

***TRANSMISSION, REPLICATION AND  
TRANSFORMATION  
IN MUSIC EDUCATION***

***case studies of practice in an  
Irish primary school context***

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the  
University of London Institute of Education

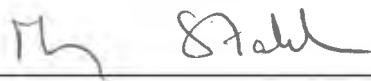
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# **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that, except where explicit attribution is made, the work presented in this thesis is entirely my own.

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## ***ABSTRACT***

This study investigates how generalist primary teachers conceive of music, how they make sense of a prescribed music curriculum and how they teach it in the course of their professional practice in an institutional setting.

Following an overview of the study in chapter one, the literature review is presented. Chapter two describes the framing of music education in the Irish primary school context. In chapter three, factors influencing teacher practice are identified as official policy, the ethos of the school and teacher beliefs. In addition, and taking a multi-faceted view of knowledge, the relationship between formative experiences and practice is examined. It is argued that teacher knowledge cannot be separated from the context in which it is learned and used. A synthesis of key points is presented in chapter four.

The design and methodology are outlined in chapter five. A qualitative approach was adopted where interview and observation methods were used to gain access to the orientation to practice and to the curriculum emphasis of five respondents. Data from the fieldwork were organised into categories from which, in the case of each respondent, an interpretative account of their practice was compiled and is presented in chapter six. Analysis of the data is presented in chapter seven. In the case of the five primary teachers, the study has confirmed that, whilst there are commonalities among the respondents regarding transmission of aspects of performance and music literacy, there are differences too. It is suggested that differences in teacher practice can be defined in terms of the values teachers attribute to music in their own lives and in the lives of their pupils. In chapter eight, conclusions and implications for further research are presented. Significantly, the study has provided a framework for research on practice in which commonalities and differences may be examined.

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## ***Background to the study***

### **1.1 Introduction**

One of the distinguishing features of the formal educational setting in a centralised system is that knowledge tends to be presented in a top-down situation in the form of a standardised syllabus. In the Irish setting, such a practice has been in place since the inception of the national system of education in 1831. Originally intended to promote literacy and numeracy, the national system of education has, in respect of music, arguably continued with the presentation of musical knowledge as music literacy and performance. In addition, evaluations on aspects of practice have been based largely within the parameters of the prescribed primary curriculum. Examples of the most recent evaluations carried out were those conducted by the Conference of Convent Primary Schools in Ireland (1975), the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) (1976) and the Department of Education (1983). Although the studies differed in some respects, in each case, questions on teacher attitudes were framed within the parameters of the content of the

prescribed curriculum, namely song singing and vocal technique, ear training and creative work with an emphasis on those aspects which were most easily measurable.

Within this centralised framing of knowledge, study outcomes suggested that there were areas of teaching music in which the teachers were less than confident. For example in the INTO (1976) study, half of those who responded felt that they were dissatisfied with their own performance in teaching music as prescribed in the curriculum with over three quarters of those who responded in the Conference of Convent Primary Schools (1975) study describing music as a specialist subject, and one which required teachers with special ability. In this study too, nearly one third of those who were surveyed responded that they had most difficulty with the area of the curriculum termed 'creative work'. Indeed the problematic nature of creative work in music curriculum led subsequently the Department of Education (1983) to omit it from their study altogether, deeming it impracticable.

The limitations of the effectiveness of such studies are central to the present research, most notably because they are based on a dependence on an implementation literature which, as noted by Clandinin (1986, p.14) viewed teachers as 'facilitators of curriculum developers' intentions'. This study sets out to challenge such a position. Set in the context of the contemporary Irish primary school system, the focus of the present study is on how generalist primary teachers conceive music, how they make sense of the music curriculum as set out in the official documents and how they teach it in the course of their practice. Little has been done to reveal how generalist teachers conceptualise their subject matter both within and outside the frame of the curriculum as prescribed. Unless the fundamental issues of teacher confidence in music are addressed, it is unlikely that any curriculum can be implemented any more successfully than previous versions.

For example, the latest version of the curriculum (DES 1999a; DES 1999b) has been described as largely the same as the one which it replaced (1971) with changes in curriculum emphasis rather than in curriculum content. Where formerly there were categories of song singing and vocal technique, ear training and creative work, in this revised curriculum there are three strands, composing, performing and listening/responding. These categories are taken from other curricula where, as put forward in the writings of, *inter alia* Swanwick, (1994), Elliott (1995) and Green (2001), it is believed that there are three main ways in which we engage directly with music; playing (to include singing), composition (to include improvising) and listening (to include

hearing). What was formerly termed 'creative work' has been subsumed into the strand of 'composing'. In addition, it continues to be official policy that all generalist teachers take responsibility for the teaching of music. Therefore, it would appear that, although the evaluations indicate that practitioners had regularly expressed concerns or difficulties in aspects of their practice, these concerns have not been taken into consideration in the latest revision to the curriculum.

In the wider context of research on teaching, the limitations of studies on practice where the conceptions of knowledge are defined at a macro level were noted by Clark and Yinger (1979). They suggested that such studies tended to focus on the curriculum as prescribed, with little account of teacher knowledge as held and understood by the participant teachers themselves. Ball and Goodson (1985, p.12) noted that underpinning the description of the teacher's role in terms of implementation of a prescribed curriculum lay an implication that teachers were seen as generic, as a homogenous group, sharing common practice and interchangeable. Clandinin and Connelly (1995, p.10) argued that in studies which portrayed the funnelling of knowledge into schools at a macro level via policy statements to the micro level of the classroom, a view of theory was assumed which was abstract in two important respects. Firstly, that there were:

'...few, if any links between the abstract statements of policy and research coming from the conduit and the phenomenological world to which they refer. There are no people, events or things – only words cut off from their origins'.

Secondly, they held that practice was abstract insofar as the research conclusions, the policy statements and so on were divorced from their narrative, historical contexts.

'This strips away the historical meaning that situates the knowledge claims in the conditions and context of inquiry and in the subjectivity associated with human presence in inquiry' (op cit. p.11).

An alternative view is explored in this thesis, one which considers that variations in implementing principles and practices are inevitable when a subject (in this case music) is enacted at the micro level of the classroom. Where other studies carried out by statutory or professional bodies have tended to focus on the extent to which official policy is carried out in a centralised system, the present study focuses on the relationship between teachers and music

within the centralised system. Where the curriculum is prescribed and introduced as official policy, the problem is not, as argued by Goodson (1990, p.305) ‘the *fact* of the focus on prescription, but the *singular* nature of that focus and the *kind* of focus’ (italics in original). In describing the prescribed curriculum as an ‘objectives game’ (op cit. p.299), he was critical of the manner in which it allowed for dispassionately defining the main ingredients of the course of study and then proceeding to teach the various segments in turn. In contrast, following Goodson, the present study takes the view that a curriculum area is not simply a course of study. Like Jorgensen, (2001, p.345) it contests the notion of curriculum particularly as it is understood in the light of the mandated curriculum. It argues, like Woods (1984, p.260) that a curriculum area ‘...is a vibrant, human process lived out in the rough and tumble, give and take, joys and despairs, plots and counter plots of a teacher’s life’ and not simply a body of knowledge or a set of skills.

## **1.2 Focus of the study**

### **1.2.1 Drawing on previous literatures**

The present study aims to counter the tendency to view teachers as a homogenous group with shared aims, values, abilities and aptitudes which is a characteristic of official policy documents. Following Goodson (1990), the aim has not been to develop a model of idealised practice but to understand more clearly why music teachers do what they do, where this understanding is located within a further exploration of the parameters of practice, by ensuring that the teacher perspective is framed in a social and historical context. The nature of the relationship between music education and the teacher perspective is one which has not been examined in an Irish context. Despite the level of dissatisfaction identified by teacher respondents in the Irish evaluation studies, the origins of their professional difficulties remain unexplored. What is also absent from the studies has been an opportunity for teachers to describe their practice, using their

own conceptions of the subject matter and not those defined at a macro level by the official policy makers.

The present study differs from previous research on teacher knowledge in a number of respects. Early studies included in reviews on teacher knowledge have tended to be descriptive and to fall within Gage's (1963, p.97) definition of research on teaching as 'research in which at least one variable consists of a behaviour or characteristic of teachers'. While the studies within this definition dealt explicitly with some behaviour or characteristic of teachers, such research tended to include descriptions of teacher behaviour as that of a skilled manager, one who 'effectively manages the learning of his or her charges' (reported in Yinger 1986, p.273), or of the teacher as a clinical information processor (Shulman and Elstein 1975), as well as the use of metaphors such as planner (Yinger, 1979) and decision-maker (Shavelson 1973, p.144) applied to research on interactive teaching (as reviewed in Yinger 1986, p.264). These studies had limitations because they focused almost exclusively on observable behaviour. By so doing, they tended to attribute differences in teacher behaviour to the cognitive processes observed by the researchers, without including the teachers' accounts of their thought processes. It could be argued that, while actions are observable, teacher thought processes occur inside teachers' heads and consequently are unobservable.

In their review, Shavelson and Stern, (1981, p.456) while noting the predominance of descriptive studies and the focus on the teacher and those teaching activities, pre-active, interactive and evaluative that pertain to classroom instruction, observed that a common trait in such studies was the relationship between teacher intentions and classroom behaviour. In identifying such a relationship, they argued that understanding how thoughts get carried into actions should be central to understanding teaching (op cit. p.457). This was highlighted by Clark and Yinger (1979) in their review of research on teacher thinking. They noted that

'[i]f the research is to be put into practice, we must know more about how teachers exercise judgment, make decisions, define appropriateness and express their thoughts in their actions' (op cit. p.279-280).

Gage (1978) argued that researching how the thoughts get carried into actions necessitated articulating the teachers' implicit theories so as to make explicit and visible the frames of reference through which individual teachers perceive and process information. From there, connections between the teacher's beliefs and classroom behaviours could be investigated,

including the ways in which behaviour accorded with belief and the extent to which the behaviour departed from the teacher's previously explicit convictions. Gage concluded that in this way, 'teachers and research workers could collaborate toward a conception of teaching based in detail on which teachers themselves know and believe about their work' (op cit. p. 81).

In light of this, the study has focused on providing a framework within which these implicit theories may be made explicit. It has adopted a qualitative approach, with an emphasis on focusing in particular on what Hammersley (1999, p.2) described as 'exploring the perspectives of the people involved rather than rushing to judgments about them and what they are doing'. Following Clandinin and Connelly (1992) it is proposed that teachers do not transmit, implement or teach a curriculum and its objectives. Rather, the teacher is seen as 'an integral part of the curricular process and in which teachers, learners, subject matter and milieu are in dynamic interaction' (op cit. p.392). Such a view offers an alternative to studies which presume a common practice bias.

A key characteristic of the study is that it is set within a context, in which the cultural environment of the teacher is seen as playing an important role. As such, it counters macro level studies such as those undertaken in respect of the Irish setting (identified above) which focused on teacher practice in the abstract. Unlike those studies which tended to disregard or minimize the influence of the idiosyncratic setting, the particular classroom, and the educational milieu, the present study considers these to be important and acknowledges the need for insight into the multiple conditions of knowledge in music education.

It is suggested that the classroom is not sealed off from what happens in the rest of the school and relatively uninfluenced by 'outside' effects. Instead, it is argued that what happens outside the classroom has effects that can be located and recognised in what happens inside. In addition, whereas other studies have been based on knowledge as defined at official policy level, the present study has taken the position that the knowledge on which teachers draw is not confined to the contents of a prescribed curriculum but includes the teachers' own experiences with music. As the study will show, these are likely to have a bearing on how they make sense of and translate the prescribed curriculum in music.

A theoretical framework derives from the literature review that is presented in chapters two, three and four. Using document analysis, chapter two examines prescribed curricula in the Irish



context and presents an introduction to the framing of Irish primary music education. It is argued that there is, at an official policy level, an assumption of homogeneity in teacher practice regarding the selection and organization of musical knowledge with an emphasis on music literacy and performance. It is suggested that, in recent studies in the Irish primary school context, there is evidence of tension arising from teachers' experiences of the prescribed curriculum. In spite of such signs of tension among teachers, little has been done to redress the situation or to investigate the causes of such tension. The chapter concludes by highlighting the need to carry out research on teacher practice outside the parameters of the prescribed curriculum, noting that studies which are based on conceptions of knowledge limited to those set out in the prescribed curriculum offer only a partial account of the realities of the classroom or the factors which influence teacher practice.

In chapter three, a review of research on teacher knowledge is presented. This starts with the view that, within a centralised system and working within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum, there is a variety of factors which may be said to influence teacher practice. Such factors include official policy, the ethos of the school and beliefs and principles held by teachers. Evidence of constraints on practice within a centralised system is noted in a range of subject areas including science (Lakin and Wellington, 1994) and music (Kyriakides, 1997: Yuen-Fun Ng and Morris, 1998).

Other studies considered relevant to the thesis are those in which the focus has been on conceptions of subject matter knowledge which were not limited to those set down in a prescribed curriculum and these are reviewed. These include the studies undertaken in subject areas such as mathematics (Lerman, 1990: Lunn, 2002), science (Lantz and Kass, 1987) and music (Bresler, 1998, Kelly, 1998). In these studies, a number of factors were identified which were found to contribute to the conceptions of knowledge held by teachers and to differences in their practice. Among the most prominent were the formative experiences of teachers (Butt, 1984: Butt and Raymond, 1987: Woods, 1987: Goodson, 1992: Goodson and Sikes, 2001 and Kelchtermans, 1993) and the diversity of ways in which the teacher perspective in teacher knowledge research has been defined (Clark and Yinger, 1979: Clandinin & Connelly, 1986) as well as on the values held by the teachers (Gudmundsdottir, 1990), and the context or the educational milieu (Elbaz, 1983) in which the practice occurred.

In chapter four, a synthesis of the key points from the literature review is presented and those conceptual and methodological issues are highlighted which are of relevance in the present study. It is argued that musical knowledge cannot be separated from the context in which it is learned and used. Attention is given to the relationship between teacher and music education, where the teacher is 'person in a situation' and 'originator of knowledge' and where music education occurs in both informal and formal settings.

### ***1.2.2 Outline and phasing of the field- based and field- related studies***

The study design and methodology are outlined in chapter five. The fieldwork has been undertaken with generalist teachers working in Irish primary schools. A key consideration has been to achieve a balance between the detailed study of one particular context where, as claimed by Delamont and Hamilton (1986, p.36) it is 'still possible to clarify relationships, pinpoint critical processes and identify common phenomena,' and adapting the maximum variation approach, defined as 'serial selection' by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 234) where each additional teacher has been chosen because they represent a new or somewhat different dimension. The focus has been on a group of practitioners (generalist teachers) in an institutional setting (the Irish primary school).

In order to understand contextual variation, five teachers have been chosen from a selection of schools with due regard to geographical locality, gender, single-sex and mixed- sex schools. The size of school and number of teachers on the staff have also been noted. The five generalist teachers -Ray, Ultan, Norma, Fiona and Patricia- worked in settings ranging from inner city to rural. Denomination was Roman Catholic but within this there were schools which had historically been run by religious orders and others run by secular or lay people. Fiona and Patricia taught in convent schools, with mixed- sex at the junior cycle and single- sex (girls only) from 3<sup>rd</sup> class to 6<sup>th</sup> class (age 8-12). Ultan and Ray taught in mixed-sex schools, traditionally not affiliated to any particular religious group. Norma taught in a boys' school, originally run by Christian Brothers, although no member of the order was represented on the staff at the time of the investigation. Of the five schools, four schools had entry at age five, but Norma's school had entry at around the age of seven.

Each site has been considered to be both idiosyncratic and representative of the system at a broader level. Inasmuch as each teacher works within the parameters of the system, using the same prescribed curriculum, it is likely that there are commonalities. At the same time, because the schools are located in different areas and each teacher has their own idea of what counts as music, it is likely that there are differences in their enactment of the curriculum. It is the extent to which there are commonalities and differences that is of particular interest in the study.

The study has been grounded in an awareness that research on teaching is considered to have a common sense obviousness, an observation made by Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1976) and acknowledged by Hammersley (1999). He suggested that, to capture what actually goes on in learning situations, it is necessary to include those directly involved, 'to use first-hand observation and/or in-depth interviews' (op cit p.1). Therefore the emphasis has been on people who would want to talk about their practice and who would agree to have a 'typical' lesson observed. The inclusion of classroom observation served as a means of establishing a connection between an espoused theory and a theory-in-use. As observed by Argyris (1999, p.131), 'people consistently act inconsistently, unaware of the contradiction between the espoused theory and their theory-in-use, between the way they think they are acting and the way they really act'.

For the purposes of the present study, case study has allowed the researcher to describe and interpret some of the complexities of the teacher's everyday practice and to come to know the context and location within which the explicit discursive elements and statements occurred. Case study is considered an appropriate means of confronting and portraying what is actually happening in schools and classrooms at a level of some detail and to ensure that the research remains close to educational practice at a micro level. In addition, the case study approach has allowed for attention to the idiosyncratic as well as to elements that might be pervasive. Denscombe (1998, p.31) noted that the focus in a case study approach is on 'relationships and processes'. Case study researchers, according to Stake (1994, p.239) are oriented to 'complexities connecting ordinary practice in natural habitats to the abstractions and concerns of diverse academic disciplines'.

