

Chapter 2

Personhood and Music Learning as a Funky Mama

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Abstract

For over a decade The Funky Mamas have been performing music for children. In this chapter Bolden examines stories of the individual group members' lived experiences of music making and learning through a lens informed by M. M. Bakhtin's notion of *ideologically becoming*. Bolden draws from Bakhtin's ideas to conceptualize personhood as an evolving sense of self firmly ensconced within the context of the social world around us, and shaped by personal interpretation or meaning making of that world. Bolden's analytical process illuminates possible ways of viewing and understanding the development of personhood through music making as experienced by the three Funky Mama musicians introduced here. Connections to music learning are drawn, and implications for music education are discussed.

Reflective questions

1. What authoritative and internally persuasive discourses have you encountered in your own journey of musical becoming?
2. How have you reconciled opposing discourses concerning music making and learning that are relevant to you?
3. What, if any, new music making or learning possibilities have become apparent to you as a result of working through challenging discourses?
4. How have you been supported (by educators or others) in exploring music making and learning possibilities?
5. How might Bakhtin's notion of ideologically becoming inform your music teaching practices?

My family and I recently attended Carrot Fest. This annual event is held at an organic farm in southern Ontario. We chased chickens, brushed an occasionally compliant donkey, watched a blacksmith make a snake from an old metal file, and—predictably, perhaps—ate carrots. But best of all was the chance to experience a performance by the Funky Mamas:

“Does anyone want to come up here on stage with us and play some instruments?” asks Mama Kate, some twenty minutes into the set. Excited volunteers leap up from straw bales and parents’ laps. “Come on up!” says Kate, passing her banjo to Mama Georgia. With help from Mamas Tannis and Alicia, she distributes a couple of colourful ukuleles, shakers, drums, and a washboard to the cluster of small, keen musicians. “Maybe you better leave your hotdog with your Dad,” Kate suggests pragmatically. “Just put your carrots in your pockets!”

The five Mamas squeeze to the edges of the small, outdoor stage, making room to feature the newly added rhythm section as the wind sings through the microphones and the protective orange tarpaulin above flaps noisily. Chantal passes the bass back to Alicia for this number, retrieves her fiddle and raises it to her chin. She makes sure she is positioned (careful to avoid the very real risk of tumbling off the stage) so that the microphone will pick up both the fiddle and her upper vocal harmony line. Georgia, meanwhile, strumming the introductory chords on her acoustic guitar, glances briefly back to ensure all drumsticks are being appropriately wielded, steps to the mic, and launches into the lively tempo-shifting ballad of the alligator that dances in 2/2 time.

Twelve years ago a small community of young mothers began making music together. They played and sang for each other and each other’s children at play groups and play dates and then, cautiously, performed more formally at a local library. Now, with three critically acclaimed CDs and many more children, the Guelph-based Funky Mamas regularly perform music for children at festivals, fairs, theatres, and a variety of community events across the country.

For some time I have been fascinated and inspired by this collective of professional mother-musicians and the music they produce. From what I have observed, these individuals have—in many diverse ways—enriched their lives and the lives of those around them through music making. I was profoundly curious to learn more about what was going on...Ultimately, I hope to try and figure out how music educators might help learners develop the ability to seek out and engage in this kind of rich and sustained relationship with music making beyond the realm of formal music education—ideally, for the rest of their lives.

To this end I developed a research study entitled: *Taking It with You: Music Making beyond the Classrooms and Studios*. I hope that findings from this study will provide practical implications for music educators, in direct response to the problem of students’ limited ongoing musical activity

beyond formal music education experiences (Mantie & Tucker, 2008; Myers, 2008; Smithrim & Uptis, 2004). The Funky Mamas provide an example of musicians who have taken music making far beyond classroom and studio experiences—they are lifelong music makers and learners.

Through case study methods (Stake, 1995) I sought to learn more about the Funky Mamas' music making and all that encompasses it—what sparks it, what shapes it, what is involved, and what results. To gather data I elicited narrative accounts or stories of lived experience. A significant aspect of this data collection involved inviting participants to engage in a *River of Life* charting technique, inspired by Burnard's (2000, 2004) use of a similar procedure. I asked participants to reflect on significant formative experiences that contributed to their becoming and evolving as a Funky Mama, and to plot these critical or special instances along an image of a winding river. This tool, used in conjunction with interviewing, elicited narratives indicative of the process of personal growth, self-discovery, and learning that these musicians have experienced.

Over the course of the research process I have discovered many fascinating facets to the music making of the Funky Mamas. This chapter explores just two: personhood and music learning.

Conceptual framework: Personhood

Personhood is a rather nebulous concept. In terms of a straightforward definition, I find the following from *The American Heritage Dictionary* helpful: "The state or condition of being a person, especially having those qualities that confer distinct individuality" (Personhood, n.d.). It is the aspect of personhood that evokes distinct individuality that is of interest to me, here, in the analysis of the individually negotiated music making and learning of each of the Funky Mamas. Egan-Robertson (1998) defines personhood as:

A dynamic, cultural construct about who is and what is considered to be a person, what attributes and rights are constructed as inherent to being a person, and what social positions are available within the construct of being a person. (p. 453)

Of interest to me in this definition, first of all, is the implication that personhood is not static; it involves an evolving sense of self. Secondly, that the sense of self is a product of culture, or, rather, of one's interactions with and within a culture. Thirdly, that the sense of self involves society, and in particular, positioning within that society.

Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, and Shuart-Faris (2005) provide a similar explanation of personhood, explaining that it "involves those shared, but continually negotiated and renegotiated, ways that a group of people have for behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, and feeling. These dimensions help to determine the expectations that accompany various

social positions” (p. 118). Again, the notion that personhood evolves—is negotiated and renegotiated—is emphasized. Also identified is the significance to personhood of the social context, or culture, within which the negotiations occur, and the implications in relation to social positioning.

I am interested in the role of music making and learning in the development of each of the Mamas’ personhood. Informed by the notions of personhood detailed above, I understand the construct of personhood to imply a distinctly individual sense of self. It is a sense of self that evolves, that is influenced by an individual’s interactions with and within a culture and/or social context, and that has implications for social positioning. I conceptualize personhood as an evolving sense of self firmly ensconced in the context of the social world around us, and shaped by personal interpretation of that world.

Bakhtin’s (1981) concept of *ideologically becoming* offers a perspective on the process of developing an individual’s sense of self that incorporates all of these aspects of personhood.

Bakhtin’s concept of ‘ideologically becoming’

Associated with the Russian Formalists, the philologist M. M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) produced work that straddles the domains of both literary theory and philosophy. While his work was primarily focused on discourse analysis, examining the use of language within literary works such as the novels of Dickens and Dostoevsky, Bakhtin’s ideas and insights on language, knowledge, and text are recognized to reach much further. His work has become significant to the domains of social and cultural theory (Kozulin, 1996) and beyond, to the point where he is “gradually emerging as one of the leading thinkers of the twentieth century” (Holquist, 1981, p. i). In the four essays that comprise *The Dialogic Imagination* (written at various points in his life from the 1930s on but first published together in 1975), Bakhtin describes the concepts of dialogism, heteroglossia, and chronotope—concepts that have since been employed as analytical tools in academic work spanning a number of disciplines, including education. Of particular interest to me is Bakhtin’s notion of “an individual’s ideological becoming” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342).

Bakhtin (1981) posits that individual human consciousness develops from an ongoing internal and personal negotiation between two types of discourse. Dialogue occurs between two “[c]ompeting, conflicting, contrary, or contradictory languages—one which informs the dominant ideology, and the other, which informs the subversive” (Halasek, 1992, p. 68). Authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse represent two separate streams of voices, words, ideas, or messages that we must reconcile within us, as:

...an individual’s becoming, an ideological process, is characterized precisely by a sharp gap between these two categories: in one, the authoritative word

(religious, political, moral, the word of a father, of adults, and of teachers, etc.) that does not know internal persuasiveness, in the other internally persuasive word that is denied all privilege, backed up by no authority at all, and is frequently not even acknowledged in society (not by public, nor by scholarly norms, nor by criticism), not even in the legal code. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342)

The term *authoritative discourse* refers to the dominating voices, words, ideas, or messages in a given society—the “language of the dominant ideology... so powerful that it is beyond question or challenge and works to maintain the status quo” (Mackinlay, 2002, p. 36). Authoritative discourse arrives to us from the outside; it is imposed upon us. It includes the prevailing words and ideas that constitute a societal norm—the communication we receive that represents the voices of authority or authoritative positions (such as dominant notions of what it means to be a musician, or educator, or music educator in our society). It tends to direct us because we are used to being directed by it.

Internally persuasive discourse, in contrast, “does not demand allegiance but encourages creativity ... Like centrifugal forces that “decentralize”, “dis-unify”, and “stratify”, internally persuasive discourse questions and denies the pre-eminence of the authoritative word or centripetal force” (Halasek, 1992, p. 70). It is the “language of the subversive ... a resistant form of discourse” (Mackinlay, 2002, p. 36). Internally persuasive discourse directs us only if we consciously and thoughtfully choose to be directed by it. We are persuaded to take it on, modifying as we see fit, until it is representative of, or even *becomes*, our own words and ideas. The term *internally persuasive discourse* therefore represents the voices, words, ideas, or messages that we negotiate a personal understanding of, become reconciled with (or persuaded by), and so incorporate as our own.

Accordingly, the process of negotiation between the two categories of discourse involves the assimilating of others’ words and/ or ideas into one’s own personal ideology; “...the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). Significant, also, is the simultaneous freeing from or abandoning of the words and ideas (authoritative discourse or *previously* persuasive) that we do *not* (or no longer) wish to assimilate. We take on and adopt the words and ideas that are meaningful to us, and move beyond the words and ideas that we come to realize are not personally meaningful.

This internal struggle and negotiation between discourses is highly significant; it determines life directions. “The struggle and dialogic interrelationship of these categories of ideological discourse are what usually determine the history of an individual ideological consciousness” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342). It is a process of calculating and determining bearing, or illuminating pathways—which roads to move past, and which to explore. It is a process of deciding which set of directions to follow, and

which to ignore—of choosing which baggage to take with you, and which baggage to leave behind.

