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Inventing songs, inventing worlds: the 'genesis' of creative thought and activity in young children's lives

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This article draws on systems views of creativity and their application in music education, to argue that young children's independent invented song making evolves from their early musico-communicative interaction with others, is evidential of their capacity for 'elaboration', and is foundational in the development of creative thought and activity in music. The argument is explored through the analysis of data generated in a longitudinal study of young children's (aged four to six years) early music making as composers, song makers, and notators. Focusing specifically on children's invented song, the article provides case study analysis of the song making of a four-year-old girl that explores the musical and lyric content, and the environmental features (context) that support and shape her song making (process) and invented songs (product). The implications of such a view for early childhood theory and practice are discussed.

Introduction

Invented song is a common feature of young children's early musical engagement and life experience. The genesis of children's invented song, I suggest, may be traced to infants' earliest vocalized interactions with parents and carers where communicative and social intent are the primary focus. Such interactive dialogic vocalization between infant and caregiver has been described as communicative musicality (CM) (Malloch, 1999; Trevarthen & Malloch, 2000), where musical elements are drawn upon to shape mutually supportive communicative and caring acts. This phenomenon appears to be foundational to the development of infant identity (Trevarthen, 2002), and is implicated in the development of the arts in human thought and activity (Dissanayake, 2000, 2001). In exploring the role of early vocalization and song activity, researchers have examined infant-directed speech (IDS) or 'motherese', where it is argued that

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the blend of music and language elements supports the early acquisition of both speech and music (Papousek, 1996, p. 50). This early developmental communicative work (during the first 12 months of life) is further supported through the use of 'infant directed song' (Trehub, 2001, 2003a) that features a distinctive repertoire of songs with simple musical structures performed 'in an expressive and highly ritualised manner' (Trehub, 2003a, p. 671).

It is from these early interactive musico-communicative experiences (CM and IDS—speech and song) that children's invented song making emerges. Invented song is an individual and social musico-communicative phenomenon that is most pronounced in the musical behaviours of children aged approximately 18 months to 7 years, and has been the subject of a number of research studies that have sought to interrogate its role in young children's musical and singing development. Studies of children's invented song and chant suggest that children construct these songs by adopting and adapting the musical structures they encounter as singers and listeners (Moorhead & Pond, 1941/1978; Moog, 1976; Dowling, 1984; Davies, 1986, 1992; Bjørkvold, 1989; Davidson, 1994; Mang, 2005). The focus of much of this research has been to understand the nature and developmental trajectory of young children's musical thinking as song makers. In parallel work, children's vocalizations as reproducers of canonic song have informed our understanding of the nature and developmental trajectory of their vocal and singing development (Mang, 2001; Welch, 2000; Welch *et al.*, 1991, 1996, 1998; White *et al.*, 1996). Despite this focus on young children's song making, little research has built on this foundation to explore the 'what', 'how' and 'why' of young children's creativity in and through invented song. Given the near ubiquitous nature of invented song in young children's activity, the careful examination of this phenomenon holds potential as a site for the exploration of creative thought and activity in young children. This article draws on evidence generated from a longitudinal ethnographic study of young children's musical thinking as composers, song makers and notators to argue that children's invented song making is foundational in the development of creative thought and activity in music.

Children's invented song

Known variously as 'invented song', 'spontaneous song' and/or 'improvised song', generative song making as an individual as well as a dialogic communicative practice emerges as a component of children's musical and play activity at approximately 18 months of age and is sustained through to approximately the age of seven. The gradual disappearance (or submergence?) of invented song from children's music making as they enter formal schooling may be attributed to a range of factors including enculturation to a school and music environment that does not value or encourage such activity, and increasing exposure to educational singing practices that reify particular vocal models, styles of vocal presentation, and song materials. The focus of much music education practice on developing repertoire and skills that aim towards adult models of skilled musical practice tends to discount the playful and generative

qualities of invented song making. Despite the apparent transient nature of invented song, it has been reported as a feature of children's growth and development in cultures as diverse as Norway and Russia (Bjørkvold, 1989), the USA (e.g. Moorhead & Pond, 1941/1978; Dowling, 1984; Campbell, 1998), Sweden (e.g. Sundin, 1998), the UK (e.g. Davies, 1986, 1992; Davidson, 1994), Canada (e.g. Mang, 2005), Italy (e.g. Tarfuri & Villa, 2002), Germany (e.g. Moog, 1976), and Australia (Barrett, 2003). While I make no claims for universality, such widespread occurrence supports the notion that we are '"wired" for music from birth' (Trehub, 2003b, p. 3) and that music ability is distributed normally (Trehub, 2003c) and is not the preserve of the gifted few.

The study of invented song has led to attempts to: provide typologies of invented songs; describe the developmental trajectory of invented song; and describe the use and function of invented song in children's lives. In a seminal study of children's (18 months to 8 years) spontaneous music making in a play/care setting, Moorhead and Pond (1941/1978) observed that children's song making fell into two main categories, namely those of 'plainsong' and 'chant'. 'Plainsong' was observed to be an individual phenomenon where the 'voice wandered freely over a large compass, the singer sang to himself alone, quietly, of everyday things, as though the melody not the words were important' (1941/1978, p. 8). By contrast, 'chant' was most often performed in a group, where the voice 'clung to one note around which it wove a melodic pattern limited in scope and insistent in form … usually loudly, repeated over and over again, rising often to a high emotional pitch' (p. 8). These authors distinguish chant from 'fragmentary songs' and present an argument for chant as the 'most primitive musical art-form' and '*sui generis*, to be found amongst children, and amongst men in general. It is part of the living experience of primitive [*sic*] peoples everywhere …' (1941/1978, p. 9). The focus on chant in this study, specifically that conducted in association with 'physical activities of a rhythmic character', and 'composed by individuals playing within the group, by the group itself or as a sort of serial repartee by the group chanting successively as individuals' (1941/1978, p. 11) represents a curious dismissal of 'plainsong' as a valid form of young children's spontaneous music making. Whether it is the individual nature of 'plainsong', its focus on singing of everyday things, its wide-ranging melody, or its apparent lack of 'fit' to a conventional musical form that led Moorhead and Pond to downplay this rich musical material is subject to debate. As Sundin notes, the formula song or chant recognized by Moorhead and Pond and, in later work, Bjørkvold, 'becomes the dominant type in children's *groups*' (1998, p. 51; my emphasis). Less is known about children's *individual* song making, in particular that identified by Moorhead and Pond as 'plainsong'.

