

Exploring Student Learning and Leadership through a University-Community Choral Initiative

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Within a rapidly changing higher education landscape, there is an increased need for universities to look beyond their ‘ivory towers’ and into their surrounding communities in preparing students for the ‘real world’. Findings from an Irish case study explore a children’s choral university-community initiative within an urban area of socio-economic disadvantage. The choral initiative involved 14 student volunteers and 150 children. Qualitative research, carried out over two years, involved student focus group interviews and reflective surveys. The research illuminates the multifaceted nature of the learning experience for students and examines to what extent such an initiative can build choral leadership capacity to work in school and community settings.

Introduction

This article argues that students at university require challenges through ‘field experiences’ in order for meaningful learning to happen, to in turn shape their musical and teacher identities. Therefore, student engagement with school and community partnership projects during their studies facilitates students to make meaning through experience which also entails reflection as part of this process. This university-community partnership approach is based on a

constructivist theoretical model (Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1995, 2001; Eisner, 2002) where ‘real-life’ experiences are required to construct knowledge and foster ‘wide awakeness’ for potential transformation to occur.

Research on a children’s choir initiative within Mary Immaculate College (MIC) in Ireland explores the links between a university and schools within an urban area of socio-economic disadvantage. The university-community initiative involves 14 student volunteers and 150 children. The students gain specific professional development training in choral leadership at the university and deliver a common repertoire to assigned classes across four primary schools. All of the children involved come together on campus at MIC for ‘big sings’ and performances during the academic year with the choral director. A qualitative case study of the partnership, carried out over two years, examines the musical, pedagogical, social and emotional aspects of the initiative for all participants – students, children, teachers and schools (Kenny, Bourke & Ní Chondúin, 2016). This article focuses on the student voice to examine how such an initiative can foster connections between university students, children, schools and surrounding urban communities, in addition to questioning how the initiative affects student awareness of educational opportunity and builds leadership capacity to work in school and community settings. Findings raise key questions relating to the impact of student participation in university-community initiatives on their development as future music teachers, leaders and facilitators.

University-Community Partnerships

The MIC Children’s Choir represents a university-community partnership within a growing diverse field of educational partnership or ‘service learning’ for higher education institutions. For universities, such partnerships often have laudable aims of connecting students to the

communities they study within by providing ‘authentic’ experiences to improve learning and offer unique professional and personal development opportunities. For local schools and communities there is often the explicit aim of breaking down third level elitism by providing access to its physical space, expertise and resources as academics ‘reach out’ from perceived ivory towers. Within teacher education in particular, such ‘field experiences’ have become essential parts of programme development with Brophy claiming (2011, p. 149) ‘... the idea of school and university faculty working together to prepare high-quality teachers for the 21st century has become a standard practice’.

Partnership projects with a specific music education remit are following such trends and thus there is an ever-expanding body of research in this area (Addo, 2003; Barnes, 2002; Bartleet, 2012; Bartleet et al., 2014; Bartolome, 2013; Brophy, 2011; Burton, 2011; Burton & Greher, 2007, 2011; Colley et al., 2012; Conway & Hodgman, 2008; Emmanuel, 2005; Kenny, 2014a; Kenny, 2016; Nichols & Sullivan, 2016; Power & Bennett, 2015; Reynolds, 2004). Burton and Greher claim (2011, p. 105):

Preparing new music teachers to face the increased challenges awaiting them as they enter the field requires a rethinking of traditional curricular practice rooted in learning about teaching toward practice that favors a concentrated emphasis on multiple, context-specific, field-based experiences throughout the course of their studies.

In a study of an intergenerational university-community project, Conway and Hodgman (2008) found that participants developed better understandings of each other and had a heightened performance experience due to their collaborative participation. While Bartolome on examining a preschool service learning project claimed that for the student music teachers involved, ‘the service allowed them to make real-time connections between course content and classroom realities’ (2013, p. 83).

The targeted nature of the MIC Children’s Choir involving designated disadvantaged schools further advances the importance of such approaches. Similar in its attempt to connect to minority groups, Power and Bennett (2015) report on the powerful potential of ‘arts-based service learning’ heavily connected to experiences of ‘place’ in their study of three universities involved with partnerships projects with Australian Aboriginal people. Through ‘moments of becoming’ (Ellsworth, 2005), these student teachers were ‘transformed’ (Kiely, 2005) through, ‘... their embodied connection to place and their connection to the people of the place’ (Power and Bennett, 2015, p. 163). Such field experiences then are viewed as a means for students to develop tools to be responsive to context, broaden social awareness, examine previously held assumptions and engage in ‘reflection-in-action’ (Schön, 1987, p. 26). Burton asserts (2011, p. 124), ‘Music teachers increase their ability to be culturally and pedagogically responsive to the students they teach when they have flexible use of cultural knowledge’.