In this study, the term ‘teacher perspective’ has been used in two respects, namely,

- teacher perspective on the prescribed curriculum and the extent to which the conception of music held by the teacher relates to that promoted at official level and
- teacher perspective on their practice and the extent to which the values they promote are a reflection of their own experiences in music.

In the case of each respondent, there are two research questions related to the teacher perspective.

What is the nature of their professional activity in music?

What contributes to their individual orientation to practice?

The study has drawn on the method of semi-structured interview on three occasions, twice in phase one and once in phase two (see Figure 1.1).

<b>Fieldwork</b>		
<b>Pilot study</b>	<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>Phase 2</b>
	Phase 1a) Interview 1 5 cases	Phase 2a) Creating narrative
	Phase 1b) Observation and interview 2	Phase 2b) Reflecting on narrative in an iterative process with the relevant literatures and discussion with tutors and colleagues
		Phase 2c) Interview 3 re. participants' views of their narratives

**Figure 1.1** OUTLINE OF THE FIELD BASED AND FIELD RELATED STUDY

The purpose in the first interview has been to build a profile of each teacher, which has included the adaptation of a 'subjective educational theory' (Kelchtermans (1993, p.450) or the establishment of an espoused theory. To achieve this, in the case of each teacher, the first interview - semi-structured - drew on a body of literature on teacher knowledge which emphasised a biographical perspective. Three topics were addressed as follows:

a) Conceptions of music in education

The purpose of this has been to ask the teacher for their views on music and so to gain an understanding of the conception of the subject matter espoused by them. It was expected that the manner in which each respondent conceptualised the subject would be informed by the context in which they operated, as well as on their perspective on the role of music in education, in schools generally and in particular the school in which their professional activity occurred. Information about the school has been provided by them and has included such facets such as its place in the musical life of the community together with the place of music in the school.

b) Formative and informative influences on the growth of musical knowledge

In the case of each of the respondents, educational background in musical experience has been noted and has included early experiences in music, at home, in school, in the community. This included pre-service teacher education. In making the distinction between formal and informal music experiences, the terminology is similar to that used in Green (2001, p.16) and described in chapter three.

c) Perspective on the official curriculum

Because the respondents worked within a centralised system, their perspective on the official curriculum has been considered important. This has also provided, in the case of each respondent, a context for the establishment of a relationship between an espoused theory and a theory in-use.

In phase one, following the first interview (Phase 1a), there followed observation of a music lesson (Phase 1b) which the teachers were free to organise in whatever manner they saw fit. The emphasis was on the 'typical lesson' within which the researcher has taken the role of a participant observer. It was anticipated that the lesson would become the starting point for the second interview, and not an end in itself. Each informant was told in advance of the lesson that

the focus of a second interview would be on aspects which the informant wished to emphasise. Consequently, the second interview was driven largely by the lesson as described by the informant, with the researcher acting as witness. The purpose here has been to give voice to the teachers, and to gain insight into the meanings held by the teachers about their work, to gain access to their 'implicit theories'.

Drawing on the literature on implicit theories, espoused theory and theory-in-use, reflection-on-action and personal practical knowledge, the emphasis in the second interview - post-observation - has been, in the case of each respondent, on the establishment of the orientation to practice and on the curriculum emphasis. In addition, it has served as a means of checking aspects of the first interview (Phase 1a) with each respondent and has also allowed for clarification and expansion of themes when appropriate.

### **1.2.3 Organisation of data**

Subsequent to the fieldwork in Phase 1, and using headings drawn from the literature review, the data from the two interviews and observation were organised into categories and subcategories as follows:

Formative experiences

In-school      primary, secondary and third level  
Out-of-school   home, community

Orientation to practice

The selection and organisation of musical knowledge  
Teacher values, both cultural and personal

From these categories, in the case of each informant an interpretative account has been compiled (Phase 2a). Following Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.164) the participants were involved in creating 'annals and chronicles as a way to scaffold their oral histories' with due regard to Goodson's (1997, p.116) caution against the 'practice of presenting individual and practical stories in the abstract without disempowering those we are trying to empower'. Adapting a

biographical perspective, the focus has been on the teachers' perspectives with an emphasis 'not so much on the facts but on the meaning they have for the respondents' (Kelchtermans 1993, p.444). This included the context in which the teacher worked, thereby situating the respondents in the 'social and historical context' described by Goodson (1997) and the 'milieu of teaching' outlined by Elbaz (1983). In their recommendation that, in the educational context, biography was ideally suited to make educational sense of thought, actions, feelings, attitudes and experiences, Butt and Raymond (1987, p.63) emphasised that it was not simply the chronological record of tapes and field notes of events in people's lives but a 'deliberate critical procedure' where the events are inferred from the transcribed record and where this record is testimony to the inferred events and interpretations construed from the events.

This 'deliberate critical procedure' has been followed in phase two which embraced several redraftings of the participants' narratives in an iterative process with the literature reviews. Subsequently, each participant was sent a draft for comment and validation (Phase 2b). Then a further face-to-face discussion took place to ensure that each informant had an opportunity to offer comment, clarification and factual correction (Phase 2c).

The interpretative accounts are presented in chapter six. They are organised as teacher stories where the purpose has been threefold:

- i) to summarise the interview and observation data in the form of a story which is set in a context, both historical and social;
- ii) to offer an account of the five informants which includes in each case, their formative experiences, orientation to practice and curriculum emphasis and;
- iii) to facilitate discussion on commonalities and differences in teacher practice with particular reference to comparison of aspects of practice at an inter-informant level.

#### *1.2.4 Analysis of data*

Analysis of the data is presented in chapter seven with conclusions and implications presented in chapter eight. In the analysis, key themes from the literature review are revisited. These are the relationship between the respondents and the prescribed curriculum and the relationship between their orientation to practice and their formative experiences. In the case of these five Irish primary teachers, the study has confirmed that, while there are commonalities in practice, there are differences too. Reading across both objective regularity and subjective realities, and drawing on Bourdieu (1990), it is shown that the differences in teacher practice can be accounted for by attending to those values and dispositions gained by the respondents from their cultural history which tend to stay with them across contexts. This includes the context in which the knowledge is formed, i.e. the biographical context and the context in which the knowledge is enacted, i.e. the classroom context. It is noted that the values and dispositions which were experienced in the biographical context by the respondents as positive have tended to be replicated by them in their classroom practice while those values and dispositions which were experienced in the biographical context by the respondents as negative tend to be discarded and replaced by those which they experienced as positive.

#### *1.2.5 Conclusions and implications*

In the concluding chapter, it is suggested that, even within a centralised system and a prescribed curriculum such as that pertaining in the Irish primary school context, the teachers in this study have constructed and interpreted their practice in different ways. These differences can be defined in terms of their understanding of what counts as music and the values they attribute to music in their own lives and the lives of their pupils. It is noted that the study is not about teachers in isolation from the society in which they work. Rather, it is suggested that, drawing from Bourdieu (1990), practice is always informed by a sense of agency (the ability to understand and control one's own actions) but that the possibilities of agency must be understood and contextualised in terms of its relation to the objective structures of a culture.



### **1.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the background to the study has been presented. The research question has been stated and an outline of the field-based and field-related study has been given. In addition, the way in which the data has been treated in terms of organisation and analysis has been outlined.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

# ***The selection and organisation of musical knowledge in an institutional setting***

### **2.1 Introduction**

The way in which knowledge in the music curriculum has been defined and transmitted in Irish primary schools since the origin of the national system of education is the focus of this chapter. It is shown how priority has been given to putting templates in place to establish and maintain a particular conception of teacher knowledge, one which was standardised and defined at a macro level. It is noted that this was achieved by the presentation of prescribed practices in the form of standardised syllabuses with, in the case of music, an emphasis on music literacy and performance. Against this background, recent revisions to the curriculum are explored. It is shown that, while the emphasis on music literacy and performance has changed and a broader conception of music is presented - at least in theory - there is little evidence to suggest that this is taken into account in appraisal of practice. It is argued that the conception of knowledge as music literacy and performance prevails in research on practice and has resulted in assumptions implicit therein, namely that music educators in Irish primary school contexts are perceived as members of a homogenous community, sharing a common practice. It is suggested that, in order to investigate the extent to which

there is a relationship between policy as set out in the official curriculum, and practice as enacted on the ground, this assumption of a common practice must be contested.

## ***2.2 Precursors to a centralised system***

A national system of education was set up across the whole of the island of Ireland in 1831. At this time in Ireland, there were two distinctly different types of schooling. These were 'hedge schools' and schools run by Christian Societies. As the name might suggest, the hedge school referred to the practice of keeping a school in some remote spot, such as 'the sunny side of a hedge or bank' (Dowling, 1968, p.35). There are conflicting accounts of the practice of teachers in hedge schools.<sup>1</sup> The Select Committee (1837, 14<sup>th</sup> July) described the hedge school as 'almost the lowest grade of school' with other sources (such as Coolahan (1981, p.21)) noting that the hedge school was based on a system of individual instruction whereby the master (predominantly male) worked with individual pupils in sequence.

In contrast to the hedge schools, the schools provided by Societies were of a collective nature, where common aims were presumed to be shared by teachers, namely to provide a uniform standard of religious education.<sup>2</sup> Of particular significance too was the monitorial system,<sup>3</sup> promoted by Joseph Lancaster in England and which tended to be based on those practices of teaching capable of being imitated with relative ease. Within this system, one teacher, the expert, modelled the prescribed practice and was observed by other less

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<sup>1</sup> For a colourful account of the hedge schoolmaster at work, see Dowling (1968, pp.45-54).

<sup>2</sup> Arguably the most popular one, the Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Ireland - more commonly known as the Kildare Place Society - published widely and incorporated the ideas of educationalists such as Bell, Lancaster and Pestalozzi into the methods and curriculum of the schools. In her account of the workings of the Society, Parkes (1984, p.20) related that Lancaster was present at the opening meeting of the Kildare Place Society on December 11<sup>th</sup> 1811.

<sup>3</sup> Parkes (1984, p.20) suggested that the monitorial system had a popular appeal in the early nineteenth century. 'In the absence of a state system of elementary education, economy was of great importance to the voluntary education societies dependent on subscriptions from members. The monitorial system of Lancaster and Bell was cheap and efficient for as the number of monitors increased the cost of each pupil decreased. One schoolmaster could teach up to a thousand boys. Moreover, the system encouraged orderliness, discipline and cleanliness, the necessary virtues of the nineteenth century poor'.

experienced practitioners, the novices. These novices later imitated the practices they observed.

## **2.3 Selection and organisation of musical knowledge**

In this section, an outline is presented of the selection and organisation of music as a school subject within the national system of education. A chronological approach is taken, with due attention given to the significant developments as they are considered to relate to the present study. In respect of the 1840s to 1900, such developments may be summarised as the establishment and implementation of a standardised curriculum, together with the prominence of vocal performance and the development of music literacy, and for the period 1900-1970s the dominance of tonic sol-fa and the provision of graded material for the acquisition of music literacy, with a concomitant reliance on methods of appraisal which were easily quantifiable.

In respect of the 1970s, two factors emerged which are shown to have contributed further to significant changes in policy. These are identified as the emphasis on child centred education and a move away from a curriculum which was wholly prescriptive towards one which afforded the teacher a degree of latitude in interpretation. These two factors continued to have prominence in recent changes to the selection and organisation of music (as presented in the 1999 curriculum). In addition to these, in the recent changes to the presentation of music in official documents, it is argued that the notion of music education has moved from an absolutist perspective to a relativist perspective and this is discussed in the later part of the section.

### **2.3.1 1840s – 1900**

In bringing together the disparate elements of schooling and education that existed in Ireland at that time, the Commissioners of national education set about establishing and implementing a standardised curriculum which included the provision of textbooks. In the case of music, programmes of instruction were introduced which centred on song and sol-fa. Durcan (1972, p.105) noted that the Commissioners wanted 'vocal music taught in every national school as they consider the study of music in any form is a refining and intellectual pursuit and is calculated to have a cheery influence on school life generally.' From the beginning then, the promotion of performance was fostered at an official policy level. Attaching great importance to the cultivation of vocal music as a branch of general education, the Commissioners adapted the ideals of Hullah<sup>4</sup> (1841) whose manuals of instruction and textbooks formed the basis of the curriculum. The Hullah method was based

'upon a careful analysis of the theory and practice of vocal music, from which the arrangement of the lesson results and which ascend from lessons of the simplest character, on matters adapted to the comprehension of a child, through a series of steps, until those subjects, which it might otherwise be difficult to understand, are introduced in a natural and logical order, so as to appear as simple and easy as the earliest steps of the method' (op cit.(ii)).

It was thought necessary for the teacher to follow closely the order of the lessons in the manual, but Hullah (op cit. (iii)) suggested that a certain amount of freedom was allowable within each lesson. Evidence that the strategies recommended by Hullah met with the approval of the Commissioners can be found in reports such as the 14<sup>th</sup> report (1847, p.53) which recorded that

'vocal music, on Hullah's plan continues to be successfully taught...it is an attractive branch of instruction: it infuses animation into the ordinary business of the schools and cannot fail, we think, under judicious management to produce beneficent results'.

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<sup>4</sup> Rainbow (1967, p. 123) described how John Hullah had adapted Wilhem's *Manuel Musical* for use in England. Strategies included the notion of fixed sol-fa, 'the musical hand' for pointing melodies and the hand signs by means of which tones and semitones were respectively indicated by opening and closing the fist when singing the scale. (See also footnote 7).

Materials for use in the transmission of Hullah's practices were sanctioned by the Commissioners and sold to the national schools at reduced prices. In 1854<sup>5</sup>, the list of books included the following:

[Item]	<i>s.d.</i>
Hullah's Manual of Wilhem's Vocal Music	2 6
Songs for Schools (two parts), each	0 3
Sets of 8 Large sheets, No.[sic] to	3 0
Exercises (two parts), each	0 4
Slate, ruled for Music	0 1
Tuning Fork	1 3

Within a framework such as that set down by the Commissioners, a practice was set in place whereby a conception of a subject, (in this case, music), would become determined at a macro level and the curriculum emphasis would be defined, not by those working on the ground but by official agencies, in a top-down situation. The expectation was that the contents of the prescribed curriculum would be implemented at a micro level by the teachers. In the case of music, the emphasis in the curriculum was on a progressive and graded syllabus featuring vocal performance and music literacy. This persisted and was supplemented by some attention to local initiatives at the end of the nineteenth century when the revival movement attempted to include Irish language songs as a means of promoting the Irish language.<sup>6</sup>

The net effect of this was that, while changes may have occurred in respect of some aspects of the contents, as for example the case of the words of songs, those teaching methods which were advocated initially remained largely the same, and the emphasis in music education continued to be on music literacy and performance.

### **2.3.2 1900 – 1970s**

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<sup>5</sup> In the appendix to the 21<sup>st</sup> report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland [1854], p.107: Appendix A. IV. Books and Free Stock Lists: No. 2. List of Books not Published, but Sanctioned, by the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, and Sold to Irish National Schools at the Reduced Prices affixed.

That the practice of focusing on a progressive and graded syllabus featuring singing and music literacy persisted into the twentieth century is evidenced in the report of the Commissioners of National Education (1900 appendix F) and reflected in the content of the music syllabus in the Revised Programme published in the same report. Ryng (2002, p.148) described how inspector Goodman convinced the National Board of the importance of the sol-fa system and advised that vocal music should be introduced in infant classes, rather than in senior classes, as was previously the case. He was critical too of the song repertoire available in the Hullah system and published two books himself, The school and home song book (c. 1886) and The Catholic hymn-book (c. 1886) in which all the songs were presented in sol-fa.

The Revised Programme of 1900 laid out the programme in music from first to sixth standard. The programme provided for the tonic sol-fa or the staff notation methods of instruction as follows:

#### ***First Standard***

*Tonic Sol-fa:* To sing from the teacher's pointing on the modulator the tones of the chord of *doh* in an easy order. To sing sweetly, in unison, any three approved school songs.

*Staff notation:* To sing sweetly, in unison, any three approved school songs.

#### ***Second Standard***

*Tonic Sol-fa:* to sing from the teacher's pointing on the modulator the tones of the chord of *doh* in any order. To sing any six previously prepared exercises with time and tune combined on the first step of the method. To sing sweetly, in unison, any four approved school songs.

*Staff notation:* to sing from the teacher's pointing on a blank staff, the tones of the chord of *doh* in any order. To sol-fa any six previously prepared exercises of a very elementary character, with tune and time combined. To sing sweetly, in unison, any four approved school songs.

#### ***Third Standard***

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<sup>6</sup> This is explained in greater detail in the author's (2004) essay 'A song to sweeten Ireland's wrong: music education and the Celtic revival' which is attached as an appendix to the present study, (cf p.239f).

