explaining that Arts Express allows others to see her son as capable and creative. As it "re-assert[s] . . . the power of music in and of itself for people" (Pavlicevic and Ansdell 2004, 27), this program challenges the norms of the recital hall in which it takes place through its emphasis upon non-hierarchical, social, and accessible musicking, providing children with the opportunity to access their right to artistic expression.

Access to the arts: A basic human right

Fran Herman, a Canadian music therapy foremother, clinician and activist, saw her work with The Wheelchair Players as a place where children could access the arts "as their basic human right" (Buchanan 2009). Recognizing that marginalized populations face significant barriers in accessing active-musical experiences within North American music education systems, as described earlier, but also that all humans are born with the capacity to develop musically (Elliott and Silverman 2014; Hargreaves, Macdonald and Miell 2012; Higgins 2012; Small 1998), community musicians and community music therapists work to make such involvement possible (DeVito 2012, Stige et al. 2010). In a society in which many children are denied music education due to a lack of so-called talent, or choose to self-exclude because they cannot "recognize themselves as of value in the image of music the school mirror reflects" (Wright 2013, 33), children with exceptionalities face even greater exclusion. As many parents of children who attend Arts Express attest, participation in this program provides the *one* time in the year during which their children have access to a high-quality artistic experience and the opportunity to perform in a recital hall. These children are not only deserving of such access: Arts Express celebrates it as a basic right. As Higgins (2012) writes, "Community musicians are radically opposed to the notion that some humans are born musically

talented, and are therefore entitled to be nurtured toward a life in music, and some humans are not” (168).

In order to nurture all children towards a life in music, course instruction is specifically aimed towards providing university students the tools with which to facilitate inclusion. As they become camp leaders, they are expected to adapt and modify camp experiences as necessary so as to ensure that all children, regardless of disability, have a significant role in daily programming and performance. For example, student leaders learn to modify instruments, manipulate musical tempo and texture, and distinguish between and facilitate both process and product-oriented experiences. Inclusive participation celebrates the child with autism who holds up a sign rather than speaking his line in the play aloud; the volunteer who pushes the wheelchair so that the child sitting in it can use her head, arms, and torso to dance gracefully to the music; and, the child with cerebral palsy whose vocalizations are precisely on pitch with the song being sung, but can be heard only if space is created for his unique voice. These moments from Arts Express performances represent an orientation to community practice wherein inclusion in the arts is viewed as a basic human right.

Within the Arts Express program, not only is general experience in the arts viewed as a human right, but so too is participation in *performance* specifically. Small (1998) comments on Western society’s perspective on musical performance:

... [W]hat no longer exists in industrial societies is that broader social context in which performance, as well as listening, is constantly taught and musicking is encouraged as an important social activity for every single member of the society. Many people are taught to play, but very few are encouraged to perform (207).

Though the main focus of Arts Express is the children who attend camp, the experiences of the university students who enroll in the course are important to note. It is not only children with special needs who are typically excluded from the recital hall; as students who are for the most part not enrolled in fine arts programs, these



Relational musicking - a camper and her worker

individuals would not typically find themselves on a stage either. Many students experience an unlearning of their views on talent and on what makes art “good enough” to be showcased publically, demonstrated through the reflective writing required for the course. This must take place, not only for them to embrace each child’s unique contributions, but also so that they can give *themselves* permission to be on stage performing alongside the children. The latter is typically more difficult, as many begin the course without any belief that they have artistic ability or creative potential themselves. Through experiences in class and during camp, university students also have the opportunity to perform and to experience firsthand the relationships that develop and are celebrated through it.

Performance, roles, and relationships

Small (1998) writes, “. . . [A] musical performance, while it lasts, brings into existence relationships that model in metaphoric form those which [those present] would like to see in the wider society of their everyday lives” (46). Though Small is specifically referring to audience members here, given the ecological nature of the concept of musicking, I will presume that performers also experience this metaphoric modelling of relationships. Arts Express is indeed a powerful metaphor.