As with any exploratory travelling, there are always unknowns beyond the horizon. The paths we choose lead us to new, unfamiliar, and often unpredicted opportunities. Similarly, when a new discourse becomes meaningful to us, and acknowledged by us as meaningful—when we pick it up and decide to travel with it, to let it guide us (when we allow ourselves to be internally persuaded), new possibilities are revealed. Bakhtin (1981) describes that,

When someone else's ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up. Such discourse is of decisive significance in the evolution of an individual consciousness: consciousness awakens to independent ideological life. (p. 345)

It is in following these new possibilities that we travel into our own independent ideological lives; we become ourselves—the people we have decided and chosen to be.

Ideologically becoming, as Bakhtin (1981) explains it, involves the negotiation of self, of identity, of personhood. In seeking to understand the Funky Mamas' development of personhood, I chose to examine their stories of lived experiences of music making and learning through the lens of ideologically becoming.

Enter the Mamas

In examining the accounts of members of the Funky Mamas, I sought to identify and document this process of 'ideologically becoming' with and through music making. I understood the process to involve these four (4) factors:

- a) identifying a particular internally persuasive discourse
- b) recognizing the discourse as meaningful
- c) acknowledging the discourse as more significant than a challenging (possibly contradictory) authoritative discourse
- d) allowing the personally negotiated understanding of the discourse to open up new possibilities

There are five Funky Mamas. All of them told compelling stories, in which internally persuasive discourses were in evidence, competing with challenging authoritative discourses, and ultimately leading to new possibilities. Given the physical constraints of this chapter, however, I will only introduce you to three of the Mamas here: Kate, Chantal, and Georgia, whose stories most convincingly came into focus through the lens of Bakhtin's (1981) notion of ideologically becoming. I will frame their stories using the four factors of ideologically becoming, and provide a brief discussion for each.

Kate

a) Identifying a particular internally persuasive discourse:

Ben (B): And why did you decide to move on to that next level, of being a regularly gigging band?

Kate (K): We were getting a lot of good feedback—and our shows were not particularly polished at the beginning (*laughing*). So just the feedback of: ‘this is really unique, and you guys could go further.’ So then we just continued to work at playing music together and it actually took us quite a while to come around to think that: this is really worthwhile—there’s quite an accessible and eager market for this.

b) Recognizing the discourse as meaningful:

K: I think we found it really satisfying to work up to the point of having a show. The excitement of it, and something that we could feel valued and good about, because for the most part we were all at home—I was taking a few courses, and maybe holding down a small part time job, but I was predominantly at home with my kids, so it was about creating identity for ourselves, and opportunity. It offered me an identity when I was really struggling with: Who am I? What is my next step? And I’m still trying to get through university and now I’ve got a kid and I own a house...and all of a sudden it was all flooding upon me. And that was a way for me to become who I wanted to be.

c) Acknowledging the discourse as more significant than a challenging authoritative discourse:

B: Were there any external hurdles to overcome, in the form of people or society not being supportive of you? For example, earlier you described yourself as ‘not a natural musician.’

K: There have been doubts, absolutely, but there’s so much more to what we give than just our pure music. It’s also the message. And this is what fuels us: it’s the message we give to the audience, it’s the community building that we share with them, it’s an opportunity for caregivers and children to experience a rewarding memory—something they can take home with them, and that’s what keeps us going. There definitely is a divide between children’s music and ‘other’ music, and I think that’s been a bit of our saving grace, especially in the beginning when we weren’t as accomplished as we are. I think we’ve come a long way. We maybe wouldn’t be where we are today if we were trying to do something other than children’s music. But actually I’ve never really felt that there’s been any sort of criticism—in fact our music has been nominated for many national and international awards.

d) The personally negotiated understanding of the discourse opens up new possibilities:

K: There was no hesitancy for anyone. Nobody was saying, ‘we should just hang out.’ We were all really excited about that opportunity. What was attractive for me—I was at a point in my life that for me to have time away, for me to be just *me* was really important—when you’re in the thick of little ones, you’ve got demands on you every minute—but this was an opportunity for us to just *be*, and decompress, and play music together. An opportunity to learn something

new, and to have a shared experience with new friends... Something that I naturally took on and wanted to develop for myself was the business end of it. At some point I presented to the band: Okay, we need to get our act together and have some consistency in booking the shows, and the contracts, and the banking, and this and that, and I'm going to take that on. And I did that for years, and was fine tuning my skills that way through trial and error and learning and going to conferences...

Kate: Discussion

Early in the genesis of the band Kate (and the other Funky Mamas) received sufficient positive feedback to believe the message that they could, indeed, go further, and become a regularly gigging band. This message became increasingly meaningful to Kate as she recognized the potential for moving beyond a conflicted sense of self towards a positive and attractive personal identity; taking the band to the next level was “a way for me to become who I wanted to be.”

In one of the interviews Kate stated: “I wasn’t a natural musician. I still am not—I don’t play by ear, I can’t quickly grasp something.” This discourse, although communicated in Kate’s own words, suggested an external, authoritative perspective of musicianship—a perspective that natural musicians must be able to play by ear and pick up musical skills and/or knowledge quickly. In fact, the discourse had become internally persuasive; Kate had taken it on, reflectively and deliberately, as her own:

B: You said that you are not a ‘natural musician.’ When did you decide that?

K: I think I’ve decided it over time—actually more recently, because I’ve been exposed to so many musicians in so many ways.

B: And what do you mean by ‘natural musician?’