*Tonic Sol-fa:* To sing from the teacher's pointing on the modulator the tones of the chords of *doh* and *soh* in any easy order. To sing any six previously prepared exercises with time and tune combined on the second step of the method. To sing sweetly in unison, any six approved school songs.

*Staff notation:* To sing from the teacher's pointing on a blank staff, the tones of the chords of *doh* and *soh* in any easy order. To sol-fa any six previously prepared exercises with tune and time combined on the second step of the method. To sing sweetly in unison, any six approved school songs.

#### ***Fourth Standard***

*Tonic Sol-fa:* To sing from the teacher's pointing on the modulator simple passages in the major diatonic scale. To sing any six previously prepared exercises with time and tune combined, on the third step of the method. To sing sweetly, in unison, any eight approved school songs.

*Staff notation:* To sing from the teacher's pointing on a blank staff, simple passages in the major diatonic scale. To sol-fa any six previously prepared exercises of a simple character, containing all the tones of the major diatonic scale. To sing sweetly, in unison, any eight approved school songs.

#### ***Fifth Standard***

*Tonic Sol-fa:* To sing from the teacher's pointing on the modulator, simple passages, including transition to first sharp or flat keys: also simple passages in the minor mode. To sing any six previously prepared exercises with time and tune combined, containing transitions of one remove. To sing from notes, in two or more parts, any three approved school songs.

*Staff notation:* To sing from the teacher's pointing on a blank staff, simple passages in the keys of G, D, F, or Bb; also simple passages in the minor mode. To sing any six previously prepared exercises with time and tune combined, in the keys of G, D, F or Bb. To sing from notes, in two or more parts, any three approved school songs.

#### ***Sixth Standard***

*Tonic Sol-fa:* to sol-fa from the teacher's pointing on a blank staff, simple diatonic passages in any key. To sing any six previously prepared exercises of a simple character in staff notation – each exercise to be in a different key. To sing for notes in either tonic sol-fa or staff notation, and in two or more parts, any three approved school songs.

*Staff Notation:* to sing from the teacher's pointing on a blank staff, diatonic passages in any key. To sol-fa any six previously prepared exercise of a fairly advanced character – each exercise to be in a different key. To sing from notes, in two or more parts, any three approved school songs.

In addition, there was evidence of other influences in music development during this period, as observed by McCarthy (1999). 'Firstly, because of the language revival movement, music's role in education was shaped by state language policy' (op cit. p.109). A key figure



in this regard was Fr. Corcoran of University College Dublin. Described as a zealot for language for language revival and an active educational policy-maker, Fr. Corcoran was a consultant in the planning of the national programme of primary instruction that came into operation in 1922. He advocated two forms of vocal music in general education: Irish traditional singing and plainsong. Largely arising from this, the dominance of songs in the Irish language was evident in this period. McCarthy (ibid) identifies a second factor as the emphasis of plainchant and the use of music as a means of promoting a Catholic ethos in the school. Liturgical festivals in many provincial centres were founded at this time.

As can be seen from the above outline, music education has been presented in the syllabus as predominantly a means of learning to sing using tonic sol-fa and where the skill of reading simple notation can be developed. These features, introduced to the system *via* the adaptation of the Hullah method, continued to dominate the prescribed content to the extent that music became synonymous with graded and standardised practices. The emphasis remained largely unchanged in the subsequent versions of the curriculum, introduced in 1922 and in 1934. In 1922, at a national programme conference, it was decided that the emphasis on music literacy and vocal performance would be retained in the music syllabus, as evidenced in the 1922 programme of instruction. The programme for the younger classes included voice training and singing, and developing the ability to read simple exercises from a modulator, from hand signs and from a blackboard.

In 1934, a revised programme of primary instruction was introduced (Department of Education 1934) which stated that children leaving national school should have memorised accurately as many songs as possible (words and music), and should have cultivated the habit of listening carefully and intelligently to music. In addition it was desirable that they would have acquired the power and, more especially, the desire to take part in choral music. Publications by the Department of Education appeared (such as those for the Infant school (Department of Education 1951) and music appreciation (Department of Education 1953)) which offered teachers support in realising the aims of the programme.

Thus it can be seen that, from its inception in Ireland in the 1840s, music education became synonymous with practices that were prescribed at an official level and that were expected to be implemented by teachers on the ground. Emphasis was on those practices which were quantifiable and which focused on the acquisition of skills in music literacy. Song singing and notation were central. Kelly (1978) reported that the limitations of such a system were noted by the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO), the organisation representing primary teachers in Ireland. In their plan for education (INTO 1947), it was felt that the

school music programme had too much emphasis on vocal music and that the promotion of good choral music was the primary objective of the course. They proposed a broader view, one which was child centred and inclusive of music appreciation and instrumental music tuition, and at the same time one which would prepare teachers for life in the community by cultivating music for its own sake. The proposal was not acted upon however and, although the teaching body had objected to the narrow focus of the music programme, the situation remained virtually unchanged.

In 1954, the Council of Education in Ireland reported on the function of the primary school and the curriculum to be pursued up to the age of twelve. In this report, (Department of Education 1954) music in schools was once again defined as sol-fa and song singing. This continued to be the case until 1967 when the Primary Certificate was abolished and the way was made for the introduction of the 1971 curriculum. The 1971 curriculum aimed at developing

‘the children’s powers of perception and performance ...by providing them with the most up-to-date musical skills and by enlarging their musical experience in every way possible, through song singing, music making and listening or moving to music’ (op cit. p. 211).

In addition, the music syllabus in the 1971 curriculum was intended to play a part in reviving a tradition which had been deemed to have diminished over the centuries. The syllabus was organised in categories as follows: song-singing, vocal technique, ear training, notation, creative activity and integration.

### Song singing

It was considered ‘very desirable that the child should have an ever-increasing repertoire of good songs (art and folk) both of his own country and of the world’ (op cit. p.212). Examples included playsongs, worksongs such as milking songs, dandling songs, spinning songs and lullabies. These were considered ideal because they shared some common characteristics, such as strong and definite rhythmic frameworks and repetitive words. Along with these, it was suggested that the child could learn some children’s songs of other countries, children’s songs by the great composers, suitable local songs and ballads, and later on the well known traditional songs in Irish and English where range and content permitted.

### Vocal technique

Teachers were encouraged to aim for the 'development of good clear tone and distinct articulation, whether the voice is used in song or in speech' (ibid). In addition, the consideration should be given to the 'cultivation of pure vowel sounds and crisp consonants, the use of the head voice, the development of breath control and the extension of the vocal range' (ibid).

### Ear training

In ear training a 'reasonable degree of music literacy' (ibid) was sought, 'i.e. the ability to interpret and to read the symbols in which the music is written' (ibid). It was noted that the basis of success in ear training was purposeful training in listening, where the child 'should learn *how* to listen and *what* to listen for' (ibid).

### Notation

It was considered highly desirable to establish the use of staff notation throughout the primary school. The combining of sol-fa pitch names with staff notation from first class onwards was considered an effective means of achieving this aim.

### Creative activity

It was expected that the children would experience the joy of composing rhythmic and melodic phrases, of discovering simple harmonies, and of devising their own percussion accompaniment to songs, or to instrumental or recorded music.

### Integration

Music was considered to appeal to the noblest emotions of the child, where 'it can help him to extend his personal experiences, to transcend geographical and historical barriers and to identify himself with the highest aspirations of humanity' (op cit.p.215).

In summary, like its predecessors in 1900, 1922 and 1934, the 1971 curriculum (Department of Education 1971) laid out the musical content in a progressive and sequential manner. Recurrent themes are basic literacy, collective activity and vocal music (music with a text) that moved from being primarily religious in the nineteenth century to being more nationalistic in flavour at the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition, the 1971 curriculum introduced more explicit pedagogical content. Similarities can be found in the inclusion of sol-fa and the predominance of vocal performance. In doing this, it also emphasised (as had its predecessors) the importance of song singing as a means of achieving musical and general literacy.

### ***2.3.3 Recent changes in curriculum: music education and current policy***

In recent years, there is evidence that an alternative view of teacher knowledge implicit in the 1999 curriculum (DES, 1999a: DES, 1999b) has moved from one which is controlled at a macro level towards one defined at a micro level of the classroom. This may be seen not least in the latitude afforded teachers in defining parameters of practice, including 'participating in listening, singing, playing and improvising activities' (DES, 1999b, p.29) and implementing an arts education programme which is 'life enhancing and invaluable in stimulating creative thinking and in promoting capability and adaptability' (ibid).

Reports which have been influential in bringing about changes include the report of the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (NCCA 1990) and the report of the Primary Education Review Body (Government of Ireland 1990). Between them, they represented the views of teachers, parents, management authorities, inspectors and representatives of the main educational bodies. The Review Body (NCCA 1990, p.97) stated that the curriculum 'requires revision and reformulation in its aims, scope and contents, in the manner in which it is implemented and in the way pupil progress is assessed and recorded and the way the overall effectiveness of the system is evaluated'. This report led to the establishment by the government of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) primary committee in 1991 which was charged with a continuing review of the 1971 curriculum while retaining the basic principles.

Within this climate of curriculum reform in Ireland, there have been moves for less centralisation, including a call from the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), for less centralisation and for the need to include the idiosyncratic nature of practice at the micro level of the classroom. In calling for a broader view, one which was relevant and realistic, the INTO (1996, foreword) argued that the curriculum

'can never be viewed simply as a list of subjects to be taught and learnt in the classroom [but is also] a dynamic evolving process that it influenced by teachers' expanding professional knowledge, skills and expertise [as well as] by experience in school, the realities of the classroom, the demands of society and in particular parents and pupils'.

Against this backdrop, the 1999 curriculum (DES, 1999a; DES, 1999b) was compiled. In the 1999 curriculum (DES, 1999a), the content has been organised in two broad areas as follows:

- a) concept development and
- b) strands.

a) Concept development describes the musical concepts that the child should develop. It is anticipated that, as the child engages in musical activity, through engaging with the musical elements, these concepts are developed. The musical elements are defined as pulse, duration, tempo, pitch, dynamics, structure, timbre, texture and style.

b) There are three strands, namely *Composing*, *Listening and Responding* and *Performing*. Each of the strands is described in discrete units and 'offer teachers a sequenced comprehensive programme on which to base the teaching and learning of music in the classroom' (DES 1999a, p.8).

In the *Listening and Responding* strand, listening is described as listening *for*, which is active rather than listening *to*, which is considered passive in the document. A combination of live and recorded music is recommended and the child is encouraged to respond in gesture, movement, speech, written or graphic forms. Listening emphasises the importance of purposeful, active listening in order to elicit physical, verbal, emotional and cognitive responses.

The *Performing* strand involves song singing and playing instruments as a means of developing musical understanding. In promoting song singing, performing dwells on the importance of using the voice, in both familiar and unfamiliar songs. Included too is the development of music literacy. The playing of instruments provides opportunities for children to demonstrate their growing confidence and understanding in making music using a variety of music sources, including tuned and untuned percussion instruments. It is anticipated that the pupils will be able to perform by sight at the end of the programme.

The *Composing* strand involves improvisation, creation, discussion and recording of compositions. This includes graphic, invented, simplified or standard notation, in addition to

electronic recording. It aims to develop the child's creativity and uniqueness and suggestions concerning evaluation of this appear in the section 'talking about and recording compositions'.

### **2.3.4 Summary**

In this section, the selection and organisation of music as a subject has been outlined, showing the way musical knowledge has been presented in official policy documents since the inception of the national system of education in Ireland in 1831. It can be seen that the selection and organisation of music as a subject originated with the importation of the Hullah method, with its emphasis on the performance of vocal music and the development of music literacy. In addition, it has been noted that other changes in emphasis were introduced over the course of time. These were the movement from almost exclusive reliance on vocal music towards the inclusion of both creative and re-creative dimensions of the subject area. This is most evident in the most recent change in curriculum, where the 1999 curriculum presents three ways of engaging in music activity. In addition, there is an attempt to give the teacher guidelines as to evaluate the work undertaken. In the next section, there will be an examination of the ways in which changes in policy had implications for teacher practice at a micro level of the classroom.

## **2.4. Implications for teacher practice**

In the previous section, it has been shown how the national system was set up and how music as a school subject was selected and organised. Although the primary teacher in contemporary Ireland works in the national system as outlined above - one which has been in existence since the early nineteenth century, - there are differences in the selection and organisation of the music curriculum as it was presented in the early stages and as it has been

presented in more recent times. In the next section, the more significant differences are outlined, together with the implications they have had for the generalist teacher working in the contemporary institutional setting.

#### ***2.4.1 Emphasis on child centredness in the prescribed curriculum***

Prior to the introduction of the 1971 curriculum to the national system in Ireland, the role played by children in their own education was gaining prominence in curriculum development across a number of countries, among them the UK. In the Plowden report (CACE, 1967), for example, it was stated that ‘one of the main educational tasks of the primary school is to build on and strengthen children’s intrinsic interest in learning and lead them to learn for themselves rather than from fear of disapproval or desire for praise’ (op cit. p.196). The Piagetian school of thought was considered ideally suited and consistent with ‘what is generally regarded as the most effective primary school practice’ (op cit. p.193). This school of thought was founded on Piaget’s interest in discovering the ground plan of the growth of intellectual powers and the order in which they are acquired. To this end, learning called for the organisation of material and of behaviour on the part of the learner, and the adaptation of the learner to their environment. As expressed in the Plowden report (op cit. p.192),

‘[l]earning takes place through a continuous process of interaction between the learner and his environment, which results in the building up of consistent and stable patterns of behaviour, physical and mental. Each new experience reorganises, however slightly, the structure of the mind and contributes to the child’s world picture’.

In line with such developments, in the Irish context it was anticipated that the 1971 curriculum would facilitate each child ‘progressing at his own natural rate, each at the different stages of advancement being allowed full scope to express his own personality and experience the joy of discovery’(Department of Education 1971, p.16). This awareness of children as active agents in their own learning was present in the case of the music curriculum which stated that ‘music for the child should be a vital means of self-expression, a preparation for social life and a basis for future musical appreciation and creation’ (op cit. p.211). As was described earlier (in 2.3 above), the development of music literacy has been emphasised as a feature in each curriculum document from the outset. In the 1971 curriculum, it was expected that music literacy would not be treated in isolation but would be

closely related to active music-making. For example, it was recommended that music literacy be used in a functional way to record the produce of creative activity, where the child would be encouraged to represent the result of their efforts in non-standard graphic notation.

The similarity between this and trends in respect of the UK system may be observed in the treatment of musical creativity in the Plowden report (CACE, p.253). There, two aspects of musical creativity were identified – the making of original patterns in sound (extemporisation, composition) and the re-creation of patterns already devised by a composer (performance, interpretation). According to the report, the latter is easier to control and direct, is usually more in line with the teacher's own musical training and as a rule gives more pleasing results to outsiders than the former. Notwithstanding this, it was recommended in the report that a balanced musical education should allow scope for both.

With regard to the most recent changes to the selection and organisation of musical knowledge in the institutional setting, there is a commitment to such activities in the 1999 curriculum, where the recommendation that active engagement will involve the three strands of composing, listening and performing is made explicit. In addition, the presentation of exemplars in the teacher guidelines (DES, 1999b) reinforce the child centred approach to music teaching and learning, with a series of ideas and suggestions which 'allow the teacher to choose those (or others not listed) that he/she believes best achieve a specific learning outcome' (DES 1999b, p.17).

In the guidelines too, there is the recommendation that

'due consideration [be given]...to the needs of the children, and [that] the teacher should take account of children's previous experience and ability levels and thus to 'provide a range of musical experiences through a variety of approaches'(op cit. p.29).

Similarities between the perspective taken in this curriculum and that taken in the 1971 curriculum can readily be made, although in the 1999 curriculum, the emphasis on meeting the needs of the children is greater and made more explicit.



### **2.4.2 Freedom in interpretation of the prescribed curriculum**

Within the culture of a traditional pedagogical model, i.e. a top - down model, the emphasis had previously been on the implementation of prescribed practices. In the 1971 curriculum, the tendency to portray the teacher as an originator of knowledge (Elbaz 1983) broke away from the tradition of presuming a common practice bias. This, in turn, set up the possibility of a particular relationship between the class teacher on the ground and the prescribed curriculum, one which allowed for a degree of freedom, where teachers were encouraged to adapt the contents of the curriculum to suit their own situation. With this freedom arguably came a challenge for the teacher, not so much to transmit the curriculum contents *per se* but to interpret the contents of the curriculum with due regard to the needs and abilities of the children in the particular educational setting.

The implications of such a change in emphasis for teachers was noted in the Plowden report. Because the teachers' task was to provide an environment and opportunities which are sufficiently challenging for children and yet not so difficult as to be outside their reach, the dangers of 'getting it wrong' were outlined.