In a later study of young children's (aged two to four years) music making, three categories of invented (spontaneous) song were identified: imaginative; narrative; and pot-pourri (Moog, 1976). 'Imaginative' songs as described by Moog bear some resemblance to plainsong, where the child's focus appears to be the play of the melodic contour rather than the lyric content. In contrast, 'narrative' songs contain varied lyric and melodic content including nonsense words and phrases interspersed with fragments of known song. In an apparent reversal of this original/known weighting,

'pot-pourri' songs are described as combinations of known songs interspersed with original melodic and lyric material. Others have described young children's first individual invented songs as '*fluid/amorphous*' arising from babbling and vocal play, and characterised by glissandi, micro-intervals and free rhythms (Bjørkvold, 1989, p. 64). Whilst such songs emerge over the first year of life, as children develop, they draw increasingly on the musical forms of their culture to make '*standard songs*', where known songs are adapted and shaped to children's own purposes of play, expression, and communication. A third type of song identified by Bjørkvold, '*song formulas*' emphasizes children's use of musical formulas in communicative/play interactions with others, and is reminiscent of the 'chants' identified by Moorhead and Pond (1941/1978). Whilst there are subtle variations in these typologies of young children's invented songs, several common features are evident, including: a gradual focus on words as an organizing element; a move towards adapting musical conventions from known song material; and the use of 'chant' or 'song formulas' in musico-social interactions with others.

The meaning and purpose of children's invented song making may be linked to early language development, early singing development, and a need for expression of thought, feeling, and experience to self and/or others (Bjørkvold, 1989; Campbell, 1998). Through a 'systematic observation' of children's spontaneous singing and playing in three public kindergartens over a school year, Bjørkvold identified three principal ways in which children use song, including invented song. These include: analogical imitation in which invented song becomes a sound analogue of play, and is intrinsic to that play; symbolic representation in which invented song carries a signifying function of an intention to 'tease, report, call, command, ask, reply'; and background coloration in which known song accompanies play in a 'casual' sense (1989, pp. 68–72). For Bjørkvold, children's 'spontaneous singing' is a 'common code of child culture' essential to expression and human growth (1989, p. 63) that performs the functions of contact-creating, communicating, freeing imagination, broadening awareness, structuring play, socialization, moulding individual identity, and establishing cultural identity (1989, pp. 80–83). These functions resonate with the 'uses' of music for children identified by Campbell. Following analysis of children's (aged approximately 3–12 years) informal music making in settings such as playgrounds, school canteens, and buses, she argues that children 'use' music for a variety of purposes in their musical cultures. These include: emotional expression; aesthetic enjoyment; entertainment; communication; physical response; enforcement of conformity to social norms; validation of religious ritual; continuity and stability of culture; and integration of society (2002, pp. 61–64).

Analyses of the invented songs (products) of young children suggest that they draw on distinct strategies in creating their songs. The creative process inferences that can be made from these analyses include the repetition and/or re-working and elaboration of familiar material such as children's songs, rhymes, and songs from popular culture, and the generation of original material through spontaneous improvisation, repetition, and development in the performance of song (Davies, 1986, 1992; Barrett, 2003).

Young children's musical creativity

The study of musical creativity in young children has focused largely on children's spontaneous music making through song making and instrumental/sound play in naturalistic play settings. Moorhead and Pond's focus on the music *of* children in an ecologically valid study, rather than music *for* children, provides evidence of the diversity and complexity of children's generative activity in music in the early years, a view that has been supported by subsequent studies. However, whether such activity constitutes creativity has been subject to considerable debate revolving around diverse issues such as: definitions of creativity; the role of process versus product; the influence of individual components such as personality, psychological disposition, and/or cognitive style; the role of skills and knowledge; and environmental factors. A further factor that needs to be taken into consideration in any discussion of children's creativity is whether children's culture is viewed as distinctive, moderated and developed through children's agency, or as an adult-regulated precursor to adult culture. A view of children's culture as an 'emergent property' of their active engagement with their worlds (James *et al.*, 1998, pp. 90–96), suggests that children are active agents who internalize the structures of adult worlds, and reproduce these in novel, context-dependent ways (Corsaro, 2000) rather than passive consumers of adult-generated culture. This view holds important implications for children's creativity that I take up in the discussion below.

Confluence or systems views of creativity suggest that creativity is not attributable to any single factor: rather, it occurs when a number of components converge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1999; Ruscio *et al.*, 1998; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). Sternberg and Lubart suggest that creativity arises from the confluence of six components: intellectual abilities, domain knowledge, flexible thinking styles, personality, motivation, and a supportive and rewarding environment (1999, p. 11). These components have some resonance with those identified by Ruscio *et al.* (1998) who suggest that creativity occurs when the factors of intrinsic motivation in the task, domain-relevant skills, and creativity-relevant processes (including personality and cognitive style) converge. For Csikszentmihalyi, creativity arises when (1) intrapsychic processes (motivation, cognitive style, psychological dispositions) converge with (2) domain-specific factors (knowledge and skills in the standards and traditions of a style of music, for example), and (3) creative products are judged to be a novel variation selected by the field for inclusion in the domain (1999). In this view, creativity emerges from the interaction between individual, domain and field, and is the product '… of *social* systems making judgements about individuals' products' (1999, p. 314, emphasis added).

If we accept a view of children's culture that acknowledges their agency and active role in constructing culture, the 'social system' in children's creative endeavour in a domain (e.g. children's music making) includes experts in the field that supports and informs that domain. Writing specifically of the 'domain' of creativity research, Csikszentmihalyi and Rich argue that 'the *field* usually consists of teachers or graduate students who judge the products of children or other students' (1997, p. 47, original emphasis). When we are considering a practice such as invented song making, a

practice unique to children's musical culture, judgements of creative endeavour should be considered in the light of the domain of children's music making, and its attendant field. It is salutary to note the distinction between the ways in which children's original artistic endeavour in the visual arts and that in music is regarded. Whilst the former tends to be given status as child-made objects of art through careful public presentation (including reproduction in texts), children's original music making is rarely heard beyond children's communities of musical practice. Importantly, judgements of children's musical works tend to regard these as 'deficient attempts towards an adult-defined, largely Western high art concept of music' (Barrett, 2003, p. 200), i.e. against the adult musical domain. As I have argued elsewhere (Barrett, 2005), where children initiate, execute and 'control' a musical practice, the domain and field should be defined within the parameters of that musical practice, and its community of practice. This suggests that the study of children's creative endeavour works from views of creativity that acknowledge children's agency and culture, and examines those practices specific to children's culture, including invented song making.