Identity Building and Student Learning

Music teacher identity development is a complex and multi-layered phenomenon (Biasutti, 2010; Freer & Bennett, 2012; Georgii–Hemming & Westvall, 2010; Hargreaves & Marshall, 2003; Henley, 2017; Hennessy, 2000; Kenny, 2017; McClellan, 2014). It has been found that students’ self-identity development is influenced from ‘society, education and from personal experiences ...as an interaction between the past, the present and the future’ (Georgii–Hemming & Westvall, 2010, p. 359). The importance of both active and reflective musical experiences within education programmes then is highlighted. Students tend to place a high value on practical engagement and experience (Kenny, 2017; 2014a; Kenny, Finneran & Mitchell, 2015; Finney & Philpott, 2010; Ní Chróinín et al., 2013). The importance of

activity-based and immersive learning within higher music education then is further promoted through ‘real-life’, ‘place-based’ experiences for students to construct knowledge and inform emerging identities.

Greene in her writings on ‘democratic imagination’ (1995) offers interesting perspectives with regard to university-school-community initiatives and the arts. Applying this term to the choral initiative, with its focus on student volunteerism within disadvantaged communities, agency is potentially created to enter attentively into the experience of others (or indeed ‘the other’) thus navigating societal biases, structures, injustices, power relations and stereotypes. Greene reminds us (1995, p. 6), ‘the educative task is to create situations in which people are moved to begin to ask, in all the tones of voice there are, “why”?’ Through such student learning experiences such as the children’s choir, there is great potential for critical reflection and a reconceptualisation about the role of music in addressing social justice issues. Within such targeted field experiences, Nichols and Sullivan warn however of the potential for perpetuating assumptions and stereotypes amongst students. They write (2016, p. 167):

Every week we brought white, upper-middle class university students to make music and art at a locked facility housing predominantly black, poor teenagers who have been accused of crimes. Despite our good intentions, one must ask, ‘Just what are these preservice music educators actually learning?’

The researchers call for ‘critical service learning’ to not only inform pre-service teachers’ understandings of the community contexts surrounding their future classrooms but also to question the existing social and cultural structures affecting the children and young people within them.

Previous research on a short-term music education partnership project between final year student teachers at Mary Immaculate College (MIC), a community resource organisation and a designated disadvantaged primary school offers distinct insights into exploring the development of a ‘community of musical practice’ between participants (Kenny, 2016,

2014a). ‘Communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) connect learning with participation, transformation and identity construction. Members within communities are seen to learn through a social process of peripheral participation where knowledge is acquired through peer learning and collaboration. Furthering this framework to ‘communities of musical practice’ (Kenny, 2016) then, the inter-relatedness of musical and social interaction as well as favourable models of meaningful musical and community experience were highlighted in the study. Through this after-school music project, children and students appeared to be engaged in collaborative learning where, ‘There was a sense of community, in the actions being carried out simultaneously, in watching one another and taking cues from each other, all building up to a shared practice of musical learning’ (Kenny, 2014a, p. 405). This project was used to inform and shape the current choral project from both research and practice perspectives.

The research

Findings are examined from research conducted over the first two years of the choral initiative (2013–2015). This article solely focuses on the student data gathered as part of the larger research project and was guided by the following research questions:

- What knowledge, skills and attitudes are developed amongst the students?
- How taking a leadership role in the classroom, the ‘big sings’ at MIC, and preparing the children for performances develop choral leadership capacity?
- How does participation in the initiative impact on student understandings of disadvantaged contexts?
- How are university/school/community links fostered through this initiative?

End of year focus group interviews were carried out with six of the students in spring 2014 and again in 2015 which were audio recorded. The students also completed three separate online reflective surveys over the two academic years and a total of 23 survey responses were gathered. These data tools addressed themes of student motivation, expectations, musical background, skills-building, understandings, enjoyment, challenges, leadership, educational opportunity and emerging teacher identity. The audio files of the interviews were transcribed, coded and analysed thematically. The reflective surveys were approached in the same manner and triangulated with the interview data collected. This thematic analysis was employed as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns in the form of themes arising from an in-depth analysis of data. The research was conducted in accordance with the Mary Immaculate College Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) Guidelines and approval was granted. Confidentiality and anonymity of the student participants was maintained throughout analysis and write-up.