'There has to be the right mixture of the familiarity and the novel, the right match to the stage of learning the child has reached. If the material is too familiar or the learning skills too easy, children will become inattentive and bored. If too great maturity is demanded of them, they will fall back on half remembered formulae' (CACE 1967, p.196).

In the case of the teachers working in an Irish institutional setting, there is evidence that the freedom implicit in the 1971 curriculum presented challenges for the generalist teachers which were considerable. For example, difficulties encountered by them were noted in evaluations of practice (and are discussed in 2.7 below). It can be seen that there was little guidance given to the teachers as to how best to treat the curriculum in a child centred way, or to draw on their own experiences of music and their observations of children's behaviour in order to interpret it. In the 1999 curriculum, teachers are encouraged to 'participat[e] in listening, singing, playing and improvising activities' (DES 1999b, p.29) or to engage in 'musicing', a term coined by Elliott (1995, p.49) to describe the multi-faceted nature of musical activity. According to Elliott, in the classroom context,

'[m]usicing is an important term...[which] reminds us that performing and improvising through singing and playing instruments lies at the heart of MUSIC as a diverse human practice'.

Swanwick (1994, p.88) has emphasised the importance of music education as a multi-faceted enterprise, and one which dwells on what he termed 'becoming an insider'.

'Becoming an insider, being part of the conversation is what education is ultimately about....Curriculum activities and assessment processes that range across the various modes of musical encounter and venture through all four layers of musical discourse give students the possibility, freedom and responsibility for charting and following their own musical pathways'.

Evidence that these perspectives on music education have influenced the 1999 curriculum may be seen in the move from a level of prescription towards a degree of freedom in interpreting the content in a variety of ways. While there are levels of attainment set out, the importance of the process is highlighted. This has been achieved in the 1999 curriculum through the provision of exemplars to add suggestion and guidance to teachers regarding the layers of learning. These layers go beyond describing levels of skills and are evidence of the extent to which musical knowledge must involve both understanding and skill development (as espoused by Swanwick 1994, p.95).

### ***2.4.3 Relativist perspective in music education***

Music as it has been presented in the 1999 curriculum may be termed a 'human practice' (Elliott 1995, p. 39) where everyone is capable of composing, performing and listening. With this, a key concept is a notion of music education which is accessible to all children, not just to the talented few. This reflects a 'relativist perspective' as outlined by Brändström (1999, p.23) where 'all human beings are musical and each and everyone has the possibility to express themselves in and through music.' It differs from an 'absolutist' view where musical talents and gifts are restricted. Underlying the relativist view is the tenet that everyone is capable of composing, performing and appraising. While this relativist perspective is implicit in the earlier (1971) curriculum, there is evidence that the teachers found the music content daunting, particularly regarding the level of prescription and level of skills needed to teach it. This evidence may be found in the reports discussed below (in section 2.6) which

documented the attitude of teachers to music as a specialist subject, requiring teachers with special ability.

#### **2.4.4 Summary**

In this section, an outline has been presented of the selection and organisation of knowledge within the frame of a centralised system. It has been shown that, within such a frame, documents which are compiled at a macro level tend to be representative of the theoretical stance held at the macro level. In the next section it will be argued that, when such a theoretical perspective is taken, teachers tend to be viewed as more or less representative of the theoretical stance. It will be seen that this is most noticeable in appraisal of practice, when 'practice' is defined in terms of implementation of the official curriculum. Arising from this, it will be seen how a degree of conformity has emerged which has tended to lead to an assumption about teaching, where teachers are viewed as merely agents fulfilling someone else's intentions or as transmitters of external knowledge. In addition, it is argued that a relationship was created between the teacher and the prescribed curriculum, built from the top down. The implications of such a tradition are noted, particularly regarding the extent to which it contributed to tensions or difficulties among the teachers, tensions which are not explored or taken into account in such appraisals of practice.

### **2.5 *The relationship between teacher and prescribed curriculum up to the 1970s***

In this section, the origins of the relationship between the teacher and the prescribed curriculum are examined. It is suggested that the practice of setting down prescribed practices in the official documents tended to result in frustration among the teachers on the ground, particularly when the content of the curriculum felt alien to them, and where there was little purchase on their own attitudes and preferences. In part one (section 2.5.1) the focus is on the early period, during the years from 1840s-1900, when methods of appraisal of practice were used which calculated teacher effort in monetary terms and led to tensions in practice. In the second part (section 2.5.2), covering the years 1900-1970s, the way in which the local initiative was encouraged is noted as is the willingness of teachers to take part in

classes (the fore-runners of in-service education in the Irish primary school context) in order to improve their effectiveness in the classroom. Finally, regarding recent developments, it is noted that there is a need to investigate current practice, taking into account the changes in policy and the extent to which it has impacted on teacher practice, from the perspective of the teachers on the ground.

### 2.5.1 1840s - 1900

Whereas the hedge schools were under the direct authority of their teachers and the curriculum and teaching style was individual, between teacher and pupil (Dowling 1968), the schools of the National Board were not. In setting up the centralised system, the Commissioners were keen to replace the non-standardised practices such as those in existence in the hedge schools. During this time, it could be argued that a notion of teacher as transmitter was reinforced, whereby an 'alien' culture was transmitted via a conduit -the teacher - to a group of people thought ready to assimilate it and appreciate it - the pupils.

The teachers were alienated from the content and method also, as noted in reports in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The Powis Commission (1870) advocated that teaching aids such as Wilhem's<sup>7</sup> vocal method were supplied only to schools where the teachers showed certificates of competency to instruct in singing (Great Britain, Royal Commission on Primary Education (Ireland) 1870; vol. 1, part 2 (B), p. 690)). That this was felt to have a detrimental affect on music education practices was noted by Inspector Keenan in the appendix to 22<sup>nd</sup> Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland (1855). He criticised the values implicit in the content, suggesting that the lack of melodies of Ireland in 'school music' was attributed to the predominance of materials for use in classes which consisted of imported textbooks which may have had little relevance to pupil or teacher.

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<sup>7</sup> Guillaume Bocquillon-Wilhem (1781-1842). Rainbow (1989, p.143-145) described how Wilhem studied the way in which, under the monitorial system in Paris, children, divided into small groups each under a monitor, were instructed in a variety of subjects. He subsequently introduced a textbook in which the rudiments of music were broken down into a series of easy steps following a carefully planned sequence. The main aim of his textbook was to ensure that each step was graded so as to enable monitors, themselves only beginners, to teach material laid out in the form of question and answer. This method received widespread recognition in Paris and beyond and Wilhem was appointed Inspector-General with a staff of *repétiteurs* to visit each school three times a week.

Around this time, music became synonymous with skills that could be standardised, quantified and produced for examination purposes. This took a particularly strong hold of the teaching process during the Payment by Results Era which lasted from 1882 until 1899. The Payment by Results system arose from the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education in Ireland (The Powis Commission) undertaken from 1868 to 1870 to establish how effectively the National System was working. The report of the Commission (Great Britain, Royal Commission on Primary Education (Ireland) (The Powis Commission) (1870)) set out a system of payment by results. In this system, teachers were paid according to the level of success that their students achieved in certain subjects. Each curriculum subject was ranked in monetary terms. The effect of the Payment by Results era on music practices was recognised by Inspector Goodman. In the 66<sup>th</sup> report, Goodman (Commissioners of National Education, 1899, p.193) stated:

‘payment by results of individual examinations has not succeeded in making our teachers cultivate art for art’s sake. Would it not be well, therefore to seek to make Music loved and cherished in the school for its own sake, and so to deal with it that each teacher will come to regard it, not merely as a source of money making for himself, but rather as a means of bringing pleasure and happiness into the lives of the little ones entrusted to his care?’

The Commissioners had laid down a detailed set of rules and regulations to be observed by the teachers. Under these rules and regulations, the teacher’s work and behaviours were prescribed and they were expected to teach according ‘to the approved methods included in the officially sanctioned manuals of method and organisation’ (Appendix A, 51<sup>st</sup> report of the Commissioners of National Education, 1884). The Rules and Programme for Vocal Music and Drawing (Appendix to 40<sup>th</sup> report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, 1873, p.88) laid down specifically the standards expected from each class group.

### **2.5.2 1900 - 1970s**

With the introduction of the new programme in 1900, the content and method of instruction centred on music literacy and performance (as outlined in 2.3.2 above). In the revised programme, it remained largely unchanged from the earlier practice. There was, however, one significant difference. Where previously Inspector Keenan had reported that the content was ‘foreign to all sympathy and sung in no home’ (22<sup>nd</sup> Report of the Commissioners of

National Education 1855, appendix p.74), in the revised programme teachers were encouraged to draw on their local initiative, thus reducing the sense of alienation previously recorded. Evidence that this effect was successful and the extent to which the teachers embraced the new programme is found in the Commissioners' report that ninety percent of the teachers co-operated in introducing the new programme (67<sup>th</sup> Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland 1900).

While the content may have had a resonance with the teachers, particularly as it promoted the use of the Irish language songs, the method of teaching being promoted continued to cause tension. The extent to which 'music teaching was lifeless and inefficient, the same modulator exercises [being] repeated day after day' was reported by Inspector Hollins (in the 77<sup>th</sup> report (1910-1911) op cit. p.101). Music learning became 'less a pleasure than a strain' (The 'New Music Programme' Irish School Weekly, 41 (October 28, 1939) 1014. However, little was done to remedy the difficulties and structures were put in place to ensure that the official policy was implemented. Most notably, this involved the introduction of an assessment procedure known as the primary certificate and this remained in place until the 1960s.

### **2.5.3 Summary**

In this section, it has been shown that, within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum, the relationship between the teachers and the subject tended to become fraught, with tensions being expressed by the teachers or other relevant professional bodies. Possible reasons for such tensions have been identified as a lack of allegiance to aspects of the contents and methods prescribed and a perceived difficulty in implementing the standards defined at the official policy level. In the next section, there is an account of how difficulties encountered by the teachers persisted and, in spite of evidence found in evaluation studies in which the dissatisfaction was expressed by the teachers, the causes or sources of these difficulties or tensions have remained unexplored.

## **2.6 Recent appraisals of practice**

Prior to the introduction of the 1971 curriculum, evidence of dissatisfaction was found in a survey undertaken by Kelly (1970), whose sample consisted of 'lay teachers in Dublin city schools on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1966'. His results showed that 68% of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the curriculum. After the introduction of the 1971 curriculum, the extent to which it was successfully implemented on the ground was measured in a series of evaluation studies carried out during the 1970s and 1980s. Among them were those conducted by the Conference of Convent Primary Schools (1975), the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) (1976) and the Department of Education (1983).

### **2.6.1 The Conference of Convent Primary Schools (1975)**

The Conference of Convent Primary Schools conducted a survey of schools in the Roman Catholic tradition, under management of religious teaching sisters. They addressed the subject of music (1975, p.31) and found that 85% of the teachers believed that the pupils' musical appreciation had improved under the 1971 curriculum. The study used the categories under which music was presented in the official curriculum as the basis of the investigation. These categories are defined as follows: song singing, vocal technique, ear training and creative work. Their results showed that teachers had difficulty with music and in particular with creative work where 30% of those who responded found this aspect of the music curriculum most challenging. In contrast, there was almost universal satisfaction with the aspect of song singing with only 4% of the respondents expressing difficulty with it. In addition, the results also showed that 76% believed that the teaching of music required teachers with special ability.

### **2.6.2 Irish National Teachers Organisation (1976)**

In 1975, the central executive committee of the INTO commissioned its Education Committee to 'carry out a comprehensive survey of teachers' opinions and experiences in the implementation of the 1971 curriculum' (INTO Curriculum Questionnaire 1976, v). A

detailed questionnaire was issued to all INTO members working in the primary school setting in Ireland. The results were published in 1976 and showed that, in general teachers felt that they were implementing the new curriculum - with its emphasis on child centredness - and expressed an improvement in their job satisfaction which was related to the change of curriculum. In the case of music, the results showed that 79.4% of those who responded said that they taught music but half of those felt that they were dissatisfied with their performance in teaching the subject.

### ***2.6.3 Department of Education (1983)***

An investigation – the only one to focus exclusively on music - was initiated by the curriculum unit of the Department of Education in 1983. Whereas the two investigations cited above (in 2.6.1 and 2.6.2) were undertaken by representatives of the practitioners, this report was compiled by the policy-makers, including those directly involved in the creation of the music component of the 1971 document. Three inspectors of music, a divisional inspector and a district inspector formed the committee. The investigation focused on the senior section of the school, and included selected schools from second class (age 7/8) through to sixth class (age 11/12). In a report (unpublished) the results showed that while there was improvement under the 1971 curriculum in individual skills, for example in rhythm or pitch, there was little evidence that children had mastered exercises which involved both rhythm and pitch used at the same time. Observation of teacher practice was included with a focus on the extent to which mastery had been achieved in such activities as the effective use of a tuning fork as a pedagogical aid in classroom practice.

### ***2.6.4 Summary***

Taken together, the three projects described above (2.6.1, 2.6.2., 2.6.3) are a significant source of ascertaining the level of success with which the 1971 curriculum was implemented. In the next section, attention is drawn to aspects in the research projects which



are of relevance to the present study. These are the methods used in the studies undertaken in the light of the introduction of the 1971 curriculum (2.7.1), the significance of the findings (2.7.2) and the extent to which there were similar difficulties experienced in other settings (2.7.3). The limitations of the studies for understanding teacher practice in the Irish institutional setting are considered.

## ***2.7 Aspects of the existing studies which are of relevance to the present study***

### ***2.7.1 Methods used***

In the case of the three studies, a common characteristic is that they were undertaken on a national basis and aimed at the generalist primary teacher who fell within their particular group. So, in respect of the study conducted by the Conference of Convent Schools (1975), the subjects were teaching in a convent school, the subjects included in the INTO (1976) study were members of the teacher organisation. In the case of the third, undertaken by the Department of Education (1983), all schools and all teachers fell into the remit. Selection was made with due regard to the inclusion of a sample chosen from a variety of locations around the country. Between them, they provide a relatively representative example of the teaching body.

Another common characteristic was that they were each evaluation studies, aimed at investigating how successfully the tenets of the 1971 curriculum had been implemented. As such, they fall into the category of implementation literature (described in chapter one above) in which there is a tendency to view teachers as 'facilitators of curriculum developers' intentions' (Clandinin 1986, p.14). In the case of the first two of these, (the Conference of Convent Primary Schools (1975) and the INTO (1976) studies), a questionnaire method was used and the aim was to cover a wide range of issues and subjects across the curriculum, among them music. In the case of the third study, undertaken by the Department of Education (1983), as noted earlier, the focus was exclusively on the teaching



of music. In order to ascertain the level of success with which the teachers were implementing the music component of the 1971 curriculum, the research design in the study undertaken by the Department of Education (1983) incorporated classroom observation and skill testing.

In addition, in the case of each of the studies, the questions on teacher attitudes were framed within the parameters of the contents of a prescribed curriculum, with particular emphasis on those categories identified as song singing and vocal technique, ear training and creative work. It can be argued that what emerges is a description of teacher practice in the abstract, and one which is limited to that as defined and understood at a macro level. There is little insight into the multiple conditions of knowledge in music education or into a consideration of local factors which are likely to have a bearing on practice. In addition, the uniqueness of each educational environment is ignored. Consequently, it could be argued that there was an implication that teachers were seen as generic, as a homogenous group, sharing a common practice and interchangeable (as discussed in chapter one of the present study).

### ***2.7.2 Significance of the findings***

As indicated earlier (in 2.4.1 above), one of the significant changes in emphasis in the 1971 curriculum was the child centred approach. The results of each study was described above (i.e. in 2.6.1, 2.6.2 and 2.6.3) and showed that, although there was agreement in general with the principles of the 1971 curriculum, (most notably regarding the child centred approach it advocated), there were difficulties in aspects of implementation of some areas of the curriculum. Most notably, music was found to present particular challenges. This was particularly so in the case of the findings of the study undertaken by the Conference of Convent Primary Schools (1975) which highlighted rigorous demands the content made on the teachers. As outlined in 2.6.1 above, 76% of those teachers surveyed in the study undertaken by the Conference of Convent Primary Schools (1975) believed that the teaching of music as defined in the prescribed syllabus required teachers with special ability. The tension felt by teachers with regard to aspects of their practice was evident in findings such as that in the INTO (1976) study outlined in 2.6.2 above where it was reported that 50% of those who responded felt that they were dissatisfied with their performance in teaching the subject. In their study to evaluate music teaching in the light of the 1971 curriculum (Department of Education 1983), the researchers continued to lean heavily on practices more

commonly found in respect of earlier curricula (using the nineteenth century paradigm). By this is meant that they tended to focus on the attainment by the children of success in tests in interval recognition and discrimination, together with sight-singing and various ear training tests (as discussed in 2.6.3 above).

In addition to the dependence on the practices introduced in the nineteenth century, the researchers ignored the innovations presented in the 1971 curriculum. Within the research design chosen, it was deemed impracticable to address the creative aspect. Consequently, little is known of the area termed 'creative music', apart from the fact that it failed to make an impact with teachers, as evidenced also in the report of the Conference of Convent Primary Schools (1975, p.31) where 30% of the teachers surveyed responded that they had most difficulty with creative work.