The 'genesis' of creative thought and activity

Drawing on the work of Colwyn Trevarthen, Ellen Dissanayake argues that the 'preverbal rhythms and modes of infancy … that underlie our ability to engage intimately with others … facilitated the acquisition of human cultural life' (2000, p. 7). She proposes five psychosocial needs or propensities in humans, those of: mutuality, belonging to, finding and making meaning, competence through handling and making, and elaboration. It is this latter propensity—elaboration—that Dissanayake views as the foundation of the arts in human life, and, implicitly, creativity. Elaboration is not seen as separate to the needs of mutuality, belonging, making meaning and competence: rather, it arises from and is expressive of these needs. It is interesting to note the resonances between Dissanayake's five psychosocial needs, and the functions of invented song identified by Bjørkvold (1989, pp. 80–83). Dissanayake traces the origins of the arts through an account of the ways in which pre-modern societies use ritual and ceremony as an 'adaptive means for arousing interest, riveting joint attention, synchronising bodily rhythms and activities, conveying messages with conviction and memorability, and ultimately indoctrinating and reinforcing right attitudes and behaviour' (2000, p. 139). The features of ritual, and ceremony, those of interest, attention, communication, memory, and emotion, resemble early mother–infant engagements, drawing on structural devices such as 'repetition, accentuation, theme and variation, anticipation, surprise, and often … building to a climax' (2000, p. 142). In later work she describes these processes in mother–infant engagements as 'aesthetic incunabula', that is, '… sources (or early developmental stages) of the operations used by artists in all media to attract attention and to provoke and manipulate emotional response' (2001, p. 336). Dissanayake argues that the neural foundations established in infancy through mutuality 'that pattern and regulate emotional arousal' (2000, p. 143) underpin our later participation in ritual and ceremony and 'the arts'. In establishing this

argument, Dissanayake challenges prevailing views of art as symbol, to propose that '… the arts of chant, song, poetry, dance and dramatic performance emerged during human evolution as multi-media elaborations of rhythmic-modal capacities that … gave emotional meaning and purpose to biologically vital activities' (2000, p. 145). In such a view the arts are not symbol: rather, they *use* symbol (2000, p. 149) in emotionally meaningful activity. This suggests a view of creative endeavour as one that seeks to establish mutuality and belonging that aims to make and communicate meaning, that involves the development of competence in handling materials and ideas, and rests in the processes of elaboration.

For Dissanayake 'the improvised duets of mother–infant mutuality predispose us to perform in and respond to temporally organised rituals or group belonging and bondedness' (2000, p. 156). Whilst Dissanayake emphasizes the social nature of such participation I suggest that the features she identifies (mutuality, belonging to, finding and making meaning, competence, and elaboration) underlie children's *independent* development and use of invented song. Further, I suggest that children's creative thought and activity arise from early adult–infant interactions where the foundations for language, music, and emotional, social and cultural development are laid down. As children become increasingly independent, this early creative behaviour evolves into independent song making. Children's invented song making functions not only as a 'common code of childhood' (Bjørkvold, 1989) but also provides an avenue for developing generative processes and products in the domain of music. In the following I shall draw on case study data of a young child's independent song making to examine her creative thought and activity, and the processes and products, and environmental supports that foster these. The analysis of these data illuminates the ways in which elaboration in and through invented song making arises from and is expressive of the needs of mutuality, belonging, making meaning, and competence.

Methodological issues

The project from which these data are drawn was designed to examine the musical thought and activity of pre-literate kindergarten children (aged four to five years at study commencement) as composers, song makers and notators (Barrett, 2002, 1999). The research was designed as a longitudinal ethnographic case study (Stake, 1995) with data generated over a two-year period. In the first year, musical, notational, verbal and observational data were generated during weekly visits to two kindergartens (enrolments of 20 children, total 40). In year 2 these children were followed into their first year of formal school (preparatory grade) and data were generated in fortnightly visits to each site.[1] During the visits in year 1 I established a 'music corner' in the kindergartens that included a selection of classroom percussion instruments, paper, and texts. At the beginning of each school day, children were advised that working in the music corner was one of the daily programme options available (others included painting, water/equipment play, working with the teacher or aide in kinaesthetic, linguistic, and numeracy development). Consequently,

children initiated interactions with me, and it was they who determined the length of engagement. During these interactions children were asked to sing me known songs, invented songs, and to make up their own music using any of the available instruments. Children were also asked to 'find a way of putting their music down on paper' so that they could remember it, or another person would be able to play/sing it. This dual instruction was required as some children responded that they would recall the music without the need for notation. A number of children chose not to notate their work. This was particularly the case with song, both known and invented, with many children commenting that they couldn't notate as they didn't know their letters yet, or how to read. This phenomenon has emerged in other studies and appears to rest in a belief that the notation task in these instances is primarily a linguistic one (Barrett, 1999). All musical and verbal interactions were videotaped by a camera mounted on a tripod and focused on the 'music corner'.

In both sites children's musical experience involved daily singing of nursery rhymes, finger play songs, action songs, counting songs, and alphabet songs. Children had little access to instruments beyond those encountered in sessions with me, and focused listening occurred rarely. Both kindergartens adopted a programme that was academic in approach, citing the main goals as socialization, adjustment to the rules and structures of schooling, and the development of basic skills in literacy and numeracy. One site was located in a large (enrolment approximately 600) suburban primary school (K-6) in a mixed SES area, whilst the other was located in a large (enrolment approximately 675) semi-rural primary school (K-6) in a mixed SES area. Children in both sites were subject to the state Department of Education mandated Kindergarten Development Check, 'an early check for appropriate development' (Kindergarten Development Check—Individual) which tests a range of identified skills within the broad categories of: gross motor (13 sub-categories); manipulative and fine motor (six sub-categories); personal and social behaviour (11 sub-categories); listening, speaking and understanding (14 sub-categories); and cognitive development (12 sub-categories). In addition, end-of-year reporting addresses the key areas of: physical skills; English; mathematics; and social skills.