K: Maybe *natural* is the wrong word...I guess somebody who can easily pick up a tune and roll with it, so learning by ear, which I never did.

Fortunately, this discourse was not sufficient to block Kate’s path. Her negotiation of the discourse allows that, while she may not be a ‘natural’ musician, Kate can certainly still be a musician. She recognizes the value her music making has in reaching audiences, building community, and creating rewarding and memorable experiences. In addition, she acknowledges that the same expectations do not apply for children’s music as they do for adult music, and different aspects are valued. Kate and the other Mamas do not claim to be what they are not. With the band firmly positioned and confidently producing music for children, Kate continues to believe she and the band can indeed ‘go further.’

Bakhtin (1981) wrote: “When someone else’s ideological discourse is internally persuasive for us and acknowledged by us, entirely different possibilities open up (p. 345). Kate’s story supports this premise; once the message that the band had a promising future as a professional musical act for children had become internally persuasive for Kate and acknowledged by her, new possibilities did, indeed, open up. Through her music making

with the Funky Mamas Kate was able to have shared experiences with friends; to decompress; to create rewarding, memorable experiences and build community for herself, her family, friends, and her audiences; and most significantly, Kate realized the possibility to *be herself*. In taking on the role of band business manager, she even found a way to become a new version of herself.

Chantal

a) Identifying a particular internally persuasive discourse:

Chantal (C): I met Kate and our babies were exactly the same age. She said, "I've got this thing we're going to, you should come—we play music!" And I was like: "Yes!"

b) Recognizing the discourse as meaningful:

C: I was so excited and so nervous...I can remember the first time I came I went to the door and I had to turn around and go back, because...you know those life moments that you *know* are so important and you're so excited that you don't think it's actually going to happen, you're so worried that it's not going to happen that you can barely stand it?

At that point it wasn't very organized. We were just mostly talking, and people playing a song, and I remember Pam [who left the band in 2005] was playing a mandolin and singing a song and I thought: Oh my gosh—that's so brave...I couldn't imagine someone just standing there and singing in front of all these strange people. It just seemed really brave to me. I was attracted to that. It equalled power, like *powerful woman*, somebody that had that kind of self-confidence.

c) Acknowledging the discourse as more significant than a challenging authoritative discourse:

C: And when you first have kids, especially being isolated and not knowing anyone you sort of lose that sense of power because your identity is off...it's like: who am I? You don't really have importance other than what you're doing in that moment...it feels like, if you're not working, if you're at home with your kids.

B: So in a way having kids made you feel like you had less of an identity?

C: Maybe less of an *outside identity*. Definitely within my own little circle I felt good, and knew that I was doing the right thing, and very confident, but then in the social realm...because in society you're not seen as something super powerful as a mom. You're just sort of an extension of your kids, in a way—you're their caregiver as opposed to your own person.

B: So when Pam sang at that first meeting she transcended the woman as extension of her children?

C: Yes, but also *connecting* it because she was playing *to* her children. Expressing herself—who she is as a person in that moment and in that *role* and not being embarrassed or shy or anything about it. There was a pride underneath it and to hear that expressed in that way was really powerful.

d) The personally negotiated understanding of the discourse opens up new

possibilities:

B: And had you recognized that you were craving that? An opportunity, through music making, to express yourself?

C: No. Not at all. I had never thought of using that as a tool to be able to express yourself that way, personally. At that point I didn't even think I could do the same thing. It was about her, and I just thought that I would love to be *around* that, more than that I needed to do it myself. And that I had something to learn from that, for sure. And then it slowly built from there. It brought a lot out of me.

I don't think of myself as a musician per se. I think of myself more as a member of the band. It's much more about the group for me than about me individually. As much as I was attracted to the self-expression, it's much less about that for me now, and much more about the presentation and the giving of it. That's what appeals to me at this point. I remember my daughter's Suzuki teacher telling her—and I love this analogy—when you perform, it's like giving a gift to somebody. You're gracious and you're holding your hands out and you're saying: here is what I am giving. And that's how I see it now, as opposed to getting up there and thinking about: 'Oh, am I doing this wrong?' There's something freeing about letting go of that and just saying: 'Here you go. This is for you.' And it also makes you think more about how you're giving it, and what you want to say in the giving. So that's how I think of myself: more about trying to give the most beautiful gift I can give, in that moment.

B: So you have an opportunity, through the music making, to be a giver?

C: Yep. Exactly. I really enjoy playing for people who are enjoying themselves, that's the main thing. Maybe that's why I enjoy playing when people are dancing, when it's not so much about them listening to me play every note, it's about creating a feeling and something in the heart. That's when it feels most comfortable to me.

B: So the notion of music as a vehicle for self-expression, sending yourself out into the world—I'm not hearing that so much from you.

C: No, it's not at all about that and if I were to have to do a solo performance I'd probably go and stress out for five hours beforehand because it's not about that for me. I appreciate that—when I see how people are expressing themselves individually within the band. I can appreciate the strength that that's giving them. It's a neat thing to see in other mothers and other human beings.

B: Do you think maybe what you're getting out of it is that you're helping the others do that?

C: I hope so. I've never thought of it that way, but I really liked it when we talked about how we hold each other up. And it feels much more comfortable for me to be able to embrace that, than for it to be all about me.