Taken together, the above points can be used to provide evidence of tensions in practice and can support the notion that teachers expressed difficulties regarding aspects of the implementation of the contents of the music curriculum as prescribed at a macro level.

### ***2.7.3 Difficulties experienced in other educational settings***

It was not unique to the Irish situation that generalist teachers experienced difficulties in implementing a curriculum. What was unique, however, that there was no successful attempt to offer practical support to the generalist teachers who were experiencing tensions in their practice. During the same period in the UK, for example, similar challenges were found in respect of implementation of a child centred music programme in the generalist setting. The need for support and a clear structure was identified in a survey of music in English primary schools (Schools Council 1973). This was carried out by a primary music project team under the directorship of Arnold Bentley. Using data collected from 200 school classes and from 150 other schools, as noted by Cox (2002, p.79), there were five main impressions gleaned from the findings:

‘widely differing approaches, conditions and standards of achievement concerning music teaching in this phase; a lack of aims, or of any general agreement about them; the need for teachers to receive simple guidance in the teaching of basic musical skills and understanding; the low priority afforded music reading; the

differences in attitude between boys and girls with respect to music lessons even before the age of eleven’.

Arising from the survey, the team, while recognising the need for a balance between producing compositions and using the traditional methods of playing singing and literacy, concluded that the latter provided scope for truly educational purposes. In addition to working on the survey, the deputy director, Thackray worked with teachers on small-scale projects in which the emphasis was on testing aspects of children’s learning. As noted by Cox (op cit. p.80), not surprisingly, because of Thackray’s commitment to the development of rhythmic ability measurement, these projects leaned heavily on testing-related topics which included a Music Achievement Test, a test of the understanding of musical concepts and a test relating to a tape recorded lesson.

Another project, undertaken by Kendell resulted in ‘Time for Music’ (Kendell, Allin and Walkley, 1976/78), a series of five kits of material for use in the primary school. Kendell held that the ideal primary music curriculum was a balance between the development of the child as the listener, the creator, the performer and the literate musician. It was with the last of these that his interest was keenest. He made explicit the connection between the teaching of reading and teaching music literacy explicit (Kendell, 1976) and suggested that classroom teachers would be capable of teaching music literacy if suitable materials were provided.

In contrast to the situation in UK, where a special body was set up to offer support and structure, in the Irish context, no one body was charged with such a task. Of the three studies cited earlier, namely those undertaken by the Conference of Convent Primary Schools in Ireland (1975), the INTO (1976) and the Department of Education (1983), only the last could be considered in any real way representative of a group comparable to those in the Schools Council projects. As noted earlier, the report on music teaching in primary schools was compiled by department inspectors, the same body of officials who influenced the creation of the music component in the 1971 curriculum. It would appear that, in defining the policy, they had neglected to attend to the practical application of the policy on the ground or to consider the manner in which it would be evaluated. Against this background, it is hardly surprising that the creative aspect of the 1971 curriculum failed to have any impact on the ground, particularly when the group of department officials who ignored the appraisal of the content was the same group as that which was responsible for providing in-service training to the classroom practitioners.

#### **2.7.4 Summary**

In this section, it has been seen that, while the notion of children as active agents in their own learning has been central in curriculum policy since 1971, in practice, the emphasis has tended to be on performing (particularly song singing) with little attention given by teachers to composing, or what was termed 'creative work' in the 1971 curriculum (as evidenced in reports on practice presented above). It has been shown that, in spite of innovations present in the 1971 curriculum, appraisal of practice tended to lean on those features of prescribed practices which were easily measurable. Other issues were neglected, such as addressing the level of success with which the innovations introduced to the official curriculum were being implemented or adopted by the teachers on the ground, or investigating possible causes for the difficulties the teachers identified with curriculum implementation.

### **2.8 Limitations of studies on curriculum as prescribed practices**

The present study takes the view that, where the curriculum has been prescribed and introduced as official policy, knowledge tends to be determined at an official level and presented in a top-down situation in the form of a standardised syllabus. The focus of research on teacher practice has been on aspects of implementation of this curriculum and on the establishment of an objective regularity. The implications of such a stance are that the teachers tend to be representative of the official view. In the field of educational research, there is evidence to suggest that within a centralised system, there is a likelihood that teachers do not act as a homogenous group, sharing a common practice bias. As outlined in chapter one above, while difficulties encountered by the practitioners have been identified, little has been done to address them. Nor has there been evidence of any attempt to reveal the participants' beliefs or thoughts about the curriculum as prescribed.

The dangers of this approach to research were noted by Clark and Peterson (1986). They suggested that, by describing conceptions of knowledge in terms defined by the researcher, the results spoke as much to what teachers' conceptions of knowledge were *not* as to what they were. The implications of this for the present study are discussed below where it is argued that the limitation of using the prescribed curriculum as the basis for reporting on the state of music education in Irish primary schools has continued to have an effect on the extent to which the multiple realities of classroom practice have been ignored.

In the absence of a perspective that takes account of the variations in practice and of the teacher's voice, an account of music education practices in the Irish primary school context remains incomplete. In addition, claims have been made about what actually goes on in classrooms which are unsubstantiated and largely speculative. In the report of the Arts Council (Herron 1985, p.2), for example, the conclusion drawn was that the reports on the implementation of the 1971 curriculum (discussed in the present study) served to demonstrate that the majority of Irish school children leave the primary school musically illiterate, with little vocal or aural training and a repertoire of songs usually learned by rote. There was no reference to the fact or possibility that a primary teacher might engage in activities other than those prescribed in the curriculum documents, with particular reference to the performance of song and the development of music literacy. In a summary of the findings of research undertaken during the 1970s and 1980s, the INTO (1996) described how there was a flaw in the results obtained in the 1976 questionnaire (INTO 1976). This was attributed to the lack of attention to the relationship between 'what teachers professed about the philosophy of the curriculum and the reality of classroom and methodological practice' (INTO 1996, p.20).

The 1986 survey sought to redress this and included in its aims;

'that the survey should seek to elicit teachers' attitudes to and understanding of the educational philosophy underlying the curriculum and to what extent acceptance of this was reflected in practice' (INTO 1996, p. 22).

The results of the INTO (1986) survey were found to underline disparities between beliefs and practices. Lack of resources, substandard school buildings and classrooms and the pressures of second level entry and expectation were cited as constraints to practice. However, it must be borne in mind that, because of the nature of the survey, its ability to capture the teachers' perspective is limited and it too tended to focus on aspects of implementation and was based on institutional and curriculum aspects within the centralised system.

‘In theory, teachers were free to choose from the suggested guidelines the methodology and content best suited to the needs of the children under their care, but in practice, there were many constraints such as many principals being unfamiliar with the ideals and practicalities involved, in-service and resourcing were totally inadequate, classes of 45-50 pupils were commonplace and the inspectors continued to evaluate teachers on classical instructional techniques’ (reported in INTO 1996, p.9).

The extent to which factors impacted on teacher practice in the context of a prescribed curriculum is treated further in chapter three (in 3.2 below). It is reasonable to conclude that, in reports on practice, the emphasis has tended to be based on implementation literature, with little attention given to exploring the knowledge held by teachers, or their conceptions of a particular subject matter.

## **2.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the focus has been on outlining the case of music education in primary school in a centralised system such as that pertaining in Ireland. It has been noted that, until the introduction of the 1971 curriculum, music has been presented as a set of prescribed practices with an emphasis on vocal performance and the development of music literacy. It has been shown how contemporary policy has moved towards a change in emphasis in the content of the music curriculum to include a child centred approach, greater freedom for teachers to interpret the curriculum in a variety of ways and a move toward a relativist perspective of music education. Yet, in spite of these developments in curriculum policy, it is contested in the present study that little evidence exists to indicate whether the policies have been put into practice. It has been argued that research on practice (most notably that conducted by the professional bodies, namely the Conference of Convent Primary Schools in Ireland (1975), the INTO (1976) and the Department of Education (1983)) has tended to remain focused almost exclusively on the implementation of music as prescribed practices, with an emphasis on vocal performance and the development of music literacy. In addition, it is suggested that, because the research studies focused on the curriculum as prescribed, there was little account of teacher knowledge as held by the teachers on the ground and understood by the participant teachers themselves. Nor did the research reports address the

changes, such as the emphasis on child centredness or the degree of freedom possible to practitioners in enacting the curriculum.

Such omissions are of relevance to the present study, not least because they reveal how little is known about what practitioners actually do in the classroom. As observed in chapter one, unless a move is made to redress this, and to explore the mismatch which exists between the policy set out at a macro level and the conversion of that policy into practice on the ground, there is every likelihood that teachers will continue to feel alienated from music and to experience difficulties about how best to approach music in the classroom.

In the next chapter, there is a review of the literature in the wider sphere of educational research within which research on teaching has been organised broadly into two categories. In the first of these, the top-down approach, the focus is on an institutional setting, within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum. It is shown how the emphasis has been on aspects of implementation of a prescribed curriculum and on the establishment of an objective regularity. It is argued that, even within such parameters, evidence is found to contest the notion that teachers are a homogenous group, with a common practice bias. Sources of tensions are revealed which impact on how teachers tend to translate the mandated curriculum into practice. In the second category, the bottom-up approach, it is shown how the emphasis has been on exploring the subjective realities, with its focus on the individual teacher working in the idiosyncratic setting.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

# ***Research on teacher practice***

### ***3.1 Introduction***

In this chapter, a review of research on teacher knowledge is presented. Firstly, an assumption of homogeneity of practice among teachers working within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum and working in an institutional context is contested. Competing perspectives are presented where a number of factors are identified which are found to influence teacher practice. These include official policy, teacher beliefs and the ethos of the school. Following this, and using Shulman's (1986) conception of teacher knowledge as a starting point, attention is given to research in which the professional knowledge base of the teacher is taken to be multi-faceted and wider than the parameters of a prescribed curriculum. Here it is argued that, in order to have a more complete picture of teacher knowledge, it is necessary to draw on the teachers' own conceptions of a subject as a basis for understanding their practice in the classroom. A third group of research studies is presented in which the formative experiences are found to have an influence on teacher practice.

## **3.2 *Research on practice in an institutional setting: competing perspectives***

On research in an institutional setting, there is evidence that there are competing perspectives at play which affect teacher practice. These include the following: the extent to which policy set out at official level resembles that held at the local level of the school; the beliefs teachers hold and the extent to which they can act on their beliefs; and thirdly, the extent to which the ethos promoted in the school can facilitate the teacher in their enactment of the curriculum. In this section, these competing perspectives are explored and the extent to which they impact on teacher practice is examined.

### **3.2.1 *Official policy as a factor***

It has been discussed earlier (in chapter two above) that teachers working within an institutional setting in the Irish context expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of their practice. While the dissatisfaction was reported, (as outlined in 2.6.1, 2.6.2 and 2.6.3 above), it was observed that no follow-up studies were undertaken to ascertain the reasons for such dissatisfaction or to identify the constraints experienced in practice. In a similar (closed) system, such a study was undertaken in the Cypriot context by Kyriakides (1997). In his study of the perceived sources of influences upon a randomly selected sample of 10% of all Cypriot primary teachers, Kyriakides (1997) used a questionnaire method to establish those constraints which the teachers perceived to have most influence on their practice. The findings pointed to the fact that Cypriot teachers were influenced more by the political factors (inspectors and documents) than by the professional (heads and colleagues) or the consumer (children and parents). Kyriakides suggested that, insofar as it was a case study of a closed system, it might be possible to generalise from the findings only to a limited extent. It did, however, raise awareness of the perceived zones of influence upon teachers who work in a highly centralised system (op cit. p.43). In addition, he pointed to the lack of consensus about perceptions of influences on practice, stating that ‘the

identification of six homogenous groups among Cypriot teachers suggests that primary teachers can not be treated as a culturally homogenous professional group' (op cit. p.44). Kyriakides concluded that, in terms of curriculum change, it would be useful for each teacher to be seen as a discrete unit upon which the change of beliefs may take place. He also recommended the recognition of a more collaborative professional culture in research, within which teachers could share ideas with policy makers (op cit. p.45).

### ***3.2.2 Teacher beliefs as a factor***

A number of studies have been done on teaching which have pointed to tensions or conflict among teachers when the beliefs they hold about a subject are different to those presented in the prescribed curriculum. These include research in science education (Lakin and Wellington 1994), in mathematics education (Andrews and Hatch 1999; Lerman 1990), and in music education (Teachout 1997; Brändström 1999).

In the area of science education, Lakin and Wellington (1994, p.175) focused on the extent to which, when faced with a science curriculum or a course of study, teachers may feel alienated from the given ideas and concepts and argued that

‘...we all construct for ourselves, from our own training, experience and philosophy of life a set of unique concepts as to what science means to us. These may be in conflict with some of the views expressed in curriculum documents’.

In their indepth study of four science teachers, they found areas of conflict in teachers where the particular view of the subject matter (in their case science) promoted at a macro level differed from that held at a micro level by the teachers. They drew on Kelly's (1955) personal construct theory to study teachers' views on the values of science. The results pointed to tensions between teachers' own conceptions of the nature of the subject and those held at a macro level, (mainly in syllabi), tensions between their expectations and the expectations of curriculum developers and management, together with constraints as experienced by them in their enactment of the policy at a micro level of the classroom. According to Lakin and Wellington (1994), the teachers in their study made decisions about what was appropriate or manageable in their particular context,

even if it did not reflect the conception of science held by the teachers themselves. It thus posited an interpretation for why the theory held by the teacher at a micro level in the classroom differed from that held at a macro level. In so doing, it supported the findings of Crocker's (1983) assessment of the impact of an elementary science curriculum project in a school. The curriculum guidelines set out in the project advocated a particular philosophy of science, one which incorporated scientific processes, first-hand experiences, pupil use of apparatus and discovery learning among other features. He suggested that the tensions between the principles held at a micro level by the teachers and those held at a macro level by the curriculum developers might be explained by the difference in conceptions of subject held at the macro level and those held at the micro level. In promoting a set of guidelines for science teaching, the curriculum developers promoted a particular view of science, one which may or may not have been shared by the teachers required to implement the programme in their classrooms. In effect, the assumption was that the teachers would act as transmitters of a prescribed programme, with little account of their own perspectives or beliefs about the contents of the programme.

Andrews and Hatch's (1999) research into secondary teachers' conceptions of mathematics and its teaching was influenced by their awareness that the requirements of the national curriculum for mathematics in England and Wales (Department for Education, 1995) may favour some perspectives or beliefs over others. Using a four-section questionnaire to explore aspects of teachers' conceptions of mathematics and its teaching, they identified ten constructs, five for conceptions of mathematics and five for mathematics teaching, with relationships between both. According to Andrews and Hatch (op cit. p. 220), their study indicated in relation to the national curriculum,

‘that substantial numbers of serving teachers, and many applicants for teacher training, may have perspectives on mathematics which counter the successful fulfilment of those curricular expectations’.

That is, the philosophy implicit in the national curriculum may not be consistent with that underlying the curriculum at local level.

Lerman (1990) identified two competing perspectives in mathematics education, namely an absolutist perspective and a fallibilist perspective. He described absolutism as ‘the presentation of the image of a certain body of knowledge, discovered by great mathematical persons and where creative mathematical work is not the prerogative of the teacher, let alone the students’

(op cit. p.55). The fallibilist view of mathematical knowledge focused attention on the context and meaning of mathematics for the individual, and on problem solving processes, where mathematical knowledge was seen 'as a library of accumulated experience, to be drawn upon and used by those who have access to it' (op cit. p.56).

In his study of specialist music teachers' attitudes and opinions of skills considered important to successful music teaching in the first three years of teaching, Teachout (1997) identified three categories of skills, namely subject matter skills, personal skills and professional skills. Items identified as musical skills included conducting gestures (item 4), singing skills (item 15), music theory/history (item 16), sight reading skills (item 31), piano skills (item 26) and high musicianship (item 30). Personal skills included sense of humour (item 6), enthusiasm and energy (item 1), displaying confidence (item 18), patience (item 22), flexibility (item 33) and creativity/imagination (item 27) while professional skills were identified as among others, maintaining student behaviour (item 5), moving among the group (item 11), ability to motivate students (item 29) and ability to work with many ages (item 37).

The findings revealed that, of the three sets of skills considered important, the respondents ranked musical skills least. In other words, when teaching music in the classroom, the respondents in Teachout's (1997) study considered extra-musical issues to be more central to successful music teaching than musical skills, particularly during the early stages of the teacher's career. In his analysis, Teachout compared the responses for pre-service and experienced teachers' opinions of skills and behaviours and concluded that generally there was agreement between the two groups on what skills and behaviours were considered to be most important to initial teaching success. Experienced and pre-service teachers ranked nine of the forty items equally within one ranking of each other. Both groups ranked item 29 (be able to motivate students) 2nd. Experienced and pre-service teachers ranked item 18 (display confidence) 3rd and 4th respectively. Both groups ranked item 26 (possess proficient piano skills) and item 15 (possess excellent singing skills) 39th and 40th respectively. He noted that both groups ranked subject matter (musical) skills lower than personal and professional skills and behaviour.