The data generation strategies described above were adhered to in the second year of the project. However, as the preparatory school day in both sites followed the teaching and learning schedules of primary schooling, daily optional programming was no longer a feature of these classrooms, with little access to 'play' experience. Consequently, I was asked to set up the music corner in an adjoining room, in a corridor, outside, or in the music room of the school (when vacant). These remote locations limited the degree to which children could choose to initiate music interactions, although they were still able to determine the length and nature of all interaction. In year 2 at both sites children participated in weekly music lessons (30 minutes) conducted by a specialist teacher in a separate music room. These lessons focused on: developing children's song repertoire and ensemble singing skills; introducing children to the names and symbols of solfege (rhythm and pitch); and developing rhythmic performance skills through action songs, echo work, and teacher-led instrumental accompaniment to known song.

Data generated included: video footage and transcriptions of children's musical processes and products as composers and song makers (known and invented); researcher transcriptions of children's music making; and children's notations of compositions and songs (known and invented). The generation and analysis of observational and verbal data in conjunction with musical and notational data have provided rich insight into children's musical thought and activity as composers, song makers, and notators.

Data presentation: Charli

Charli[2] was aged four years nine months when she initiated her first session with me (2 July). She had commenced school late in the year and had attended kindergarten for two weeks only (commencement of term 2) at the time of our first encounter. A single child in a single-parent family (mother), Charli was experiencing some difficulty settling into the kindergarten. This was reflected in her teacher's comment to me that she had 'difficulty making and maintaining friendships', a state of affairs that showed 'major improvement' by the beginning of term 3 (September). Whilst Charli did not undertake music instruction she reported singing with her mother 'every day'. This report was confirmed by her mother. In the first year of the study Charli initiated four sessions across a six-week period. In the second year of the study she initiated two sessions in the latter part of the year. For the purposes of this discussion I shall focus on Charli's invented song making as it occurred in year 1 of the project, and the accompanying dialogue and action (Charli's musical and notational output over the two-year period is mapped in Table 1. Invented song did not appear in year 2). Specifically, I shall examine the ways in which Charli's invented song-making may be seen as instances of her establishing mutuality and belonging, finding and making meaning, developing competence, and elaborating (Dissanayake, 2000).

Mutuality and belonging

In her first session Charli commenced by singing *Twinkle, twinkle little star* accompanied by small hand movements of twinkling stars. When I asked what other songs she knew Charli sat still, hands in her lap, watching me as she sang:

> If you know fairies are around you,
> You think they are around you,
> But when you look they aren't around,
> They're very little tricky fairies. (*Fairy song 1*)

When I asked could she sing the song again, Charli nodded and sang:

> Where are the little fairies?
> Here they are,
> They know now, they know me now,
> They don't flutter away now,
> 'cos they know me now. (*Fairy song 2*)

Table 1. Total musical and notational output (Charli)

Date	Type of activity	Notational event
Year 1, session 1, 2 July	Known songs: *Twinkle, twinkle*; *Baa baa black sheep*; *ABC song* Invented songs: *Fairy songs* × 6; *Outside songs* × 2	Pictorial notation of *Baa baa black sheep* (Happy face), *ABC song* Pictorial notation of *Fairy song* (1)
Year 1, session 2, 18 July	Invented songs: *Little fairies where are you?* Songs × 4 Instrumental work: pattern composition for triangle	Pictorial notation of *Little fairies where are you?* (1)
Year 1 session 3, 1 August	Invented songs: *Wizard songs* × 2; *Loud and quiet song* Instrumental work: maracas, triangle, guiro, cabasa, tone-block composition; loud and quiet music for cymbals and triangle duet (researcher)	Pictorial notation of *Loud and quiet song* (fairy) Exploration (scribble) notation of maracas, triangle, guiro, cabasa, tone-block composition (1); symbolic notations for loud and quiet cymbals and triangle duet (lines for loud, dots for quiet)
Year 1, session 4, 8 August	Known songs: *Baa baa black sheep*; *Bob the builder*; *Hey diddle, diddle* Invented songs: Dressing up as fairies song Instrumental work: triangle, cymbal, guiro 'music'; loud and quiet music with another child	Pictorial notation of *Fairy song* (fairy) Exploration (scribble) notation of triangle, cymbal, guiro music
Year 2, session 1, 6 September	Known songs: *Eency weency spider*; *Twinkle, twinkle, little star* (approximate performance on xylophone); *Arabella dressed in yella*; *Counting song*; *Little old cottage in the woods* Instrumental work: 'pattern' composition performed successively on drum, triangle, guiro	Notation of *Eency weency spider* including picture (spider), rhythmic solfege symbols, and arrows and faces depicting pitch direction Notation of *Twinkle, twinkle, little star* including picture (star) and rhythmic solfege names (e.g. Doh, Lah) Pictorial notation of *Little old cottage in the woods* (house, man and rabbit) Notation of pattern composition including repeating pattern of 'triangle, stick, square, diamond' and rhythmic solfege symbols
Year 2, session 2, 4 October	Known songs: *Magdalena, Hagalena*; *Found a peanut* Instrumental work: pattern composition for cabasa; pattern composition for claves	Pictorial notation of *Magdalena, Hagalena* Second notation of *Magdalena, Hagalena* including the words 'it nef stop' and picture (peanut) Linguistic notation of pattern composition for cabasa (eee, ppp, ddd, bbb) 'that is how it sounds like' Notation for pattern composition for claves including rhythmic solfege symbols and alternating pattern of 2 z crossed claves and 2 stars

I commented 'That was a little bit different wasn't it?' asking 'Do you have any other songs that you make up?' Charli responded by singing three verses of *If you're happy and you know it*, accompanied by actions (clapping hands, nodding head, and stomping feet). She then sang *Baa baa black sheep*, rendered confidently in full voice, this time sitting still and concentrating on me. Charli notated this song by drawing a 'happy person'. She explained 'The happy person tells me, I can tell every single song I know.' I asked Charli to sing some more songs and she responded with two songs about fairies:

> If you know how fairies feel
> They fly about when you-ou look,
> They don't look and then they trick you,
> They're tricky fairies. (*Fairy song 3*)