B: So maybe one of the things you really benefit from or enjoy about this music making experience is that it's an opportunity for you to give others a chance to express themselves. Do you think so?

C: Exactly. There's a great joy when Georgia takes out her [musical] saw and she's doing her thing and seeing the people's faces and knowing there's something happening in that moment and just being there behind that is a really neat feeling.

Chantal: Discussion

When Kate told Chantal she 'should come' and join in with the music-making moms she delivered the discourse and planted the seed. It did not

take much for this message to become internally persuasive; Chantal's prescient description of her anticipation of the first encounter with the Mamas brims with the anticipated excitement of an imminent epiphany. Somehow, she knew this encounter would be pivotal in her life. That she should be part of this coming-together became even more meaningful when Chantal experienced the power of Pam singing and playing. That act flew in the face of a deeply unsettling authoritative discourse that had gained currency in Chantal's mind: that a young mother choosing to stay at home with her children did not have importance. As with Kate above, Chantal recognized that her sense of identity had been knocked off kilter as she took on the all-consuming role of mother. She felt that her personal identity, as projected outwards, was subsumed by the perception that she was "an extension of [her] kids." Encountering a young mother proudly and confidently expressing herself through music while she sang to her children effectively brought the barrier of this authoritative discourse crashing down; Chantal recognized the possibility of a powerful identity that both embraced and transcended motherhood.

Interestingly, while recognizing the value of expressing self through music making, a vehicle for self-expression is not what Chantal sought. The most significant possibility that opened up for Chantal was the opportunity not to *send out* from her self, but to give. Chantal finds not only satisfaction, but joy in giving to her audience through music and in giving support to her band mates' musical expressions of self. Chantal values being able to "hold up" the others in her band.

Georgia

a) Identifying a particular internally persuasive discourse:

G: ...at this point I don't read music. I just play by ear, intuitively. I read a bit of music but it's not the way I play. I started playing the saw with my friend when we were in school at Trent. We wanted to play an instrument, but neither of us played an instrument and we didn't want to try playing guitar because everybody else plays guitar...We saw the movie *Delicatessen* and there's this beautiful duet with a woman playing the cello and we were like: "We've got to learn to play the saw!" So Reverend Ken Ramston from Peterborough took us to see his friend called Sawbones, who was in the retirement home, and used to dress up in a cowboy costume and tour high school gymnasiums and play "Home on the Range" on the saw... and he showed us how to do it. He taught us how to do it. I started on a Canadian Tire Mastercraft. It cost twelve dollars. You don't need a musical saw.

B: So you had an introduction from Sawbones, and then you just figured it out on your own?

G: Yep.

B: Did you ever go back for more pointers from someone?

G: No. I just figured it out.

b) Recognizing the discourse as meaningful:

G: Cam has a bass and I picked it up and realized—after playing guitar—that it comes pretty naturally to play the bass. I don't really remember exactly how I figured it out.

B: You play accordion, too?

G: Yeah...I just don't have time to do it. But I like it. There's some basic fingering on the buttons that I learned about... I think my mom told me. She said "watch out for those finger buttons, because if you don't learn those finger patterns right...then you'll be a mess."

I picked up the mandolin. There was already someone playing mandolin [in the band] at that time. I just played it because it's a beautiful instrument and I like it.

B: So you bought one and started figuring it out on your own.

G: Well I have a chord book. But there were a lot of songs that I knew already, so I could pick out the melodies. I also took a Celtic College course. I learned a few songs. But basically it just has to do with wanting to play it and picking it up and playing it.

B: How else did you learn to play the mandolin?

G: By listening, and figuring stuff out, and every now and then playing with other people and getting pointers from people...if I wanted to learn any song I could go to the computer and look up the tablature for it. And I can figure out how to pick it out, with listening to it and looking at the tab. I can figure it out.

c) Acknowledging the discourse as more significant than a challenging authoritative discourse:

G: A year ago I went into the local library right when we got nominated for the Canadian folk music award. And the librarian, who was for years a schoolteacher, said to me: "that's quite something, for you girls to be nominated for that." And I had never thought of it that way. But it totally came to me, all at once, that none of us are music teachers, we aren't formally employed as teachers, and for us to actually accomplish that is a big deal for some people and for me it was always just what we were doing. And I just had not even thought about it from that point of view before. The fact that a group of moms could get together and make CDs and get nominated for an award that's recognized Canada-wide, and I thought, it's totally worth it! It's a great recording! But other people are like: Well how could those moms do that?

B: I think there is much about music—music education, in particular, sadly—that imposes barriers concerning what people can and can't do, musically.

G: That's a point that means a lot to me. I can play a lot of these instruments. I have a really good ear. I can sing. But I don't have any qualifications...the content of what we do could be really good for kids but people look at our qualifications personally and that just puts us in another category all together. If I had a bachelor of music the Funky Mamas would be way further than they are now. If any of us had a bachelor of music. If one of us had a bachelor of education and one of us had a bachelor of music it would be totally different. I really believe that. But for what we do I don't care; I'm not going to let that bother me.

I think there are a lot of people who look for qualifications: "If they're a band that plays for kids, then where's their qualification?" ...if they saw there was that qualification, then they'd feel safer, and then they could say to their boss, "Oh, we hired this band (whoever it is might not even have any kids, or care) but here's their qualification..." and someone else might win out over us in that we're home-spun...which is what we are. I love what we do, but what certain

people are looking for is something to qualify you as a good musician or a good act or something...