Context

The MIC Children's Choir is a university-community partnership initiative aimed at complementing and enhancing existing music education provision in primary schools. The choir was set up in 2013 with children from four targeted DEIS Band 1 primary schools in Limerick City. With regard to the specific aims for student participants, the initiative aims for students to: acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes to develop their own future community and/or school choirs; encourage active participation and inclusion within communities; and widen civic engagement through creative outlets.

The initiative sees third level students at MIC involved in active voluntary engagement. Their engagement is not graded and does not form any part of a degree course. The initiative then is

open to any undergraduate student on campus willing to give the time, effort and commitment and so includes students from first to fourth year on a number of degree courses. Over the two-year period of research (2013–15), 14 students volunteered to visit eight classes in pairs each week to sing and rehearse with children aged between nine and 12. 150 children from 3rd and 4th classes across four schools participated in the first year of the choir and subsequently continued. Students gained focussed professional development in choral leadership during weekly mentoring sessions with the choral director at MIC and went on to deliver a common repertoire in schools, building to large and small-scale performances throughout the school year. All schools involved came together in MIC during the academic year for masterclasses or ‘big sings’ with the choral director as well as for performances.

Discussion of findings

Key findings from the three reflective student surveys (coded as SS1, SS2 and SS3) and two focus group interviews (coded as FG1 and FG2) are drawn together here under the following themed headings: (1) skills-building, (2) emerging teacher selves, (3) performance opportunities, and (4) access and educational opportunity.

Skills - building

The student volunteers had varying motivations to join the MIC Children’s Choir initiative. The most frequent responses included accessing hands-on experience in classroom settings as well as gaining skills, knowledge and understandings in: effective communication, classroom management, conducting, singing, music literacy, choral preparation, coordination and organisation, age-appropriate repertoire choice, choral leadership and, performance

preparation. The students were clearly focused on the dual purpose of building choral leadership capacities as well as gaining broader classroom skills in situ, as further demonstrated in the extracts below:

Going out to schools and engaging with the children first hand was a very valuable experience ... Conducting a lesson in front of a class was a very good experience, as it will definitely help me on the school placements I will have to undertake in the future. (B.Ed2, SS3)

The rapport you build with the children during the year as you watch them achieve was wonderful. Also, I felt like I had grown as a teacher through the project ... if someone came to me and told me that I had to teach a music class this instant, I would be able to. (B.Ed2, SS3)

Many of the students commented on the hugely beneficial process of applying skills learnt together in choral leadership workshops on a weekly basis within school contexts during that same week. This process also facilitated communal reflection each week where students could discuss together ‘what worked’ the previous week, what did not, challenges and next steps. This crucial process of marrying activity with reflection resonated with previous research at the same institution (Kenny, 2014a, 2014b, 2017; Ní Chróinín et al., 2013). In this study, the students built skills, knowledge and understandings incrementally while at the same time gaining experience in ‘real-life’ classroom situations, as reflected here:

It's so hard to get practical, worthwhile experience ... I benefited so much from it because then I wasn't nervous at all going into my actual school placement for the degree ... it made the thing a whole lot easier. (B.Ed1, FG2)

It was an excellent opportunity to be out in the classrooms to experience classroom life each week. I believe that this project has given me a lot more confidence ... I also understand what the children really enjoy and that will be very beneficial to me in the primary school classroom in the future. (B.Ed 2, SS1)

The confidence building evidenced above was repeatedly referred to across data sources. In particular, all of the students studying to be primary teachers spoke of the multiple benefits this brought when embarking on assessed school placement as part of their degree. This very direct application of skills gained was never far from their minds, which is perhaps unsurprising given the nature of their preparation for the profession. However, these students also commented on how it was unlike school placement – there was no assessment or in-

school supervision – and so offered them room for more risk-taking, creativity and experimentation. One student commented, ‘it is very different, because you’ve a lot more freedom in how you do things’ (B.Ed2, FG1).