As children with exceptionalities, typically excluded from the recital hall stage, dance, sing, and act, as university students and volunteers facilitate so as to make the experience as inclusive and empowering as possible for them, and as families, friends and community members openly express pride for those on stage, there is a poignant subversion of concert-hall and societal norms taking place.

Not only are children with exceptionalities typically excluded from this setting, they are also often portrayed as *recipients* of care-giving and have a great deal imposed upon them: structured lives of therapy appointments, medical procedures, and assistance with personal care. They may be seen as consumers of the arts, but they are much less often viewed as creators or as being in a position to *provide* a rich artistic experience to an audience. In comparison to the exclusion that most Arts Express campers face outside of the performance space, most audience members hold a certain degree of privilege. Though many concert hall performances would reinforce such positions of “excluded” and “privileged”, this performance celebrates an alternative. Here, these children are artists, creators, and entertainers, performing before an audience of caregivers, teachers, and policy-makers who are invited to witness and participate in a “new conception of reality” (Goble 2009, 76). Goble categorizes musical practice based on “the effect it has on the community within which it is undertaken” (76). He explains:

Some musical practices tend to bring about the psychophysiological reconciliation of individuals to the worldview (or conception of reality) already collectively shared by the community within which it takes place. Other forms of musical practice tend to make manifest a new conception of reality, the characteristics of which may have been latent in the “collective mind” of a community (76).

On an individual level, the relationships, roles, and values that are enacted on stage at Arts Express likely represent a worldview already shared by certain performers and audience members. However, on a broader societal level and in terms of the participants’ “relationships to the world outside the performance space” (Small 1998, 48) it is indeed a “new conception of reality” (Goble, 2009, 76) that is enacted,

one in which there are fewer barriers for children with exceptionalities to engage in the arts. As these children are viewed as artists in their own right, this performance offers a new conception of the relationships typically cultivated in the recital hall and also in society at large.

Recognizing Small's (1998) assertion that "all art is performance art" (108), the question could be posed as to whether the Arts Express performance must take place in a formal recital hall. Small summarizes his dis-ease with these settings: "They do not correspond with my ideal of human relationships. . . . There is a dissonance between the meanings—the relationships—that are generated by the works that are being performed and those that are generated by the performance events" (15–16). Goehr (2007) links the development of the concert hall and its conventions to society's veneration of musical works: "Like performers and conductors, audiences were asked to be literally and metaphorically silent, so that the truth or beauty of the work could be heard" (236). Indeed, parents of Arts Express campers often recount that in addition to the barriers their children face in accessing performance opportunities, it is also not uncommon for them to be turned away as audience members, as staff at performance facilities fear they will create unwanted noise. Though undoubtedly the physical space in which the Arts Express performance takes place is the type of setting that Goehr and Small are referring to, the performance itself is anything but typical. Rather than promoting the veneration of pre-composed musical works, the artistic material within each year's original production is largely created and improvised by the students and campers themselves during the week of camp. The performers' experiencing of agency, confidence, creativity, and a genuine sense of accomplishment replace more conventional and product-oriented indicators of performance success, and children's spontaneous interactions with their audience are not discouraged; in fact, they are welcomed, and appreciated. There are often many audience members who have special needs themselves, often friends or siblings of the children on stage, and these individuals need not rein in their excitement nor remain perfectly still or

quiet. Recognizing the conventions of this space, the decision to hold the performance within it emphasizes the program's commitment to challenging the typical relationships generated and musical works performed there, while also providing children with a performance opportunity that they would not otherwise have. There is something particularly poignant about inviting such an enactment onto *this* stage in particular.

For most of the campers, the performance at the end of the Arts Express camp is integral to the program, representing a culmination of hard work and personal growth through the week. This does not detract from the importance of creative process however. Only a small portion of each day at camp is spent preparing for the performance; for the rest of the time, the children have opportunity to play and explore the arts with less imposed structure. No child is ever required to perform; the performance is important, but it is not the sole measure of the program's success.