B: And what you really value is the qualification of being a mum.

G: Yeah. And I love the fact that we're all moms, that's what we do, but I also think that when we *say* we're a group of five moms, I think that automatically dismisses us from competition in a lot of shows.

d) The personally negotiated understanding of the discourse opens up new possibilities:

B: What are the "new possibilities" that have become apparent to you through your music making with the FMs?

G: I think overall, for me, from pretty close to the beginning, it's been realizing that what we do is a really good thing...we're giving parents and kids a great in-the-moment live music experience and it's beneficial...we're creating out of whatever's there, in the moment, for everyone. And everyone's there, sharing the same moment. I think that's valuable in this world...we have this bit of creativity time and we can put out something that's free from everything else and hopefully bring some other people into the bubble with us.

B: How does it affect who you are or how you identify yourself? Being the one that makes this possible for people?

G: For some reason it's a way I can communicate... something that I think is good. I believe that we're doing a good thing.

B: Is there anything you have come to embrace about yourself that has come about as a result of your music making with the Mamas?

G: I think at a certain point I realized I had to try my best each time. But I don't remember when I consciously started saying that. But there's one person who always asks me how the Funky Mamas are doing, and I always say, "I always do my best!" And I do.

B: Are there any things about yourself as a musician that you've consciously decided to let go?

G: Not being able to read music, I can't hang on to that.

Georgia: Discussion

One of the internally persuasive discourses evident in Georgia's account—what she came to know through her achievements with the musical saw, mandolin, voice and all the other instruments—was that she could learn music on her own. Although she occasionally received guidance, or pointers from others (in person or via the Internet or songbooks) Georgia learned to play instruments by listening and 'figuring out' how to reproduce the music she heard. This method of music learning shares much in common with the learning that Lucy Green (2002) encountered amongst popular musicians, who predominantly learn by listening to and copying recordings by ear in solitary practice, and whose use of written resources such as songbooks is "always secondary to the aural" (p. 97). Reading music notation, the virtually inescapable hallmark of formal music learning, does not figure much at all in Georgia's music making. Again, this approach to music learning echoes what Green (2008) learned of the popular music world, in which "notation plays hardly any part" (p. 7). Learning to play an

instrument, for Georgia, basically “just has to do with wanting to play it and picking it up and playing it.”

Despite the achievement and personal satisfaction Georgia has experienced through being a self-taught musician, she has encountered an authoritative discourse that voices skepticism about her ability to be a performer of children’s music without formal qualifications. It is apparent that Georgia has solid reasons to move beyond this discourse; she recognizes her own musicality and recognizes the value and importance of the knowledge and experience that motherhood allows all the members of the Funky Mamas to bring to their work. At one part in our conversation, I asked:

B: It may seem obvious, but what role did having a child play in becoming a Funky Mama?

G: Well I wouldn’t be qualified otherwise.

Although Georgia recognizes the *real* significance of the informal qualifications that she and the other Funk Mamas bring to the table, she nevertheless feels the band would be further ahead if they were able to announce formal qualifications such as degrees in music or education—not because those things would make the band any better, but because they would enhance the band’s marketability.

However, this still-ongoing negotiation of discourses has opened up some notable possibilities in the form of the unofficial qualifications that Georgia holds, and has come to recognize and value: her own powerful independent musicianship, motherhood, and the conviction she has that through her music making she is doing a good thing for the children and parents who attend the shows. In addition, Georgia’s work as a performing artist carries with it the self-imposed rigour and conviction of one who—though she may not have a string of letters behind her name—will always do her best.

Connecting personhood and music learning

In the preceding paragraphs I filtered narratives collected from three of the Funky Mamas through a *Bakhtin ideologically becoming* rubric in order to illuminate a possible way of understanding these individuals’ constructing of personhood with and through music. But what does the examination of these particular accounts of lived experience through this particular personhood lens illuminate in terms of music *learning*? The most useful way to answer this question is, I believe, to identify what music learning means to Kate, Chantal, and Georgia.

Learning from Kate

The analysis of Kate’s stories indicated that she was able to build a sense of identity through music making. Although she identified personal limitations

as a music-maker this did not inhibit her from being the musician she wanted to be; in fact, it seemed to assist her, by allowing her to focus her efforts on aspects of music making that suited her best.

B: Given your experience with the Funky Mamas, what does music learning mean to you?

K: I think this experience has really changed—and I've really adapted—a new sense of what music learning means to me. In my childhood and through my high school years in a lot of ways it was forced—to receive a credit, or whatever I was getting for it. But now, music learning is an opportunity to grow as an individual.

Kate indicates here that her sense of music learning has evolved. To return to Bakhtin (1981), this is to be expected. He points out that an internally persuasive discourse, or understanding, “is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts” (pp. 345-346). When she was younger Kate understood music learning as an opportunity to receive an external reward; now, having experienced music learning in the new context of being a Funky Mama, she recognizes the reward, for her, as internal; music learning represents an opportunity for personal growth.