While there was no input by the teachers to the design and as such the categories were researcher-based, the findings are of relevance to the present study. For example, contrary to the studies which focus on curriculum implementation where skills are central, (as discussed in chapter two of the present study in respect of the Irish setting), Teachout's (1997) findings

suggest that factors impacting on teaching music in the classroom include the personal and the professional and are not confined to issues of subject matter transmission *per se*. It is argued that these factors contribute to the multiple realities of teacher practice and consequently need to be considered in research on teacher practice.

Where Lerman has used the term 'fallibilist' in the case of mathematics education to describe an alternative to the 'absolutist' perspective, Brändström (1999, p.23) has described a 'relativist perspective' in the case of music education to allow for an alternative to the absolutist. In the relativist perspective, (as described in 2.4.3 in respect of the present study), Brändström proposed that all human beings are musical and each and every one has the possibility to express themselves in and through music. In contrast, Brändström described a competing perspective - the absolutist perspective of music education - where musical talents and gifts are restricted and not everyone is capable of composing, performing and appraising. To what extent tensions arise when a perspective held by the teacher differs from that espoused at official policy level has not been explored in the Irish primary school context. Brändström's study will be discussed further in section 3.4.2 below.

### **3.2.3 Ethos of school as a factor**

Research identifying the ethos of the school as a factor which influenced teacher practice includes the study undertaken by Yuen-Fun Ng and Morris (1998) in the area of music in the Hong Kong secondary school context. Using questionnaire and interview methods, they wanted to identify those constraints considered by the respondents to have an effect on their practice. Yuen-Fun Ng and Morris (1998) examined teachers' perceptions of the aims of the formal music curriculum and analysed their explanations of the factors influencing the pedagogy they used in the classroom. In the questionnaire, Yuen-Fun Ng and Morris used ten statements identified from the literature and asked the respondents to rank them in order of importance. Responses indicated that those statements associated with experiences in performing or skill acquisition were ranked lowest while statements associated with appreciation or analysis were ranked highest. Their results showed that, although the curriculum purported to provide a balance between three components, listening, composing and performing, the syllabus itself provided

more support to a pedagogy which focused on listening rather than performing or creativity and that the teachers in their study also gave the highest priority to the promotion of listening.

Following this, a number of respondents were interviewed about their choice of ranking. An analysis of the interviews revealed that teachers explained the reasons for their choices, not primarily in terms of the intrinsic features of the music curriculum but rather on the characteristics of the wider context of schooling within which they operate: 'specifically, the ethos of schools was perceived to stress the need for the maintenance and assessment of objective and established knowledge...' (op cit. p.55). In other words, they found that the teachers in their study had a limited amount of freedom in interpreting the subject matter as set down in the syllabus. This was seen to have an effect on the extent to which the teachers had an opportunity to interpret the subject matter according to their own beliefs about teaching.

### **3.2.4 Summary**

In this section it has been shown how, within the parameters of an institutional setting, where knowledge has been presented in the form of a prescribed curriculum, factors which affect teacher practice have been identified as official policy, teacher beliefs and school ethos. It has been shown that, where the dominant perspective has tended to be in one direction, the teachers made decisions or interpret the materials accordingly. Among the variables in teacher practice has been found to be the extent to which there are tensions between the conception of subject matter as presented at a macro level in the official curriculum and that held by the teacher at a micro level in the classroom. In such cases, it is likely that their practice will be influenced by such tensions. In chapter four, a synthesis of these features is provided and the implications of these factors for research in the Irish setting are treated further.

### ***3.3. Using a multi-faceted view of teacher knowledge as the basis of research on teacher practice***

In the next section, literature on teacher knowledge is presented which is multi-faceted and influenced by the writings of Shulman (1986). Following from this, attention is drawn to the research which used his view as the basis of defining teacher knowledge.

#### ***3.3.1 Shulman's conception of subject matter knowledge***

Shulman's (1986) perspective on teacher knowledge involved distinguishing among three categories of content knowledge, in particular his subject matter content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge. Shulman (op cit. p.9) described subject matter content knowledge as the 'amount and organisation of the knowledge per se in the mind of the teacher' which may be divided into substantive and syntactical knowledge, where substantive knowledge denoted the key concepts, facts, principles and explanatory frameworks in a discipline and syntactical knowledge included an understanding of the methods and rules that guide study within that discipline.

Shulman's notion of pedagogical content knowledge went beyond knowledge of subject matter *per se* to the dimension of subject matter knowledge for teachers. According to him, pedagogical content knowledge consisted of the most powerful analogies, illustrations, examples, explanations and demonstrations:

'in a word the ways of representing the subject which makes it comprehensible to others... it also includes an understanding of what makes the learning of specific topics easy or difficult' (ibid).



The third aspect, curricular knowledge, incorporated a vertical and lateral dimension, where the teacher is informed of what other areas are being learned by the student and how his work fits into the overall scheme as set out in the linear curriculum.

Shulman's conception of teacher knowledge has been used as the basis of a wide range of studies. These include the studies undertaken by Brickhouse (1991) in the area of instructional strategies in science education and by Gudmundsdottir (1990) in the area of values and teacher knowledge. A common feature of both is the fact that teachers were found to re-organise their knowledge in the light of their personal beliefs or values. This is the focus of the next section.

### ***3.3.2 Beliefs, values and teacher practice***

Brickhouse (1990) used Shulman's (1986) conceptual framework to make a connection between teachers' beliefs and instructional strategies in the area of science education. In addition, she identified a difference between experienced teachers and inexperienced teachers. Brickhouse reported that, in the case of the experienced teachers, their classroom instruction was remarkably consistent from one day to the next and their expressed personal philosophies were congruent with their actions in the classroom (op cit. p.60). In contrast, results showed that the teacher with less experience was less predictable. Unlike the experienced teachers, Brickhouse noted that 'the inexperienced teacher had not reconciled his own conflicting beliefs or the impact of institutional constraints on his teaching' (ibid). It may be concluded from this that there may be a connection between the level of experience one has and the extent to which one acts upon one's own personal philosophies about the subject in the classroom.

According to Gudmundsdottir (1990, p.47), teachers tended to reorganise the knowledge they held according to their personal values and the values embedded in their specialisation. She argued that differences in teacher theories could be attributed to differences in the way in which their theories were imbued with this personal dimension.

'[Teachers' theories] differ because they represent each teacher's values in a unique and personal way and at the same time the models are a pedagogical representation of the orientation to the discipline the teacher prefers'.

Using Shulman's notion of pedagogical content knowledge as 'that special amalgam of pedagogy and content' (as described in Wilson, Shulman & Richert 1987, p. 8), Gudmundsdottir (1990) researched teachers' conceptions of the subject matter that they teach and the extent to which they restructured their content knowledge to create pedagogical content knowledge. Using a case study problem, Gudmundsdottir (op. cit. p.46) focused on the extent to which teachers have different orientations to the subject matter they teach and suggested that their orientation to the subject matter is central when teachers restructure their content knowledge to create pedagogical content knowledge. Each of the four teachers created a pedagogical model of subject matter where epistemology, ethics and pedagogy converged in content.

Gudmundsdottir (1990) described the four pedagogical models of subject matter as 'homemade', by which she meant that the teachers had developed them over time and out of their experiences. She advocated the use of case studies of teachers to develop an awareness of the role of values in pedagogical content knowledge, arguing that 'cases that represent alternative ways of teaching the same content could be particularly valuable in fostering prospective teachers' examination of the influence of values on instruction'.

By arguing that values held by teachers were a factor which influenced teacher practice, Gudmundsdottir demonstrated the importance of the relationship between the values held by teachers and their classroom practice. It has been suggested ( in 2.5 above) that, in a centralised system, such values tended to be taken for granted, ignored or replaced with values held at a macro level. Yet, as Gudmundsdottir held, values are held at a micro level too. It also pointed to the importance of making explicit the values held by teachers and embedded in curricula.

Gudmundsdottir's study highlights the importance of recognising that the values teachers hold are a factor which can influence teacher knowledge. In the next section, key concepts of Clandinin and Connelly (1995) are presented with particular attention to their understanding of the practical nature of teacher knowledge.

### 3.3.3 Relationship between teacher practice and the context of practice

Clandinin and Connelly (1995, p.7) described teacher knowledge as an expression of the personal and practical.

‘What we mean by teachers’ knowledge is that body of convictions and meanings, conscious or unconscious, that have arisen from experience (intimate, social and traditional) and that are expressed in a person’s practices.

They used the term ‘expression’ in a particular way.

We use the term *expression* to refer to a quality of knowledge rather than to its more common usage as an application or translation of knowledge. It is a kind of knowledge that has arisen from circumstances, practices, and undergoings that themselves had affective content for the person in question. Therefore, practice is part of what we mean by personal practical knowledge. Indeed, practice, broadly conceived to include intellectual acts and self-exploration, is all we have to go on. When we see practice, we see personal practical knowledge at work’ (italics in original).

In adapting such an approach, they pointed to the limitation of using the contents of a prescribed curriculum as the basis for defining teacher knowledge. By making the connection between knowledge and experience explicit, such a view counters the notion that teacher knowledge can be generic or homogenous or confined within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum. They placed an emphasis on the teachers’ personal and practical experiences. By thus focusing on the personal, they pointed to the idiosyncratic nature of knowledge and to the importance of including the location within which the practice takes place. Such a stance took into account the notion that studies which wanted to capture teacher knowledge need to be located not only in the classroom but outside the classroom also. They focused on a view of the teaching milieu which was broader than the institutional setting. They termed this the professional knowledge landscape. They distinguished between two situations within which the teacher operated, namely an in-school situation and an out-of-school situation. They suggested any discussion on teacher knowledge needed to include both situations, since both situations contributed to the professional knowledge landscape.

### **3.3.4 Summary**

In this section, the focus has been on research in which the professional knowledge base of the teacher is taken to be multi-faceted and wider than the parameters of a prescribed curriculum. It contrasts with the research studies which were researcher-biased and based on conceptions of knowledge as understood at a macro level. As noted by Goodson (1997) and discussed in chapter one of the present study, the limitations of such research are that the agencies of curriculum as prescription are seen to be 'in control' and the schools are seen to be 'delivering'.

In the next section, a review of research on teacher practice is presented in which the formative experiences of the teachers are found to have an influence on teacher practice. Particular attention is drawn to research studies in the area of music education. In exploring this, the relationship between in-school and out-of-school experiences is made explicit.

### **3.4. *Using in-school and out-of-school experiences of teachers as the basis of research on practice***

The importance of the experiences of the teachers themselves has been acknowledged in research on teaching which included a biographical perspective and everyday conceptions of the subject matter. In the next section, attention is drawn to those studies in which there is an emphasis on formative experiences. Such studies include the work of Mant and Summers (1993), Butt (1984), Butt and Raymond (1987), Woods (1987), Goodson (1992), Goodson and Sikes (2001) and Kelchtermans (1993).

### 3.4.1 A biographical perspective

The extent to which formative experiences contributed to difficulties in teachers' attitudes to practice was studied by Mant and Summers (1993) in the area of science. They took the national curriculum as the basis for eliciting primary teachers' subject matter knowledge, specifically related to their understanding of scientific concepts of the earth's place in the universe. A group of twenty teachers was interviewed and in each case, the interviewee was asked to observe the sky, to explain day and night, the seasons, the phases of the moon, the position and movement of the planets, the scale of the solar system and the relationship between stars, planets and the solar system. In each case, stimulus cards were used. There were two aspects to the analysis, cross interviewee to see whether commonalities existed in their theories and misconceptions, and intra interviewee, to extract a cognitive model of the universe held by that interviewee. This cognitive model revealed the extent to which they held everyday conceptions or ideas which had no relationship with a scientific conceptual model (terms used by Norman, 1983).

Among the findings was the relationship between preconceptions and teacher knowledge. In other words the research gave an indication of the preconceptions and difficulties that primary school teachers were likely to bring to any course dealing with the topic. The research, however, was based on teachers' espoused theories and did not reflect their theories-in-use. Consequently, the teachers' conceptions of the nature of the subject were related to the curriculum as set down in curriculum documents and not necessarily to their own experience of professional practice.

According to Butt, (1984) biography was an appropriate way of understanding teacher thinking and its relationship to action because it focused on teaching as experienced by teachers. He argued that biography examined 'the transformational quality of significant experiences in personal and professional lives, [through which] we can apprehend a teacher's formation or development in an educative as well as a training sense', (op cit. p.100) while Butt and Raymond (1987, p.76) argued that biography was useful

'not only in discerning what teachers actually think and do, but more importantly, what events in their *past* personal and professional lives were and are influential in shaping how they think and act in *current* classroom situations' (italics in original).

According to them, in the educational context, biography was particularly suitable as a means of 'bringing together experience, thought, action, theory, practice, research development and self education' (op cit. p.88).

Butt, Raymond & Yamagishi (1987, p.151) held that 'teachers as persons bring to teaching a particular set of dispositions and personal knowledge gained through their particular life's history'. By its nature, then, there is an individual aspect to teacher knowledge and it is believed that adapting a biographical perspective in research is a suitable means of capturing this.

Woods (1987, p.124) advocated an approach which would both respect the uniqueness of individuals and promote identification of commonality among them. This was the whole life perspective, within which individuals personally engage with the process of a subject area. By its nature, this whole life perspective was based in the subjective reality of the individual, thus acknowledging that there are common practices but also some differences. Using the story of Tom, Woods plotted a series of co-ordinates. This allowed him to describe the teacher and to show causal relationships between aspects of theory and practice. Using the interview of one subject, Tom, Woods described the process as follows:

'[f]irst I abstract from the many hours of interactions with this man what I perceive to be the major components of his self. I go on to consider the implications of these elements for his strategical action as a teacher and for his attitude to the curriculum. I next trace the origins of the elements in his earlier life, including a consideration of macro-influences and mediating factors. Finally, I suggest that the actual degree and quality of self-subject interaction depend on ranges of coordinates that we can specify for any teacher' (op cit.pp.239-240).

Contrary to studies in which the notion of the teacher is portrayed in the abstract, Woods' study looks at the extent to which it is idiosyncratic. Thus, Woods provided a means of researching teachers using a bottom up model in which the teacher's perspective was prominent. He achieved this by including methods which focused on the teacher's experiences expressed by him. The result is that, while there is a portrait of Tom which has depth and is based in the subjective realities of Tom, there is also a means by which inter-subjective comparisons may be made. Although Woods built up a profile of one subject, Tom he used a template which could be used with a number of subjects. By using the process described above, it would be possible to find commonality and difference across a number of teachers. This has been applied in the present study (as will be seen in the design of the study). The subjective realities are central.

### **3.4.2 *Everyday conceptions; research on music education***

Brändström's (1999) study has been cited earlier in the literature review (in 2.4.3 and 3.2.2 above). As discussed in section 3.2.2, he described two competing perspectives in the area of music education, namely an absolutist perspective and a relativist perspective. He suggested that the extent to which teachers held one of these perspectives was a factor which influenced their practice. In the same study, Brändström (1999) focused on music teachers' 'everyday or spontaneous conceptions. Like Mant and Summers (1993), Brändström's (op cit. p.21) wanted to understand how teachers conceptualised their subject, not just as it pertained 'in the context of their practice but how they understood it in their own life-world'.

In including teachers' everyday conceptions, he broadened the knowledge base outlined in the prescribed curriculum and highlighted the importance of the personal or idiosyncratic nature of knowledge. Such a perspective included the in-school and out-of-school experiences. The relationship between teacher in the in-school and out-of-school settings was found to have importance. Whereas in the formal setting (as for example in the classroom) the content and method used may reflect a particular set of values, namely those values determined at a macro level by official policy makers, outside school it is likely to be influenced by a variety of factors. By taking part in music activities in the informal setting, people become immersed in a set of values which may be in conflict with those promoted in the formal settings. The different ways of engaging in music tends to lead to different ideas of understanding what counts as music, as noted by Campbell (1991, p. 81) who argued that the familiarity with the music arising from such immersion in turn 'often generates preference'.

#### **3.4.2.1 *Musical pathways***

Finnegan (1989) used the term 'pathways' to describe the route taken by the musicians in the area during the course of their lives. In her study of the musical worlds of one geographical location, Finnegan (1989) took the view that what was heard as 'music' was characterised, not by its formal properties but by people's view of it, 'by the special frame drawn round particular forms of sound and their overt social enactment'(op cit. p.7).

'Music is thus defined in different ways among different groups, each of whom have their own conventions supported by existing practices and ideas about the right way in which music should be realised'(ibid).

Finnegan focused on the practice of music: on what people actually do on the ground. She made the distinction between the

‘formalistic analyses, towards one which leads to a greater appreciation of how individuals and groups organise and perceive their activities at the local level, whether in music-making or any other active pursuit’ (op cit. p.8).