> If you know tricky fairies are always around you,
> You're like me how you feel,
> You're like me how you feel,
> Nine, nine, nineteen fairies count,
> You have fairy rings down for them,
> Then they come out again and kiss you. (*Fairy song 4*)

I asked Charli to notate the song. She drew a fairy, then sang the song again as I held up the notation, adding movements to her singing:

> Fairies always go along, when they fly [moves arms up and down as wings]
> They fly a lot, they fly a lot [moves from side to side, arms outstretched]
> They go side to side to side [sways with greater emphasis and arms lifted high]
> Here come the big butterflies [brings her hands to rest in her lap and focuses on her notation]
> Fairies and other little angels too [remains in this position for the rest of the song]
> And goblins, but they're good goblins
> You know how goblins feel, like no-ow. (*Fairy song 5*)

Charli immediately began singing another song:

> Fairies sometimes come along with you,
> With all other friends and the goblins,
> But the goblins are nice, goblins are nice,
> They're nice goblins,
> Goblins are ni-i-ice. (*Fairy song 6*)

Charli sang another song, echoing the rhythmic and melodic contour of a popular counting song:

> If you know how you feel,
> Number five,
> A-one, two, three, four, fi-i-ive [counts off fingers in both hands]
> You know me, you know me, you kno-ow me [sways head from side to side with the pulse]
> [indistinct], but I know you should go outside. (*Outside song 1*)

When I asked whether she could teach this song to me, Charli sang the following to an original melody:

> I know you should go outside,
> 'cos it's a lovely sunny day,

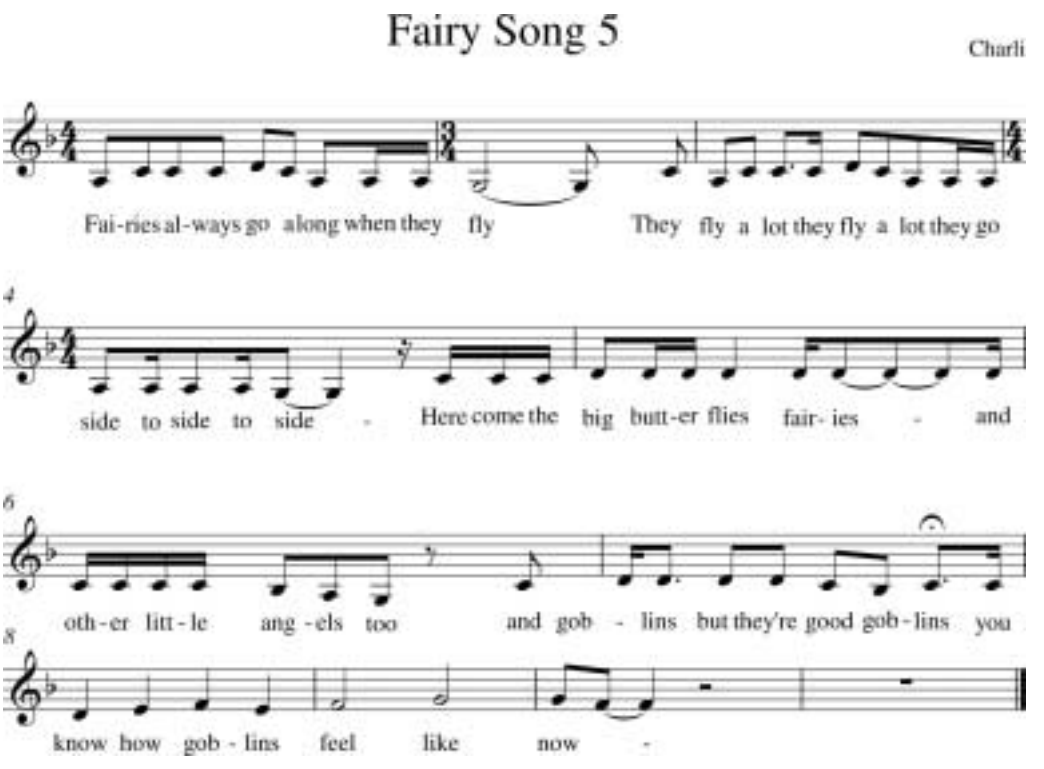

Figure 1. *Fairy song 5*

I'm meant to go outside and have play,
Go outside 'cos it's a sunny day. (*Outside song 2*)

Charli then sang me the *ABC song*, again confidently and accurately.

Over a period of approximately 25 minutes Charli sang six invented songs on the theme of fairies and goblins and two further invented songs on the theme of 'going outside' on a 'sunny day'. In the account above I have focused on the narrative content of these songs, and the accompanying actions and gestures. Although some songs were elicited as repetitions rather than new material, each song differed in its rhythmic and melodic content. Despite these differences, Charli's singing was rhythmic, all her songs were focused around a discernible tonal centre displaying a strong melodic intention, and each was structured into musical phrases that reflected the lyrics. When the lyric content of these songs is examined, Charli sings of deception and being tricked ('Tricky fairies'—*Fairy songs 1, 3, 4*), of being known ('They know me now'—*Fairy song 2*; 'You know me'—*Outside song 1*), and of knowing how others and 'self' feel ('If you know how fairies feel'—*Fairy song 3*; 'You're like me how you feel'—*Fairy song 4*; 'You know how goblins feel'—*Fairy song 5*; 'If you know how you feel'—*Outside song 1*). In this session Charli drew on her enjoyment of singing (evidenced in her 'happy face' notation for her songs), and her rich fantasy life to establish a sense of 'mutuality' and

'belonging to' with me. My evident interest in, valuing, and encouragement of Charli's invented songs provided a context for her to explore ideas, thoughts and feelings (musical and personal), and to engage in the processes of generation. Whilst I did not engage in an interactive musical dialogue, Charli drew on my interest and engagement to 'create and sustain affiliation' (Dissanayake, 2000, p. 57).