Learning from Chantal

Chantal views music making as providing not only a sense of self but also a sense of power. Additionally, although she recognizes music making as a potent vehicle for self expression, it is the opportunity to *give* through music making—to her audiences but perhaps even more significantly to her fellow music makers—that holds value for Chantal. She relishes her music making for the opportunity it allows of both supporting and being supported by the musicians with whom she plays. For Chantal, music making enables connecting. And music learning, consequently, needs to involve learning that will support that connecting. I asked Chantal:

B: What is music learning to you?

C: A lot of it is about listening. Much more so than anything else. And there's that Zen thing of letting go of your ego. There's the little place you get to—I don't even know how to put it into words—it's one of those little perfect moments. It's about the connections. There's a connectedness, and connectivity, I guess, that music can create, especially in the playing of it and the making of it.

B: You said connecting—what's connecting?

C: It's so hard to articulate. It's something that happens, it's just a *groove*, it's just something that you *feel*, it's just you're all going along together and you're connected. With the music, with other individuals, sometimes with the audience, or someone in particular in the audience...sometimes you're getting a lot back, you're feeling the energy coming back at you.

Insightfully, Chantal connects the dots between identifying music making as an opportunity for connecting and the importance to music learning, thus, of listening and letting go. When pressed for a further defining of connecting Chantal offered the notion of feel and groove—words often present but rarely satisfying in descriptions of musical communication. Green (2008), for example, found that popular musicians' attitudes toward musical value and ability "tend to emphasize 'feel' 'sensitivity' and 'spirit' over technical ability" (p. 8). She also found that "friendship, co-operation and the ability to be sensitive to other people also affect the precise nature and feel of the music being produced, in ways that relate to musical communication in performance" (p. 9). As Chantal suggested (while gently resisting my attempt to pin down the ineffable), there may be a valid reason why such concepts defy precise definition:

B: So learning music has to do with recognizing and tapping into these things?

C: Yeah, I guess so. It's a very emotional thing. There's a lot of feeling about it; it's not really a verbal, head thing. It's very much a heart thing.

Learning from Georgia

Georgia's music making and learning, as is often the case with popular musicians (Green, 2002, 2008), does not significantly involve teachers or music notation. She learns music on her own, by figuring it out. This phrase was uttered many times in discussing Georgia's music making and learning, and was unpacked a little in her response to the following:

B: After having spent all this time with the Mamas, what is music learning to you?

G: Being able to feel it and then being able to talk about it so that you can know what you're talking about. So if you can *hear* it, and *feel* it, then you can pick it apart after...

In order for the *figuring out* to happen, Georgia suggests the importance of hearing, feeling, and discussing the music. Only then is one in a position to learn (about) it, or "pick it apart." The approach to thinking about and working with music that Georgia articulates here is striking in its close alignment with the music working priorities of famed Canadian musician and producer Daniel Lanois. When producing the recordings of such musicians as U2 and Peter Gabriel, his "method is surprisingly straightforward. Forging a common language is the first task—forcing the musicians and recording team to settle on the vocabulary they will use to describe the component parts of each song" (Gatehouse, 2010, p. 61). A significant aspect of music learning, it seems, is learning how to talk about the aspects that are felt and heard.

In addition, qualifications play a role in Georgia's negotiation of her sense of self as a musician; formal qualifications such as institutional degrees and the academic learning signified by the ability to read music

(which are not part of her musical personhood) are balanced by informal and often unrecognized music qualifications that are fundamental to Georgia's musical personhood, such as motherhood, the ability to play and sing by ear, the power to give something that is good, and the determination to always perform to the absolute best of her ability. For Georgia, music learning is much more about these informal and even obscure paths to musicianship.

The Bakhtin ideologically becoming lens and music learning

Stepping back further—or, to pursue the microscope metaphor, decreasing magnification—in order to view all three analyses as a whole along with the Bakhtin conception of ideologically becoming itself, there is more to be learned about music learning.

As a result of filtering these stories through the Bakhtin ideologically becoming rubric it has become evident that engagement with music is likely to result in increasing awareness of and interaction with a variety of discourses concerned with music, both authoritative and internally persuasive. It would follow, then, that music learning necessarily involves learning how to negotiate these discourses. Similarly, the analysis process has clearly illustrated that a wealth of possibilities can be encountered in and through music making, particularly in regard to the exploration, construction, and understanding of self. Consequently, music learning involves recognizing personal possibilities, and, following from this, figuring out how best to make use of them.

Implications and possibilities for music teaching and learning

In conclusion, it remains for me to identify how this analysis and discussion might inform music teaching and learning. Of primary significance is the recognition that music learners negotiate personal meanings from the various discourses they encounter. As Koschmann (1999) suggests, from a socially grounded Bakhtinian perspective learning may be seen “as the process of multiple voices coming into contact” (p. 308). When the voices have been reconciled, new meanings, or understandings, give rise to new possibilities. What, then, is the role of an educator in supporting this process?

Etienne Wenger (1998) writes of learning, meaning, and identity in the context of communities of practice. I have found that his ideas often align with those of Bakhtin, and are useful here in connecting to and considering educational implications. Wenger points out, for example, that education concerns the opening of identities; that it must “strive to open new dimensions for the negotiation of the self” (p. 263). It follows that music education should provide diverse opportunities for the negotiation of the *musical self*. A music classroom could become a testing ground for the trying

on of music identities: recording engineer, listening connoisseur, conductor, rhythm expert, king of the high C's, composer, and so on.