Arts Express performance, 2014 –The “swordfish” enter the stage

Ripple effects: University students and the community at large

In describing the potential scope of community music therapy, Pavlicevic and Ansdell (2004) reflect: “Music naturally *radiates*, like dropping a pebble in a pond

and seeing the waves of energy spread out in concentric circles” (16). Extending far beyond the children who attend the camp, Arts Express is significant for the students who take the course and also for the community at large.

University students: Identity and risk-taking

Wilfrid Laurier University’s Centre for Community Service Learning (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2012), to which the Arts Express course is linked, has the following vision statement: “To see all Laurier students graduate with a critical understanding of themselves and their potential to make a meaningful contribution to the world” (2). The centre recognizes the following eight learning outcomes as vital to community service learning: social responsibility, intellectual growth, leadership development, appreciating diversity, collaboration, self-awareness, clarified career and educational goals, and clarified values. It is likely not surprising that yearly, many of the university students reflect upon profound experiences and development in one or several of these areas.

Given that this course has an element that many community service learning experiences do not have—the arts—I propose that the university students’ growth in particular learning outcomes may be enhanced, as artistic growth contributes to and parallels their growth on a personal level (Mitchell, in press; Aigen 2005). Throughout the course, these students are encouraged to immerse *themselves* in the artistic experiences first and foremost, prior to reflecting upon what the experience would be like for a child and then planning for the camp. A small minority of students are fine arts majors, and some students have had past experience or training in the arts; however, most do not self-identify as “artists”. A safe environment is collaboratively created in class, and as the term progresses many students are increasingly willing to take risks artistically. As one student reflected, “I have become more comfortable and able to put myself outside of my comfort zone” (Wilfrid Laurier University 2013). Students are challenged to reckon with society’s prevalent message that artistic performance is for the privileged and talented few

(Small 1998). Many must face these questions: Can I sing/dance/act/make art in front of children? In front of peers? On a stage? Those students that begin to challenge society's ideology discover new capabilities, as evidenced by their progression from arts-based experientials in class to their performances on stage at the end of camp.

Students also often note growth in creativity. The concept of creativity is discussed and explored in class, and many students reconfigure their own definition of the concept, and in turn, develop new awareness of themselves as creative beings.

One student wrote:

If through this course and camp we are encouraging/teaching children how to explore their creative side, why has it taken me so long to encourage creativity in my own life? I hope to explore my creative side in the future...I can now be a creative professional, student and community member who is not scared of providing new ideas and thinking outside the box (Wilfrid Laurier University 2012).

What is the implication of the realization that one is in fact creative? The scope of this question is far too broad to be answered in this paper. However, connections between personal wellness and creative experience are supported by the literature (Chappell et al. 2012, Sawyer 2012, Aigen 2005, Csikszentmihalyi 1997, Kenny 1982). Lynch and Allan (2007) acknowledge the importance of teachers being given opportunity to "develop their capacity for creativity and self-confidence" (13) if they are expected to use the arts to facilitate wellbeing in their students. Through the experiential learning and safe atmosphere created in this course, not only do university students grow and learn as they facilitate experiences for children, but they also grow personally as they experience the arts first-hand, many for the first time. In order to facilitate authentic and safe experiences for children, the students must first experience this themselves, and in doing so, face and challenge false-beliefs about themselves as artists.

Community at large

Small (1998) writes about the way in which the traditional concert hall space does not foster community:

The very form of the auditorium tells us that the performance is aimed not at a community of interacting people but at a collection of individuals, strangers even, who happen to have come together to hear the musical works. We leave our sociability behind at the auditorium doors (27).