Finding and making meaning

Some two weeks later, Charli approached me whilst another child, Audra, was working with me. Charli played with the instruments, observed our interactions, occasionally commented on action, and drew some 'shapes' ('a square, circle, triangle-y one'). In this latter activity, she hummed continually. Gradually a group coalesced involving Charli, Audra, and two others (Lily and Mia) in the process of 'making up a band', an activity that continued for some five minutes culminating in a performance of *Baa baa black sheep* accompanied (very loudly) by tambourine drums, triangle, and maracas. As the group dispersed, leaving Charli and Mia playing with triangle and cymbals respectively, Charli handed me the sleigh bells instructing: 'Now youse gotta sing little fairies, little fairies, where are you. Copy me':

> Little fairy, little fairy where have you been?
> Little fairy, little fairy your dinner's ready
> We missed ya, we missed you 'cos you're
> Too [?] finding little good friends
> Why do ya think? Why do ya think?
> Li-ttle fai-a-ries
> Little fairy, little fairy, little fai-a-a-a-ries
> Little fai-a-a-a-ai, ai-ries. (*Little fairy song 1*)

Charli accompanied her singing with rapid strikes of the triangle, coordinating a final stroke with the last note of the rising final phrase. We were interrupted by a small group of boys chasing a 'very bad, runaway diesel'. After they had retrieved the toy, Charli announced 'I'm ready', changed Mia's cymbals for a cabasa, and began to sing another 'Little fairy' song. She stopped at the end of the first phrase, instructing me to 'tap' the sleigh bells, then sang:

> Little fairies, little fairies where have you been?
> Little fairies, you're sneaking, are you sneaking?
> You missed everything little fairies, you'll be late
> Little fairies, little fairies, little fai-a-ries
> You missed your dinner and you missed bre-eakfast
> Now you know, know the time,
> No-ow-ow-ow. (*Little fairy song 2*)

As Charli notated the song (at my request) Mia leaned over to watch her, and hummed fragments of the melody of the song, before packing up the instruments and moving to help the rest of the class pack up the room for morning tea. Charli's notation consisted of a drawing of a person ('to help me remember') with a rainbow. I asked Charli to sing the song again for me (see *Little fairy song 3* transcription[3]).

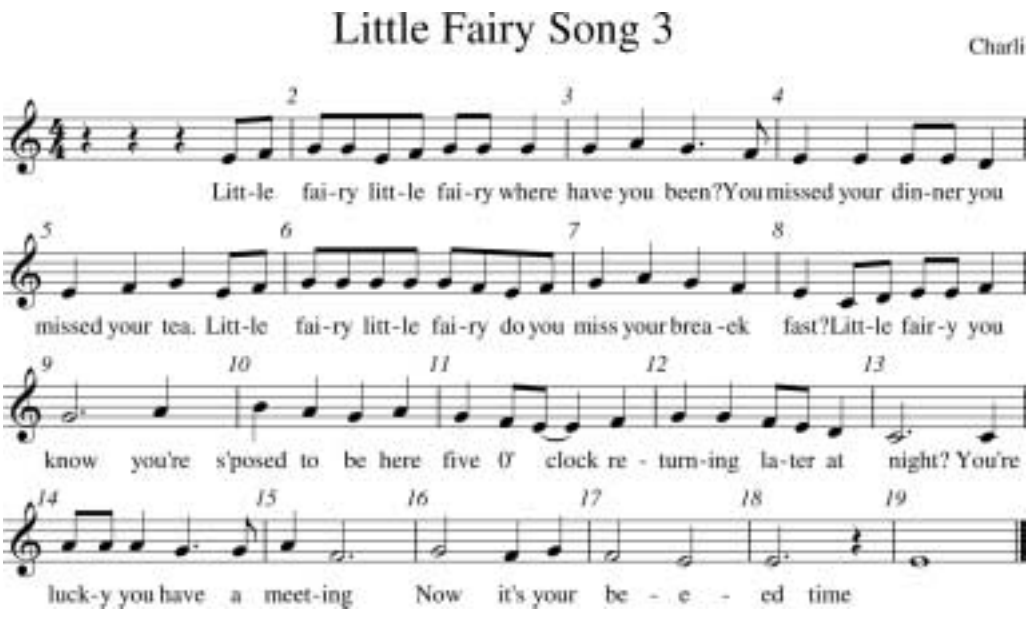

Figure 2. *Little fairy song 3*

Finally, at the end of the session Charli sang the song once more.

> Little fairy, little fairy where have you been?
> Little fairy, little fairy, you missed your breakfast
> And you was bad
> And you're lucky you haven't missed your tea,
> You are now, time for your bed. (*Little fairy song 4*)

When we examine the lyric content of these songs, Charli draws on her fantasy world of fairies to explore the consequences of actions. Throughout these songs, missing meals and being late are attributed to the fairies, who are then admonished 'you're s'posed to be here five o'clock' (*Little fairy song 3*), 'And you was bad' (*Little fairy song 4*). These 'scoldings' are countered with the more conciliatory 'we missed you' (*Little fairy song 1*) and 'Now you know, know the time' (*Little fairy song 2*). Charli uses the processes of invented song making as a means to find and make meaning of actions, to reflect on these and consider the ways in which these might be viewed by others. Musically, all four of the 'Little fairy' songs performed in session 2 commence with the same musical and lyric motif (see bars 1 and 2 of the transcription of *Little fairy song 3*), a motif that is repeated in all songs, providing thematic consistency. Another thematic element of this group of songs is the use of melisma, where a syllable is sung over a group of pitches rather than one syllable per pitch (see be-e-ed in bars 17 and 18 of the transcription of *Little fairy song 3*). These songs exhibit an increasing capacity to make musical meaning drawing on the forms and structures of known songs, including the use of regular phrasing, repetitive motives (both rhythmic and melodic), and melisma.

Developing competence in handling and making

Over the four sessions Charli displayed a growing competence in musical activity. She was confident in performing a repertoire of known song, displaying little difficulty in remembering words (the listing of characters in *Bob the builder* in session 4 being a rare exception), and in her capacity to generate invented song. Charli's vocal performance was rhythmically strong, with a clear sense of phrasing, and a confident use of voice. Whilst her capacity to stay in key in both known and invented song varied, she was able to maintain the melodic contour or general outline of song material.

Elaboration

In the third session Charli began by telling me she was singing 'different songs now … twinkle little star, and still a little bit of fairy songs, and the wizard songs'. When I asked her to sing a wizard song, she pulled the triangle from the instrument box, and handed me a double-ended tone-block saying 'you need to bang it … you need to make it soft though' (see Figure 3: Transcription of *The wizard song no. 1*). When I asked her to repeat the song, she sang another song (see Figure 4: Transcription of *The wizard song no. 2*).