Although there were ambiguities between the sphere of ‘amateur’ and professional’, her study focused on musicians along a continuum of amateur/professional. She explored the musical worlds which spanned home, school, church, pub and club. She made the connection between parental interest and pupil participation in music. She concluded that the pathways were imbued with symbolic depth and got the impression from the respondents that their music-making was ‘one of the habitual routes by which they identified themselves as worthwhile members of society and which they regarded as of somehow deep-seated importance to them as human beings’ (op cit. p.306). Thus music had the potential to make a valuable contribution to the lives of the participants, giving them membership of a society which would enrich their lives. In respect of the present study, it will be seen in the case of the five respondents, that they consider music to have the potential to make a difference in the lives of their pupils.

#### ***3.4.2.2 The formal and informal in research on music education***

The relationship between the formal and the informal has been explored by Green (2001) in her study of how popular musicians learn. Green interviewed fourteen popular musicians, aged from fifteen to fifty and living in and around London. As part of her study, Green investigated the nature of popular musicians’ informal learning practices, attitudes and values.

In doing this, she wanted

‘to come to an understanding of popular musicians’ experiences in formal music education and to explore some of the possibilities which informal popular music learning practices might offer to formal music education (op cit. p.7).

Green (op cit. p.16) distinguished between formal music education and informal music learning. She used formal music education to refer to

‘intended instrumental and classroom music teachers’ practices of teaching, training and education: and to pupils’ and students’ experiences of learning and of being taught, educated or trained in a formal educational setting.’



She used the term 'practices' in relation to formal education to denote a wide range including conscious and unconscious, intended and unintended practices: whilst the term 'methods' as in 'teaching methods,' refers to specific, conscious, focused or goal-directed activities designed to induce learning. By informal music learning she meant a variety of approaches to acquiring musical skills and knowledge outside the formal educational settings. She referred to informal music learning as a set of 'practices' rather than 'methods'.

In distinguishing between them, she argued that the concept of 'methods' suggests engagement which is conscious, focused and goal-directed, while that of 'practices' leaves open the degree of conscious, focused and goal-directed engagement.

'They include encountering unsought learning experiences through enculturation in the musical environment, learning through interaction with others such as peers, family members or other musicians who are not acting as teachers in formal capacities: and developing independent learning methods through self-learning techniques' (ibid).

Green held that musical enculturation was a key concept in music in a social context.

'The concept of enculturation refers to the acquisition of musical skills and knowledge by immersion in the everyday music and musical practices of one's social context' (op cit. p.22).

Learning music within these social contexts can be 'imbued with a wealth of affective culture' (McCarthy, 1999, p.15). Consequently, whereas in the formal setting, this is made to happen in a structured and systematic way, outside the formal education setting such a thing occurs unavoidably.

### **3.4.3 Summary**

In summary, these studies are significant in that they tended to focus on the experiences of the teachers themselves. In contrast to the other studies where the knowledge base was defined at an official level, in this group of studies, the parameters were wider. The conception of the subject matter was not confined to that set down in official documents but included the teachers' own

conceptions of the subject area. By including the teachers' own conception of the subject matter, aspects of knowledge which were drawn from the formative experiences were included. Thus, while there were aspects of commonality, it was acknowledged that there were differences too. In research on music education, the relationship between the in-school and the out-of-school experiences has been noted in a number of studies.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, a review of the literature on research on teacher practice has been presented. Starting with studies undertaken in institutional settings such as those in the contemporary school setting, it has been suggested that there has been a tendency to take the practice of using a prescribed curriculum as the basis for research. It is argued that, in such studies, the conception of knowledge has tended to be defined at a macro level and as a result, little is revealed about the knowledge held by teachers at an individual level. Secondly, little attention is given to the professional knowledge landscape in which the teacher works. Thirdly, assumptions tend to be made in which the teachers share a common practice bias, one which is determined at official level and within the parameters of the prescribed curriculum. Taken together, these tend to contribute to the establishment of an objective regularity. Such a stance is limited in that the provision of descriptions of an objective regularity alone inevitably ignores the multiple ways in which teachers tend to conceptualise their subject matter or about their perspectives on the curriculum as prescribed. Nor does it take into consideration the extent to which teachers might have differences and variation in practice, even within the confines of an institutional setting.

In contrast to the first group of studies, which focused on the establishment of an objective regularity, the second group of studies has provided evidence of the multiple realities which exist in respect of teacher practice. In addition, in the second group of studies, the starting point of the studies has been, not the prescribed curriculum but the experiences of the practitioners themselves, working on the ground. These studies have illuminated the multi-faceted nature of teacher knowledge. Using Shulman's (1986) conception of teacher knowledge as a basis, the

relationship between values and teacher practice has been discussed. Attention has been given to the extent to which this knowledge is influenced by the formative experiences of the teachers, both in-school and out-of-school. It has been observed that such studies can contribute to an understanding of the multiple realities which exist in respect of teacher practice.

In the next chapter, key points from the literature review are drawn together. In recognising the limitations of research on practice in which there is an assumption of homogeneity in practice, it is suggested that, while commonalities may be said to exist in aspects of practice, attributable to working within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum and within the institutional setting, there are differences too. These differences may be attributed to the formative experiences of the teachers. In order to understand practice, it is suggested that it is necessary to include the teacher perspective. In addition, it is important to acknowledge both the establishment of an objective regularity and an exploration of the subjective realities in research on teacher practice, where the connection between the teachers' everyday conceptions about music and their attitude to the official curriculum can be made. Since the present study is concerned with revealing the multiple realities, the second group of studies is considered important. At the same time, the study is located in an institutional setting where commonalities and differences are likely. It is acknowledged that both facets need to be included in the present study.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

# ***Synthesis***

### **4.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, a synthesis is presented of the key points from the literature review. These key points have included the case of music education in primary school in a centralised system such as that pertaining in Ireland. Within such parameters, it has been suggested that musical knowledge has been presented as performance and music literacy, with an emphasis on song singing. In addition, it has been seen that, in those studies undertaken to assess the success of the implementation of the official curriculum in the 1970s and 1980s, results pointed to difficulties, constraints or tensions among teachers, particularly regarding teachers' attitudes, opinions and views on aspects of practice in the context of the prescribed curriculum.

In contrast, it has been shown how, in recent years there is evidence of a move towards a conception of knowledge which offers latitude and scope to teachers, one which is not confined to the contents of a prescribed curriculum. Because there is such scope and latitude, there is a possibility for interpretation at local level by the teachers working in the idiosyncratic setting. Consequently, the assumption that teachers are a homogenous group sharing a common practice bias is open to challenge.

Given that the teaching occurs in an institutional setting there is concern with the establishment of an objective regularity. At the same time, teachers bring their own experiences and conceptions of the knowledge base to their practice. These contribute to the multiple realities and are, by their nature, subjective.

Arising from this, as stated in chapter one, the present study has identified the limitations of the stance taken in research on teaching, where there has been little account of the commonalities and differences which are likely to occur in teacher practice and this is the focus of 4.2. The importance of gaining access to the teacher perspective is explained in 4.3. Another consideration is the importance of including both the objective and the subjective in research on practice and this is outlined in 4.4. Finally, in section 4.5, a framework of comparison of the teachers' perspectives is presented.

## ***4.2 Researching commonality and difference in teacher practice***

Evidence of an assumption of teachers as a homogenous group sharing a common practice bias has been seen across a wide variety of subject areas and in a variety of institutional settings.

Lantz and Kass (1987) have shown that, while there are differences in teacher practice, there are commonalities too. Lantz and Kass's revision to Crocker's (1983) concept of functional paradigm accounted for the differences by allowing for variations in the individual elements within the functional paradigm. Put simply, they maintained that teachers in their research study were found to have a somewhat different constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, exemplars and routines (Lantz and Kass, *op cit.* p.132). Lantz and Kass focused on curriculum materials and the ways in which teachers interpreted them in classroom practice.

In an earlier study on science education, Lantz and Kass (1987) had shown that three high school chemistry teachers who used the same chemistry curriculum taught very different lessons about the nature of science, as a result of differences in their understanding of the nature of chemistry. Using qualitative data obtained from observations and interviews with three chemistry teachers from a variety of experiences and settings, they found significant differences among them in the way in which the teachers interpreted curriculum materials. In addition, they studied the extent to which chemistry teachers' beliefs, values and techniques were commonly held and the extent to which they were idiosyncratic.

The significance of Kyriakides's (1997) Cypriot study (as described in 3.2.3 above) lies in the following respects, each of which is considered to be relevant to the current study. Firstly, the context in which it was based was similar to that in the present study insofar as it took place in an institutional setting within which there was a prescribed curriculum. Within this context, it might be assumed that teachers shared a common practice bias. The findings of the study pointed to the degree to which the content of the prescribed curriculum presented at a macro level had an influence on teachers in their practice and reinforced the notion that teachers have beliefs, attitudes and conceptions about the curriculum as prescribed. Secondly, in suggesting that teachers are not a homogenous group, Kyriakides pointed to the variations in practice inevitable when teachers interpret the prescribed curriculum. Finally, he argued that teachers should be included in discussions on practice, and their views taken into account, particularly when aspects of policy have direct implications for their professional practice.

Implicit in the factors contributing to the variations in practice is the extent to which the profiles of teachers differ from one another. Differences were found to lie in their formative experiences, including their educational and professional backgrounds. Such differences arguably influenced their relationship with the curriculum as prescribed and their conceptions of the subject matter they are required to teach. This was not, however made explicit in the Kyriakides (1997) study. In the Kyriakides study, the nature of the research precluded investigation of teacher responses and consequently there was little insight into aspects which would shed light on the beliefs, attitude or conceptions held by the teachers and the extent to which these were put into practice in the classroom. In contrast, the present study has included a way of exploring teacher responses.

Another study in which the aspects of commonality and difference in teacher practice featured was Gudmundsdottir's (1990) study (outlined in 3.3.2 above). Gudmundsdottir's study is significant to the present study in that it highlighted the extent to which differences occur among teachers working in the same educational setting and suggested that the differences were influenced by values held by teachers. By arguing that values held by teachers differed and were a factor which influenced teacher practice, she demonstrated the importance of recognising the relationship between the values held by teachers and their classroom practice. It has been suggested that, in a centralised system, such values tended to be taken for granted and are embedded in curricula. As observed by Gudmundsdottir (1990) 'values are held at a micro level too and need to be "lifted out" and examined' (op cit. p. 51).

In the case of the Irish education system, the value of music was arguably presented at official policy level in the 1830s as 'a refining and intellectual pursuit and ...calculated to have a cheery influence on school life generally' (as discussed in 2.3.1 above) and retained as a means of giving the child 'full scope to express his own personality and experience the joy of discovery' (as outlined in 2.4.1 above). Evidence has been presented ( in 3.2 above) that there are likely to be competing perspectives between the values espoused at an official policy level and those held at a local level, by the practitioners working in the idiosyncratic settings. However, as noted in recent appraisals of practice in the Irish setting, (as documented in 2.6.1, 2.6.2 and 2.6.3 above), little has been done to examine the effects on teacher practice when such differences in values appear to exist between those promoted at an official policy level and those articulated on the ground.

In Gudmundsdottir's (1990) study, to the extent that the respondents were working within certain parameters that were common, namely those found in an institutional setting, it has similarities with the present study. While Gudmundsdottir acknowledged that the 'pedagogical model of subject matter' held by the teachers grew during their career, his study differs from the present study in the following respects. Unlike the present study which is set in the institutional setting of the primary school with generalist practitioners, Gudmundsdottir's study was undertaken with subject specialists, working in the secondary school system. In addition, Gudmundsdottir's study did not explore the origin of the conceptions held by the respondents or examine the extent to which their formative experiences influenced their values. Nor did his study investigate the possibilities of patterns among and between the respondents *vis à vis* the values held by them and their practice.

In respect of the study undertaken by Lerman (1990), there are similarities with the present study. Most significantly, like the present study, it points to the importance of including, not simply the views expressed by the teachers but the origin of such views. Like Lerman (1990), the present study makes the connection between the acquisition of theories of knowledge and the formative experiences of the teacher explicit in research on teacher practice.

#### **4.2.1 Summary**

Taken together, the studies emphasised the importance of researching commonalities and differences in teacher practice. Lantz and Kass (1987) were concerned with how teachers actually interpreted curriculum materials in their work rather than with how they talked about the process in the abstract. Kyriakides (1997) highlighted the significance for teacher practice of the part played by beliefs, attitudes and conceptions about the curriculum as prescribed. Gudmundsdottir (1990) emphasised the differences in the theories held by teachers and identified a causal relationship between the differences in their theories and the values held by them. Lerman's (1990) study has provided evidence of the idiosyncratic nature of teacher theories, where, even among teachers using the same material there are likely to be differences in their understanding of the subject they teach.

In the next section, the importance of gaining access to the teacher's perspective is highlighted.

### **4.3 Gaining access to the teacher's perspective**

In respect of the present study, it has been argued (in chapter two) that, where tensions or conflicts have been identified by the practitioners in aspects of practice, little has been done in



the field of research in the Irish context to probe these or to research the origin of such difficulties. It has been suggested that this is due to the lack of opportunity afforded to teachers to reveal their espoused theories, their personal theories or their perspectives on their practice (as discussed in section 2.8). The case is made that, in order to gain access to the teacher perspective, there is a need to make explicit the relationship between what Argyris (1999, p.131) defined as an espoused theory of action and a theory-in-use:

‘Ask people in an interview or questionnaire to articulate the rules they use to govern their actions and they will give you what I call their ‘espoused theory of action.’ But observe these same people’s behaviour and you will quickly see that this espoused theory has very little to do with how they actually behave. When you observe people’s behaviour and try to come up with rules that would make sense of it, you discover a very different theory of action – what I call the individual’s “theory-in-use”’.

Like Gage, (1978) (cited in chapter 1 above), Wilson et al (1987) have noted the limitations of using observable behaviour on its own as a means of coming to understand the breadth of teacher knowledge. It was recommended that other methods be used also. Through a series of semi-structured interviews with beginning teachers, Wilson et al (1987) built a portrait of the knowledge held by each teacher, by asking questions about their conceptions of subject matter and about pedagogy.

Studies in which the connection between an espoused theory and a theory-in-use was made explicit used those methods which allowed access to the teacher perspective. These included studies which used interview (Mant and Summers, 1993), participant observation and post-observation interview (Clandinin, 1986) combined with teacher reflection (Brickhouse, 1991) and Elbaz, (1991)).

In addition, studies of relevance to the present study were those in which the origin of the views - the biographical perspective - was included (as discussed above in respect of Lerman, 1990 and Gudmundsdottir, 1990). The work of Woods (1987) in compiling a profile of the teacher both respected their uniqueness and took account of the aspects held in common with other teachers. His work took account of the formative experiences of the teacher as well as their attitude to the prescribed curriculum.

Clandinin’s (1986) study offered a conceptualisation of a teacher’s experiences as they can be seen to crystallise in the form of images. A significant feature of this methodological perspective

lay in the fact that all three had their starting point 'in the experience of the persons involved' (op cit. p.26). Among the methodologies used were participant observation and interview.

Brickhouse's (1991) data collection included interview and observation of lessons as well as textbooks and other materials used by the teacher during the course of their practice. Towards the end of the study, the teachers were sent a copy of the case study written about them and their classrooms for comment and accuracy. From seven pre-college science teachers, three were chosen on the basis of their diverse perspectives on the nature of science.

In adapting the technique of the interview in the studies cited above, importance was placed on gaining access to the teacher perspective. The views of the teachers were included and their relationship with the subject matter made explicit. In doing this, there was a recognition that there were differences in the practice of those teachers holding a conception of a subject which starts from a consideration of the current state in the philosophy of the subject from the practice of teachers whose conceptions begin with 'teachers' views and behaviour', a point made by Lerman (1990, p.53) in the case of mathematics.

Elbaz's (1991) concept of practical knowledge emerged from interview situations in which the informant reflected on her teaching. Elbaz chose five categories of knowledge which appeared to reflect differences that were relevant to teaching rather than those which focused on academic distinctions among disciplines of study. These were knowledge of self, of the milieu of teaching, of subject matter, curriculum development and instruction (op cit. p.14). Using case study in a series of five open-ended discussions, Elbaz took into account both cognitive and affective considerations that reflect teachers' orientation to action and to experience, without ignoring the stable and invariant features of their work. Thus, while firmly situated in teacher practice, such as approach also acknowledged the importance of theory. Issues discussed included the teacher's attitude, conception of subject matter, values, commitments and career plans. These were supplemented by two periods of observation in the classroom and in a reading centre.

Taken together, these studies are of relevance to the present study because they focus on gaining access to the teacher perspective. A key characteristic is that teacher knowledge is conceived by the teacher in the classroom and includes such notions as theories-in-use (Argyris 1999), personal practical knowledge (Clandinin and Connelly 1995), practical knowledge (Elbaz 1983) and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman 1986 and Wilson et al, 1987).