The feeling of progression in skills-building over time was very strong amongst the students:

When I walked in two years ago, I knew nothing ... I’ve learned so much more in these two years in the children’s choir than I’ve learned in probably all my three years of lectures in the college. I was on school placement there and the teacher had to go. I spent the time doing music because I was like on the spot – what can I do? Music. That’s what you need, you need to be able to just straight away come up with an idea and not be relying on having resources and lesson plans and PowerPoints. With this you just don’t need anything else except your voice. (B.Ed3, FG2)

I’d be way more confident in doing it . . . I think even if you had to tell me now, ‘oh teach a choir lesson right this minute’, I could do it off the top of my head. (B.Ed3, FG1)

This level of self-confidence and preparedness is most unusual for generalist student teachers as seen in previous literature (Finney & Philpott, 2010; Georgii–Hemming & Westvall, 2010; Hennessey, 2000; Kenny, 2014b, 2015, 2017; Kokotsaki, 2012). That these students felt prepared to teach a choral lesson ‘off the top of their heads’ is a remarkable achievement considering they are not fully qualified teachers as yet.

Emerging teacher selves

It was found that student emergent identities were informed and influenced through their roles in the children’s choir. Values, judgments and beliefs about teaching, and in particular music teaching appeared to develop alongside their choral leadership experiences. With regard to values, the student’s own strong musical backgrounds were influential where students felt a strong motivation to ‘pass on’ their love of music. Furthermore, many of the students saw their involvement as a way to reconnect with music as seen in the extracts below:

Throughout my childhood, I have been studying music in and out of school and it has always been something I’ve been interested in. However, since I started college, this involvement had slowly decreased, and I really did

miss music, especially being involved in choirs and singing. Therefore, once I heard of this project, I decided to give it a go. (B.Ed2, SS1)

One of the major reasons for partaking in the project was because I have really missed partaking in choir since starting college. I have been a member of a variety of choral groups since a very young age and therefore believe that choral singing is incredibly beneficial to students as well as being enjoyable. (B.Ed2, SS1)

The data also revealed that students were making critical judgments about the place of music in schools and in the curriculum, based on their experiences. As might be expected, they placed a high value on the place of choral music in children's lives but also on the beneficial aspects of its inclusion. One student, using his own built-up knowledge and experience, was enabled to critically reflect on a classroom teacher's approach to song-singing while observing on school placement:

I was looking at a choir in the last school placement and it was quite bad. The kids weren't singing, they all had sheets . . . They were kind of just told to sing along, and they [the teachers] hoped they'd pick it up but they weren't really taught. You know it wasn't broken down for them into sections or anything. (B.Ed2, FG2)

Here the student was able to identify what they perceive to be an ineffective method of teaching a choir but goes a step beyond this to suggest how they might approach it differently to effect a positive change. A primary concern here for the student is that the children are not actually singing which they blame on a poor approach to teaching. This demonstrates quite a sophisticated reflective response within an emerging student teacher identity.

Student beliefs about the kind of teacher they would like to become, the work involved and teaching approaches they aspire to were also significantly evident, signifying 'moments of becoming' (Ellsworth, 2005), shown in this example here:

I now know that singing does not just happen, a lot of preparatory work outside of choir time is also needed. I have gained much understanding in terms of what the children have taught me. All children in the class were really enthusiastic about the choir and had a really positive attitude about it and have given me an understanding of how music can be used to transform the classroom atmosphere. (B.Ed2, SS1)

Students also commented on the benefit of watching the choral director during the ‘big sing’ rehearsals and performances. They felt that these opportunities were very valuable for them in terms of observing how to control large groups of singers, choral direction techniques, pacing and style of teaching. One student commented:

I found the most beneficial thing of the whole thing was when we had all the children in. To watch you have command of a hundred and sixty children ... you know, they did it, they listened. That definitely opens your eyes, that it would give you the confidence that okay I can do it too. (B.Ed2, FG2)

The students also had interesting insights to make regarding teacher involvement in the initiative. It was noted that this support largely came in the form of active participation in the class singing, classroom management, as well as in some cases work completed on the songs between student visits. In other cases, some students noted that the teachers let them ‘get on with it’ while they completed other tasks. Where teacher involvement was strong, the students acknowledged the multiplier effect this had on the children, on their own leadership development, but also on the teacher’s own professional development. As one student commented, ‘I was fortunate, the teacher I was with was fantastic, he really got involved and you could see they’d been practicing it during the week when I wasn’t there. That makes such a huge difference’ (B.Ed2, FG3). The student here was clearly expanding their view beyond their own development to acknowledge ‘big picture’ issues for choral leadership in schools.