As previously mentioned, the relationships fostered and celebrated between performers and audience members at Arts Express differs from the concert hall's norms. This is an interactive community. Audience members and performers wave to one another, and the audience does not wait for natural breaks or conventional moments to applaud, but rather shares applause generously and freely whenever any child on stage gives their best effort or contributes to the performance, whether spontaneous or planned. As the performance unfolds, relationships are enacted: between performers on stage, between performers and their workers and leaders, and between the performers and the audience members.

The ripple effects of this program extend to the families who send their children to camp each summer. Parents of two children who have attended Arts Express each summer for the past eight years, both as campers and volunteers, wrote:

We cannot thank you enough for the impact Arts Express has had on the lives of our children. The atmosphere of acceptance and caring, and the creativity and hard work on the part of the leaders, is invaluable to a child with special needs. There are endless worries and concerns among parents of children with challenges and having a week knowing your child is cared for and accepted provides a much-needed reprieve (N. Forler & K. Coates, personal communication, November 1, 2011).

When asked why she attends camp each summer, their now fourteen-year-old daughter, who does not have any diagnosed exceptionalities said:

It is such a great experience and you can learn so much from it. . . . My favourite part is seeing all of the camper's *[sic]* parents watching them perform at the end of the week, and they are so proud and happy for their child. Arts Express makes it possible for children to do what they love...with people who are caring, understanding, and kind. It is an amazing experience for everyone who is involved, and I look forward to it all year (M. Coates, personal communication, January 8, 2013).

At the time she wrote this, this young girl had recently carefully planned her birthday party to accommodate inviting a child with Down syndrome whom she had met at camp. She is now a dedicated volunteer with the program.

The ripple effects extend beyond university students and families. For example, the program welcomes individuals with exceptionalities to work as volunteers at the camp if they are too old to attend. One parent of a volunteer with a developmental disability wrote:

She learned how to be a good leader and role model for the children. . . . You raised confidence in her ability to work in an environment outside the home and to be independent. I have seen so many gains in [her] determination to learn and be a part of her community (personal communication, August 25, 2015).

In addition to the significance for those individuals who volunteer with the program, there is personal significance for staff, faculty, and administration of the three post-secondary institutions who support the camp. For example, one senior administrator had tears in his eyes after attending the performance for the first time: "It put things into perspective for me. My heart really went out to those parents" (personal communication, July 13, 2009). Whether on stage or in the audience, all are musicking; active involvement of everyone in the room is the norm here.

Final thoughts: “This is who we are”

Small (1998) asserts that the merit of a performance should be judged based on “. . . its success in bringing into existence for as long as it lasts a set of relationships that those taking part feel to be ideal and in enabling those taking part to explore, affirm, and celebrate those relationships” (49), and from this perspective, the recital that concludes the Arts Express camp each year is certainly a success. The relationships that are explored, affirmed, and celebrated subvert and challenge typical dynamics with children with exceptionalities. Families, volunteers, and university students, faculty, and administration, are invited to recognize these children as artists and receive the gift of their performance, while actively participating in it. This diverse group becomes a community, as these children’s right to artistic experience and expression is recognized and celebrated.

“However trivial and banal the work may be that is the basis of the performance, meaning and beauty are created whenever any performer approaches it with love and with all the skill and care that he or she can bring to it” (Small 1998, 7). The performers described in this paper, both children and university students, are indeed committed with their whole selves to creating a beautiful and meaningful event for all who are present. Relationships are celebrated and enhanced, among those on stage, between the audience who interact and share stories, and between the performers and their audience. Though the artistic material at the basis of the Arts Express performance is anything but trivial or banal, it is certainly unconventional for the recital hall stage. Here, a new possibility is enacted, one in which *all* children are seen as capable of creating beautiful art and are provided with the opportunity to do so. This is indeed music-making “inextricably connected to the ordinary and impure condition of our human affairs” (Goehr 2007, 286). Small’s (1998) statement, that “Those taking part in a musical performance are in effect saying—to themselves, to one another, and to anyone else who may be watching or listening—*This is who we are*” (134, italics in original), could not possibly ring more true anywhere than it does here.

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