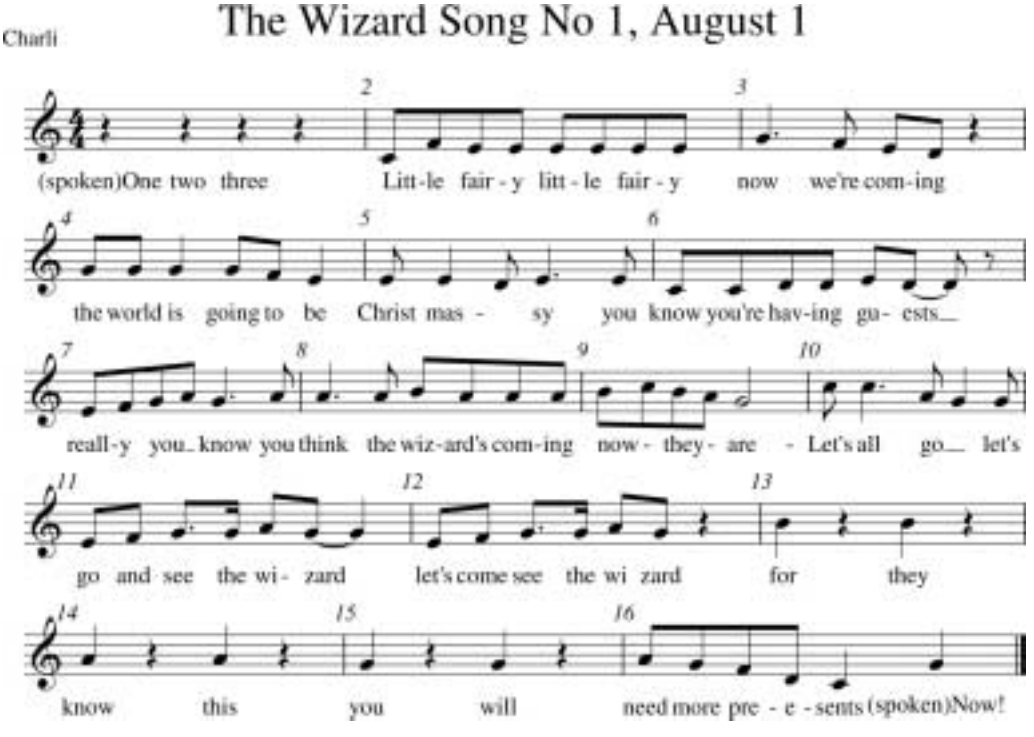

Figure 3. Transcription of *The wizard song no. 1*

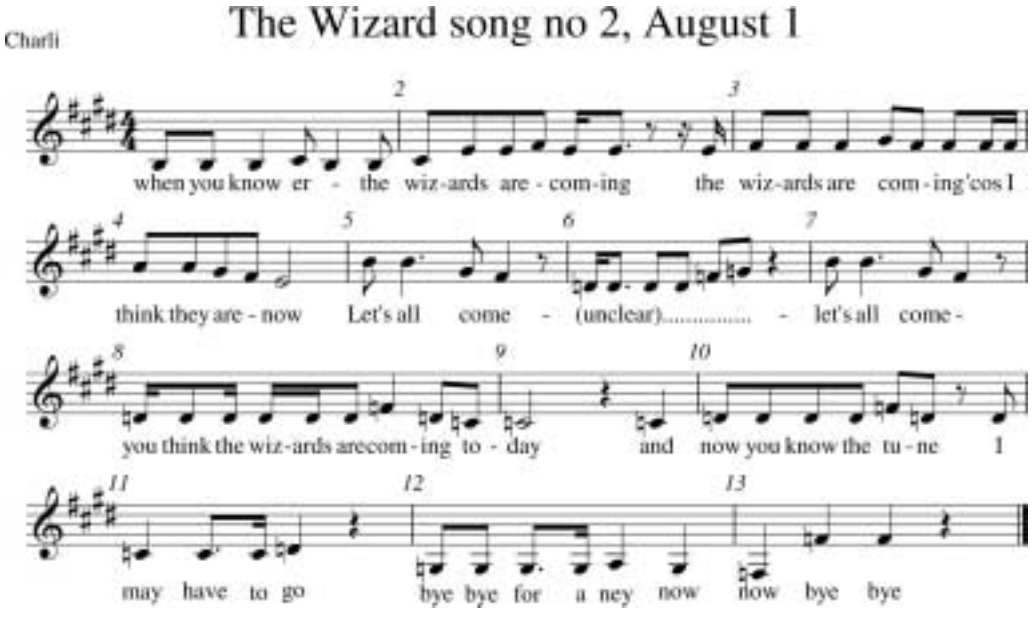

Figure 4. Transcription of *The wizard song no. 2*

Whilst these songs are different, there is considerable thematic unity within and between the songs. For example, the melodic patterning of bar 6 of *The wizard song no. 1* (repeated pitches and a falling tone on 'guests') is picked up in the opening bars of *The wizard song no. 2*, and echoed again in bars 2 and 3. In a similar fashion, the syncopated[4] rhythm on a falling melodic pattern in bar 10 of the first song ('Let's all go') is picked up in bar 5 of the second song ('Let's all come') and echoed in bar 7. These 'borrowings' between songs constitute a form of elaboration where ideas are drawn upon in successive iterations, and varied through their application in 'new' works.

In our discussion of these songs I commented that the second song was 'a little bit different' and asked: 'why do they keep on changing?'

Charli:	Well, because I use my imagination.
Margaret:	A-ha. So you want them to be different every time, do you?
Charli:	Yeah.

Charli then sang a third song (see Figure 5: Transcription of the *Loud and quiet song*), instructing me to play (the tone-block).