Performance opportunities

The performance aspect of the MIC Children’s Choir was deemed to be an essential component of the initiative by the students. The lead up to performance opportunities they claimed excited the children during choral workshops, focused their rehearsals and motivated the children to progress with their singing, as exemplified here:

The highlight of the semester was when all the children came into the college and sang with the other schools. It made me feel proud that they remembered all the words of the songs and were able to sing in rounds. It was rewarding to know that we as directors, taught them what they knew. (BA1, SS1)

Coming together as a large group with other schools appeared to heighten the performance experience for all involved as each school ‘played their part’ to contribute to one large sound. When on campus performing, the students all commented on the enjoyment and sense of pride felt by both them and the children. As well as this however, they also noted how such performances acted as a vehicle to raise awareness of the initiative amongst the wider college community. In this way, the scope of the impact of the initiative was broadened out on such occasions. The extracts below reflect this:

Even people in my year like were asking me what was going on, showing an interest in it, like I got a few people said to me next year they'd be interested in getting involved. (B.Ed1, FG1)

...there was huge reaction ... It's good for other students to see children in the college. (B.Ed2, FG2)

The students viewed different types of performance opportunities in different ways. For instance, the ‘Big Sing’ events where the children gathered in a large tiered communal area of the college were deemed a success and as highly enjoyable. Here, the children were placed on steps amongst staff and students who were passing by, having their lunch or taking a break to enjoy the singing. In this manner, these events were relatively casual yet the students commented on the value and multiple learning points for the children during these performances. However, not all performances were viewed in the same manner. In particular, a specially commissioned contemporary classical piece was perceived to be very difficult for the children and students believed that the children therefore did not enjoy it as much as more easily accessible repertoire. Teaching this piece for performance on stage was felt to be a huge pressure by the students due to the difficulty level of the music and lyrics, as well as the lack of familiarity with the genre. Despite this, some of the students also recognised the

advantage of the steep learning curve encountered in order for this piece to be performed.

One student explained:

It took a lot of work to try and make it accessible to them, and it was good from my point of view to be able to teach something that isn't immediately motivating in itself because that is part of teaching. You know everything that you teach isn't going to be loved by children, so from that point of view I thought it was good. (B.Ed2, FG2)

Overall, the repertoire chosen for the initiative was questioned by some of the students where they felt an inclusion of more popular songs was needed to be 'relevant' to the children's contexts:

The children loved to sing what they LIKED to sing. For example they loved singing the Christmas songs they knew. How about if we took the songs they know and love ALREADY and IMPROVE them? Like add harmonies, two-part, canons, dynamics, pulse (maybe body percussion?), etc. Furthermore, on the final week the children asked us if we could sing with them 'What Does The Fox Say' which is a current pop song. They were all really interested in this! Why not use these songs? (B.Ed2, SS1)

Whatever the opportunity however, it was significantly clear throughout the data findings that performing repertoire was all-important for both children and students. Thus, while the focus of the initiative was consistently on the choral workshop sessions themselves (both in school and in the college), the performance aspect of choral singing was repeatedly emphasised as a main priority amongst the student participants.

Access and educational opportunity

It was found that previously held student assumptions about the socio-economic and geographical school contexts they were working within were challenged through their participation in the project. Recognising their own stereotypes, one student claimed, 'Everyone had that sort of idea that it was going to be more difficult but it wasn't at all, it was just the same' (B.Ed2, FG1), while another stated, 'It proved to me that anybody can make and enjoy music regardless of their social or cultural background' (BA1, SS3).

With regard to access issues, it appeared the students developed an informed and acute sense of social justice – to both music but also to third level education. This is most interesting in light of the Nichols and Sullivan article (2016) discussed earlier. One of the stated goals of the project of course is to broaden access to a third level institution within the city and perhaps then unsurprisingly the students all referred to the benefits of having the children on campus:

The children really enjoy the Big Sings themselves and coming in, it's like a really exciting and daunting experience for them. Coming to college is really good, the link that they have with the college and the school as well, that they know they're always welcome in the college – I think that's really good for them. (B.Ed3, FG1)

The relationships built up between the children and the students appeared to facilitate this 'opening-up' to potential educational directions for the children. Of particular note is that all of the students noted the children's interest in what each of the students did at college, how one 'got in' and what happens within its walls. This was quite a revelation for the students as college life was an assumed future pathway for them growing up. On campus visits, the students all were overwhelmed by the increased curiosity from the children about third-level life, as revealed here:

It's lovely for the kids to see this side of life . . . one boy was asking me, 'what do I have to do to come to a place like this' and I was like 'study and try your best in school'. So it's lovely to see that as well, it does give them an incentive. (B.Ed3, FG2)