Bakhtin (1981) posits that the process of ideologically becoming is set in motion by discourses. Musicians need to come into contact with all manner of discourse that may influence, in various ways, their music learning, musical identity formation, and musical becoming. There is a role for educators in purposively introducing particular discourses, countering others, and helping learners interpret the various discourses they receive; but much more valuable is for the educator to build opportunities for this to happen naturally. Wenger (1998) explains: “the ability to apply learning flexibly depends not on abstraction of formulation but on deepening the negotiation of meaning. This in turn depends on engaging identities in the complexity of lived situations” (p. 268). In order for educators to foster music learning that students can flexibly apply elsewhere—that they can take with them—learners need to be engaged in genuine music making experiences in all their richness and complexity.

What might rich and complex learner engagement in genuine music making experiences look like? I believe the key to facilitating such experiences is student ownership. Given the familiar framework of an end-of-term public music performance and a regularly scheduled music class, how much of the decision-making might effectively be managed by the learners? A highly significant aspect of the art of the educator involves this balancing: how much learning activity management should be relinquished so that the learner may take it on? How can the teacher maximize the learner’s opportunities for personally owned *and* personally satisfying musical experiences? This will vary hugely, of course, depending on the age and experience of the musicians and the specifics of the learning/teaching environment. But might the learners be able to:

- analyze a potential audience, conceptualize an appropriate program, and advertise a concert?
- choose the music to be performed? Arrange the music to be performed? Compose the music to be performed?
- identify the musical skills and knowledge they need to successfully play, sing, arrange, and/or compose the music to be performed?
- rehearse and perform in self-directed small ensembles as well as or instead of teacher-led large ensembles?
- organize, manage, and lead rehearsals?
- hold each other accountable for contribution to group efforts?
- book the performance space, oversee ticket sales, manage front-of-house?
- engineer, produce, and distribute a concert recording?

Through participation in lived situations such as these learners will both encounter significant music discourses and explore and negotiate them in context. Schools gain relevance by “the experiments of identity that the students can engage in while there” (Wenger, 1998, p. 268). Music learners

need to have the opportunity to try out multiple musical roles: repertoire selector, arranger, composer, performer, rehearsal manager, director, motivator, teacher, market analyst, impresario, concert promoter, recording engineer, and so on. As the identity experiments are conducted, learners will encounter a variety of music discourses. For example, a certain discourse may value one genre of music over another, or one type of music learning over another, or one musical activity over another, or one way of being musical over another. Immersed in the context of genuine music making, learners will have the opportunity to meaningfully negotiate personal understanding of discourses encountered.

There is an important role for educators in supporting the negotiation of discourses: guiding learners through in a manner that acknowledges and respects their individuality, and enables the finding of the unique path best suited to the learner. For example Chantal's music learning, described above, involved recognizing that one of the most personally significant musical goals for her to reach was to be able to support her fellow musicians as they expressed themselves through music—despite pervasive discourse that suggests musical self-expression is generally more desirable. The opportunity to support others is not an obvious musical goal, but it has significant value, which an educator might usefully help a learner to discover.

As educators we should support learners in the negotiation of discourses; the resultant meaning making must certainly not be dictated, as it will only be relevant if learners are allowed “empowering forms of ownership of meaning” (Wenger, 1998, p. 269). There is no value in guiding learners to meaning making, or identity, that is not their own.

When the discourses have been negotiated and the path forward found and followed, the new possibilities will be encountered. At this point a new role for the educator becomes apparent: facilitating the exploration of possibilities. Educators must strive to provide whatever the learner needs to seize an opportunity and run with it. “Students must be enabled to explore who they are, who they are not, who they could be” (Wenger, 1998, p. 272). Amongst my own memories of learning, the teachers who found ways to help me pursue such possibilities are those for whom I am most grateful. I will never forget the teacher who supported my composer identity exploration by clearing out a storage loft in his classroom and equipping it with recording equipment so that I could compose in peace while the rest of the class rehearsed.

There is, in fact, a further role for educators, in facilitating the *re*-negotiation of the discourses that learners have developed and taken on and made their own. Bakhtin (1981) points out that we are never in a static state—we are constantly re-defining who we are as we make new meanings and come to new understandings. A musician, may, for example, come to prefer a different genre of music, or a different approach to music learning, or a different musical activity, or a different way of being musical. Our

internally persuasive discourses evolve. We are never just being, but always becoming:

The semantic structure of an internally persuasive discourse is not *finite*, it is *open*, in each of the new contexts that dialogize it [provoke interactions between meanings within it], this discourse is able to reveal ever newer ways to *mean*. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 346)

Indeed, Bakhtin (1981) implies that this is the very *raison d'être* of an internally persuasive discourse: Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word [discourse] awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of your words from within...it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions" (p. 345). The purpose of an internally persuasive discourse is to allow us to become.

Consequently, it is essential for educators to remain aware that learners are operating with constantly evolving understandings of the discourses they receive and advance. For on the journey of becoming, though we may rest, we do not stop; our travels continue. We encounter new discourses and new contexts that change how we make sense of old ones. Educators need to accept and strive to support learners' forever changing understandings of the music making and learning—the musical worlds—they encounter, develop, and inhabit.

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