This song represents a departure from Charli's fantasy world of fairies, goblins, and wizards. It commences with a reference to her father's visits 'to take care of me', and moves quickly into a playful exploration of dynamic possibilities. Elaboration occurs through the processes of 'repetition, accentuation, theme and variation, anticipation, surprise, and often … building to a climax with eventual resolution'

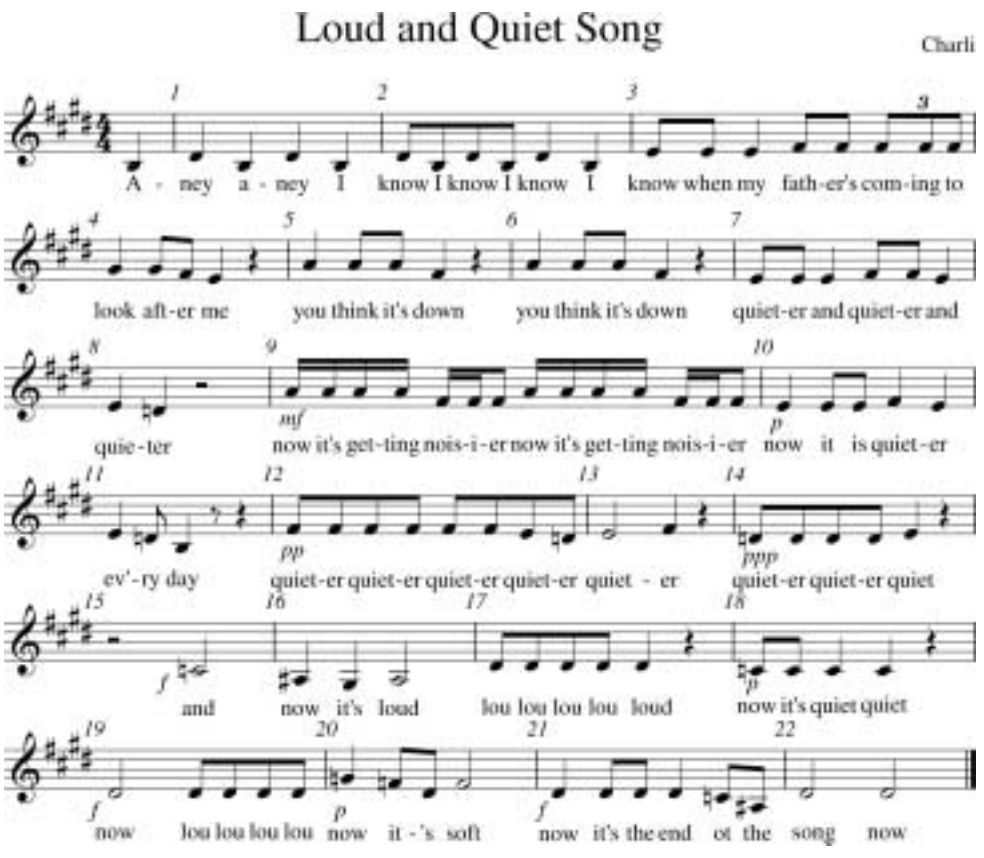

Figure 5. Transcription of the *Loud and quiet song*

(Dissanayake, 2000, p. 142). In this song, Charli establishes the dynamic levels of loud and quiet through repetition (see bars 5–11). However, not only does she alternate the dynamics in this section: she also elaborates on her original musical idea by taking the melodic shape of the quiet phrase (bars 5 and 6), and repeating this with a more complex rhythmic pattern (bar 9). Charli creates musical tension through her repetition of 'quieter, quieter, quieter …' (bars 12–14), before the musical surprise of a loud statement (bars 15–17). The rapid alternation of quiet, loud and 'soft' (bars 18–20) moves the song towards a strong (and loud) resolution. Her singing and playing (triangle) ranged from pianissimo to forte, and she ensured through her performance that I followed her dynamic lead. Her notation of this song consisted of a drawing of a fairy.

Whilst I have focused on the ways in which elaboration is evidenced in Charli's *Loud and quiet song*, the features of elaboration are clearly evident in her other invented songs. Similarly, whilst the emphasis in the discussion and analysis of the songs generated in session 3 has focused on finding and making meaning, and elaboration, these musical interactions were rich in deepening mutuality and belongingness for both Charli and me.

The improvisatory nature of young children's invented song is often discounted as evidence of an inability to 'fix' a musical idea, and a sign of musical immaturity. In contrast to this notion, I suggest 'fixing' a musical idea through exact repetition is of little interest to children, and not the focus of their music making in invented song. Whilst adults might value exact repetition as indicative of musical 'knowing', I suggest that for children their focus in invented song making is one of elaboration, of using this practice to explore ideas and possibilities. This is evidenced in Charli's awareness of the changing nature of her songs, and her desire for 'them to be different every time'. Charli's invented songs are successive elaborations on a theme and, I suggest, constitute an early instance of creativity. Further, this creative work provides a means for Charli to make meaning of her experience of the world, to control and organize her world, and to communicate this understanding to self and others. When we consider invented song making in this light there are a number of implications for early childhood practice and music education.

Teaching and learning implications for young children

Advocated music practice in early childhood settings tends to focus on group music making such as ensemble performance of nursery rhymes and songs, finger-plays, action songs, alphabet and counting songs, and associated structured movement and instrumental play that emphasizes beat and rhythm. There are many positive reasons for undertaking such practices including: repertoire development; vocal practice; ensemble performance skills development; social development; language development; concept development (high/low, numbers, letters of the alphabet); and gross and fine-motor development. It is instructive that those reasons cited above are extra-musical, that is, music is viewed as a vehicle for the development of other areas. Further, the aspects of music development that are supported through these practices tend to be those that enculturate the child into the conventions of adult music making, specifically those of music performance. Little opportunity for music generation, for viewing music as a creative rather than a re-creative practice, exists.

Through this article I have sought to demonstrate how children's engagement in the generation and performance of invented song provides fertile ground for the development of generative and creative dispositions and the modes of thought and activity that lead to 'elaboration'. I suggest that the key characteristics of elaboration, those of 'repetition, accentuation, theme and variation, anticipation, surprise, building to a climax and resolution', may be developed through careful attention to and valuing of invented song as it occurs in children's individual and joint music making. It is evident from the analysis of Charli's invented song processes and products that these play an important role in building cultural, social, and emotional capital in her life. To profit from this early creative work, it is crucial that children's musical agency as song makers and the unique processes and practices of children's communities of musical practice are valued, celebrated, and fostered in early childhood settings.

Notes

1. In Tasmania kindergartens are attached to schools.
2. Pseudonyms have been used.
3. Owing to a high level of ambient noise in the classroom, instrumental parts have not been transcribed.
4. Syncopation refers to the device of shifting the accent to a weak beat of the bar, evidenced here by the accent on 'go', which falls on the second half of the second beat of the bar.

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