Students also recognised existing inequalities around access to private music tuition for certain children. Through their involvement with the choir, they were enabled to reflexively take stock of their own childhood opportunities, clearly connecting to Greene's notion of developing 'democratic imagination' (1995) here. Thus, students were enabled to make meaning from and ask ethical questions about societal 'gaps', norms and biases through their experiences. A student noted:

I have been extremely lucky throughout my life to get many diverse opportunities in music, and music has played a formative role in my life so far providing me with so many benefits. Therefore I really wanted to play a part in giving such musical opportunities to children who might otherwise not get the chance to experience the benefits and joys of music. (B.Ed2, SS1)

There was a dominant perception amongst the students of them taking on altruistic roles within the project, as seen above. This was perhaps due to the volunteering nature of the initiative or the fact that the choir is a targeted project for ‘disadvantaged’ school children. Some students went on to set up Christmas Charity Choirs within their own local communities during the research period perhaps also signaling a desire to ‘give back’. One student claimed:

Giving these children an opportunity to be a part of a choral group is a fabulous opportunity to them as some of them may not have this opportunity without this project. In addition to this I enjoy doing voluntary work as it makes me feel good as I am giving something back to the community. (B.Ed2, SS1)

Concluding thoughts

The MIC Children’s Choir represents a university ‘outreach’ initiative aimed at breaking down third level elitism, broadening student learning experiences, building leadership capacity and expanding access opportunities to disadvantaged communities in Limerick city. The research findings raise several pertinent issues with regard to student participation in university-community initiatives. The student perspectives explored reveal much about the assumptions and stereotypes held with regard to educational opportunity and disadvantaged communities, as well as how they were challenged through direct ‘field’ experience. Hence, there was evidence of considerable student reflection on musical opportunity and access within differing societal contexts. Allsup asserts, ‘Diversity is not understood as something I introduce to students. Diversity is encountered, and its problems unpacked, as we work within and across layers of difference and divergence’ (2016, p. 105). At their best, student

engagement with such projects facilitates meaning making through experience and reflection, which in turn shapes their musical and teacher identities. Caution is needed however when engaging with marginalised communities to remain ethical. At their worst, such projects can represent misguided ‘goodness’ and in fact serve to reinforce stereotypes rather than challenge them. Therefore, as music educators, Nichols and Sullivan (2016, p. 169) remind us, ‘In the face of such difficult encounters and conversations we must not allow ourselves to back down from continued, reflective action’.

Interestingly, the students saw their work with the choir as very distinct to their graded university school placements. This was no doubt due to the volunteering nature of the work but also the autonomy afforded them to experiment, take responsibility and be creative in the classroom. Learning skills and building confidence in such a hands-on and immersive way emerged as highly significant for the students. While these students were of course self-selecting in their involvement, such an approach to building musical leadership capacity within universities is worth further consideration in light of these findings. Despite being a voluntary activity, distinct from a graded placement, the students’ commitment, passion and learning was repeatedly evidenced throughout the project.

This article highlights the need for university-school-community initiatives to be a key feature of university life where learning is both practice and place-based, and crucially, reflective. Yob argues (2000, p. 76), ‘Transfer of learning from one situation to another is not automatic. It is something that must be deliberately planned and taught for’. The role of the university in facilitating ‘eye-opening’ learning experiences for students where they can connect to previous knowledge, actively participate, reflect critically, make meaning from their experiences and hence inform their emerging identities, cannot therefore be underestimated. Where relevant and possible, university-community initiatives should also strive to address access and social justice issues for marginalised groups within the

communities where they are situated. Such initiatives could potentially offer to revive what Maxine Greene (1995) calls ‘the democratic imagination’ amongst our students and wider college community thus expanding views on the what, where, why, who and how of (music) education.

Notes

1. Mary Immaculate College is a third-level College of Education and Liberal Arts, academically linked with the University of Limerick.
2. The choir is a partnership between the Department of Arts Education and Physical Education and the Transforming Education through Dialogue (TED) Project at MIC, with the Limerick Arts Office and previously Music Generation Limerick City (MGLC).
3. Schools in receipt of additional supports under the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) Action Plan for Educational Inclusion in Ireland. The action plan focuses on addressing and prioritising the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities.
4. Limerick city is the third-largest city in Ireland, situated in the mid-west.
5. The student volunteers were drawn from cohorts pursuing the Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Education in Education and Psychology, Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Care and Education.
6. B.Ed2 refers to a student in their second year on the Bachelor of Education degree course. All of the data was coded in this way.

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