Of the studies which were small scale, those of significance to the present study included a case study approach to the subject specialist or the generalist teachers in the idiosyncratic setting in which a biographical perspective was used. Such studies considered the formative experiences of teachers - both in-school and out-of-school - to be factors which influenced teacher practice. Contrary to research which provided little encouragement for teachers to view themselves as 'originators of knowledge', (Elbaz, 1991, p. 11), the present study has placed a high value on experiential knowledge, noting that teachers themselves may be unaware of the value of their own knowledge. Following Elbaz (ibid.), the present study has placed a high value on including teachers, of working *with* rather than *on* teachers.

#### ***4.4 Researching the objective regularity and the subjective realities***

The research studies on teacher practice outlined in chapter three above may be categorised into two broad areas. In the first of these, the focus has been on the establishment of an objective regularity where the interest has been on the extent to which teachers implemented or translated the prescribed curriculum. In the second group of studies, the focus has been on exploring the subjective realities of practice which, as exemplified by the work of Woods, (1987) (cited in 3.4.1 above), included the individual teacher working in the idiosyncratic setting.

The literature review has shown that there are limitations when, in the first instance, a subject (in this case, music) is defined at a macro level. There tends to be a view of teacher knowledge which is framed within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum. No account is taken of the individual's previous experiences, personal theories and values and no acknowledgement is made of the uniqueness of each environment. There is a tendency to portray teacher practice in the abstract, with little account of how teachers interpret the subject at the micro level, of the variables and constraints in practice or the context in which the knowledge has been formed or informed. Such a stance is limited in that the provision of descriptions of an objective regularity

does not reveal how people negotiated the objective regularity. Consequently, such studies ignored the multiple conditions of knowledge (as described in 1.2.1 above), the ways in which teachers conceptualised their subject matter and their perceptions of the curriculum as prescribed. Nor does it do justice to the extent to which teachers might have differences and variation in practice, even within the confines of an institutional setting.

In the second of these stances, attention was given to the variety in the content and orientation of teachers' implicit theories. There was evidence of differences in practice, even in those teachers working within the same prescribed curriculum. As noted by Clark and Peterson (1986, p.289) in their review of the literature on teacher thought processes, 'even within what appears to be relatively homogenous groups of teachers (e.g. teachers implementing open education approaches) there is wide variation in the content and orientation of teachers' implicit theories' (op cit. p.291). Such studies emphasised the subjective realities, in which the focus has been on exploring a view of knowledge which is multi-faceted and based in the experiences of the practitioners themselves. Drawing on Shulman's (1986) conception of teacher knowledge, the professional knowledge landscape of the teacher is taken to be wider than the parameters of the curriculum as prescribed. Knowledge has been defined in terms of an orientation to practice (Elbaz 1983, as discussed in 5.3.5 below) or as an expression of the personal and the professional (Clandinin and Connelly 1986 as discussed in 3.3.3 above) and not confined to the content of a prescribed curriculum.

The present study takes the view that research which identifies the subjective realities in isolation are seen to ignore the contextual factors, and the extent to which commonalities exist in teacher practice among those teachers working within the same educational context. The danger is that when these features are ignored, little is known of the complexities of teaching. In addition, little insight is gained about the ways in which teachers negotiate the objective regularity where competing perspectives arise between the official policy level (the top-down approach) and the idiosyncratic level (the bottom-up approach) (as discussed in 3.2 above).

Drawing on both sets of studies, the present study takes the view that the teacher is a member of two worlds, one – the institutional setting- (outlined in 2.3 above) is framed by the presentation of knowledge in a top-down situation and the other – the idiosyncratic setting – (outlined in 3.2 above) refers to the world of the teacher on the ground, interacting in a particular educational

milieu, drawing on a conception of knowledge which is multi-faceted (as discussed in 3.3 above) and which includes both in-school and out-of-school experiences (as outlined in 3.4 above).

The present study has recognised the importance of gaining access to the teachers' perspectives within the parameters of a system such as that in the Irish primary school system. In order to do this, a framework has been required within which a comparison of teachers' perspectives can be made. This can allow for both depth and breadth and can facilitate an exploration of the relationship between aspects which are subjective and those which are objective. This is discussed in the next section.

#### ***4.5 A framework for comparison of teachers' perspectives***

Drawing on Bourdieu (1990, p.25) who argued that 'of all the oppositions that artificially divide social science, the most fundamental, and the most ruinous, is the one that is set up between subjectivism and objectivism', the present study has read across both subjectivism and objectivism. In taking this approach, it has adapted Bourdieu's (1990) notion of 'habitus' and of cultural field as follows.

According to Bourdieu (1990), the 'habitus' is the set of durable dispositions that people carry within them that shapes their attitudes, behaviours and responses to given situations. There is both an individual and a collective aspect to the 'habitus'. It is proposed that the individual aspect of the 'habitus' lies in the fact that each respondent has had personal experiences, unique to them, that have fashioned their attitudes and values. At the same time, the 'habitus' is collective in the sense that the common situation in which they find themselves disposes them to certain shared actions; in this case their preservice education has focused on the same set of prescribed curricula and they all work within the parameters of the same institutional setting.

Bourdieu's (1990) notion of cultural field has been used in as much as it allowed for exploration not only of institutions and rules but of the interactions between institutions, rules and practices

as outlined by Webb, Schirato & Danaher (2002). According to Bourdieu, (1990) a field is also constituted by, or out of, the conflict which is involved when groups or individuals attempt to determine what constitutes value (or what Bourdieu termed 'cultural capital') within that field and how that value is to be distributed. Allied to this is the importance of cultural arbitrary, a term used by Bourdieu to suggest that the differential power relations pertaining to our culture have no necessary basis but are rather arbitrarily constructed to reflect the values and interests of dominant groups. As can be seen in 3.3.2 above, this relationship between values and practice is a factor. Values are not seen as neutral but are embedded in teacher attitudes.

Bourdieu (1990) argued that, by and large, agents (in this case, the respondents) adjust their expectations with regard to the capital they are likely to attain in terms of the 'practical' limitations imposed upon them by such factors as their place in the field, (in this case their educational background, the position occupied by them in the school and so forth). Adapting a Bourdieuan perspective, for the purpose of the present study, the formative experiences may be described as aspects of the 'habitus' of the respondents. This notion of 'habitus' has allowed structure to be viewed as occurring both within small-scale interactions such as those in the classroom and activity within large-scale settings which includes the education system as a whole. The relationship between the cultural field and the 'habitus' is further explored in the analysis of data, (as for example in 7.6 below) particularly as it applies to the notion of replication and replacement.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the key points from the literature review have been presented. The case has been made to move away from a dependence on implementation of a prescribed curriculum *per se* in research on teacher practice. In some instances, (as was pointed out in chapter two and chapter three), the research findings pointed towards constraints or tensions expressed by teachers about their practice. Such tensions resulted from competing perspectives which have included the official policy (3.2.1), teacher beliefs (3.2.2) and the ethos of the school (3.2.3). While these

studies recognised the impact of such tensions on teacher practice, they were based on a conception of knowledge imposed in a top down situation which framed expectations about teacher behaviour and practice in the classroom. Consequently, little was revealed about the multiple conditions of knowledge, and the subjective realities, as experienced by individual teachers at a micro level in the classroom, or in the milieu of teaching.

It has been noted that research which includes the teacher's perspective has tended to move from those large-scale studies which tended to establish an objective regularity towards smaller scale studies which are based in the subjective realities of the teachers. By placing the focus on the subjective realities, the significance of the personal is acknowledged. It has been considered likely that the teacher's conception of musical knowledge influences the selection and organisation of musical knowledge in classroom practice. Gaining access to this knowledge has necessarily involved teachers talking about their work. Methods have involved the use of interview, observation and life history, all of which have included the perspective of the teacher. Such studies attempted to develop a conceptualisation of teachers' experiences as they were reflected in practice.

In the case of music, little has been done - at least in the Irish context - to explore teachers' conceptions of their subject, the origin of such conceptions and the relationship between this and teacher practice. In research which looked at music education in the classroom context, the teacher perspective tended to be implicit rather than explicitly stated.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### ***Method and methodology***

#### ***5.1 Introduction***

The literature review has pointed to a number of issues which have implications for the present study and these have received considerable attention in the design of the study. Firstly, making a connection between an espoused theory and a theory-in-use explicit was considered important. This is considered to be relevant especially in the case of research on teaching when the theory and practice are held in the same person. As noted in the literature review, there were limitations to descriptive studies in which the connection between the behaviours of teachers and the meaning which the teachers attribute to these behaviours was not made explicit. Studies which looked at a causal relationship between aspects of theory and aspects of practice and which have



relevance to this study, tended to include observation and interview, and to focus on both an espoused theory and a theory-in-use. In adopting a qualitative approach, the studies focused in particular on the meanings teachers give to their practice, or on what Hammersley (1999, p.2) described as 'exploring the perspectives of the people involved rather than rushing to judgments about them and what they are doing'. Consequently, the present study builds on previous research in teacher knowledge which is characterised by gaining access to teacher knowledge from the teachers' perspectives, having as its starting point the illumination of teachers' perspectives of their classroom practice. This includes both interview and teacher reflection.

In addition, following Goodson (1990, p.305) the study aimed not to develop a model of 'idealised practice' but to understand the practical, where this understanding is located within a further exploration of the contextual parameters of practice, ensuring that the teacher perspective was framed in a social and historical context. In so doing, the study has drawn on the document analysis (as presented in chapter two) to suggest that the selection and organisation of knowledge has been framed within this social and historical context. Like Goodson (1992, p.6) the present study has advocated that stories which are set in a historical context are like life histories. In keeping with this, the study has aimed to frame the formative experiences of teachers, both in-school and out-of-school within the parameters of the cultural setting within which they work. In this way, the present study has set out to have a relatively complete picture and understanding of contemporary music teaching in the Irish primary school context. It has aimed to present an alternative to those studies on teacher practice which have tended to establish an objective regularity where assumptions of homogeneity are evident. In order to counter this assumption of homogeneity, the present study has focused on presenting an alternative view, and one which is based at a micro - level and where the teacher voice is heard.

At the start of the research study, I had an uneasy relationship with the terms 'curriculum' and 'teacher'. At the end of the process, I realise that the source of my uneasiness was not with the notions of 'curriculum' and 'teacher' *per se*, but with how they have been constructed and confined in the Irish music education setting. Like Goodson (1981, p.69) who had a problem with research where 'the human actor is located and studied in a manner contrively divorced from the previous study of both the actor and the situation', the present study emphasises the fact that the classroom is not a discrete unit, sealed off from what happens outside the classroom.

## **5.2 Case study**

Following Walker's (1986) observation, case study was considered an appropriate means of confronting and portraying what is actually happening in schools and classrooms at a level of some detail and to ensure that the research would remain close to educational practice. The case study allowed for attention to the idiosyncratic more than to the pervasive. Denscombe (1998, p.31) noted that the focus was on 'relationships and processes'. Case study researchers, according to Stake (1994, p.239) oriented to 'complexities connecting ordinary practice in natural habitats to the abstractions and concerns of diverse academic disciplines'. It allows the researcher to interpret and describe complexities of the teacher's everyday practice and to come to know the context and location within which the explicit discursive elements and statements occurred.

### **5.2.1 The research questions**

As has been stated, the study was concerned with researching teaching from the teacher's perspective. In this context, the term 'teacher's perspective' has been used in two respects, namely:

- their perspective on the prescribed curriculum and the extent to which the conception of music held by the teacher relates to that promoted at official level and
- their perspective on their practice and the extent to which the values they promote are a reflection of their own experiences in music.

In the case of each respondent, there are two research questions related to the teacher's perspective.

What is the nature of their professional activity in music?

What contributes to their individual orientation to practice?

The research questions are framed within the parameters of a centralised system and where there is a prescribed curriculum. In such a case, knowledge tends to be presented in a top down situation with an emphasis on music literacy and performance. Given that the respondents in the present study are working within the same institutional setting, it is likely that their practice will be framed by the establishment of an objective regularity, with an emphasis on the transmission of the contents of the prescribed curriculum. However, the study is concerned also with teachers working in the idiosyncratic setting, and in the second question, the emphasis is on exploring the subjective realities of teaching, as articulated by the teachers themselves. As has been outlined in the literature review, factors contributing to constraints in teacher practice have been identified as official policy, ethos of school and teacher beliefs. These are explored in the light of the respondents.

In addition to this, the significance of negotiating the relationship between the subjective and the objective has been central. Here the focus has been on the origins of commonalities and differences in practice among the five respondents. In particular, the formative experiences of the respondents are considered to be central.

### **5.3 *Methods***

Although the study was conducted in stages, the intention has been to adapt the perspective of bricolage as outlined by Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.3) whereby all facets of the study would combine towards the understanding of teacher knowledge. In addition to the points raised above, there were other concerns which were identified as significant in the study. These included the criteria for selection of respondents, with an emphasis on researching the 'ordinary', attention to the balance between the detailed study of one particular context and a broad variety of contexts, as well as and the use of appropriate methods such as classroom observation and interview. This is the focus of the next section.

### **5.3.1 Criteria for selection of respondents**

Because the study has not been designed as an evaluation of the official curriculum or as an investigation of best practice *per se*, the option of consultation with inspectors was considered inappropriate. It was felt that this means of selection might tend towards one partial interpretation of the official curriculum and run counter to the underlying rationale of the study.

Nor was the purpose of the study to identify an expert pedagogue (Berliner, 1986). While the study of the veteran teacher, the expert pedagogue or the novice held value, Elbaz (1991, p.8) argued that it was 'usually a portrait in the language of research, emphasising explicit rather than tacit knowledge'. Further she intimated that it was suggestive of 'a hierarchy among educators, with the scholar above the expert teacher, who is in turn above the novice' (ibid). Like Elbaz (1991, p.7) who was critical of research which emphasised 'the extraordinary at the expense of the ordinary', the present study has focused on the 'ordinary' teacher. By focusing on the ordinary teacher as subject, it is intended that, as Elbaz (ibid) contended, 'we uncover and give legitimacy to the extraordinary that is within the ordinary'.

The criteria for selection of respondents were influenced by Spradley's (1980) belief that the good informant has first hand, current involvement and expert knowledge. In the context of the generalist primary teacher and the present study, expert knowledge was taken to mean the knowledge held by any practising teacher who would agree to act as informant. It was felt that such a commitment would necessarily indicate an adequate level of interest, competence and informativeness. Therefore commitment to music education and willingness to participate in the study were taken as evidence of expert knowledge. Selection was made primarily on this basis.

A second consideration was to include as wide a range of participants as possible. It followed the notion of purposive sampling described by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.233) as 'a way of increasing the scope or range of data exposed'. A key concern has been to achieve a balance between the detailed study of one particular context where, as claimed by Delamont and Hamilton (1986, p.36) it is 'still possible to clarify relationships, pinpoint critical processes and identify common phenomena,' and adapting the maximum variation approach, defined as 'serial selection' by Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 234) where each additional teacher chosen because

they represented a new or somewhat different dimension. The focus has been on a group of people (generalist teachers) in an area (the educational setting).

In using interviews, like Green (2001) I kept a fairly open mind initially about how many to interview. My emphasis was on people who would want to talk to me about their practice and who would agree to let me observe a 'typical' lesson. Five teachers were chosen from a selection of schools with due regard to geographical locality, gender, single-sex and mixed sex schools. The size of school and number of teachers on the staff were also noted. Each site was considered to be both idiosyncratic and representative of the system at a broader level. The five generalist teachers named Ray, Ultan, Norma, Fiona and Patricia worked in settings ranging from inner city to rural. Denomination was Roman Catholic but within this there were schools historically run by religious orders and those run by lay people. Fiona and Patricia taught in convent schools, with mixed sex at the junior cycle and girls from 3<sup>rd</sup> class to 6<sup>th</sup> class. Ultan and Ray taught in mixed schools, traditionally lay-schools. Norma taught in a boys' school, originally run by Christian Brothers although now entirely run by lay people. Of the five schools, entry was at age five, with the exception of Norma's school where entry was in 2<sup>nd</sup> class.

### **5.3.2 Classroom observation**

The study has been grounded in an awareness that research on teaching is considered to have a common sense obviousness, an observation made by Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis (1976) and acknowledged by Hammersley (1999, p.1) who suggested that, to capture what actually goes on in learning situations, it is necessary to include those directly involved, 'to use first-hand observation and/or in-depth interviews'. The inclusion of classroom observation served as a means of establishing a connection between an espoused theory and a theory-in-use (as discussed above). As observed by Argyris (1999, p.131), 'people consistently act inconsistently, unaware of the contradiction between the espoused theory and their theory-in-use, between the way they think they are acting and the way they really act'.

The respondents were free to organise the lesson in whatever manner they saw fit. The emphasis was on the 'typical lesson'. The researcher was a participant observer whose presence in the

classroom was intended to be non-intrusive. A tape recorder was used as an *aide-memoire* and was placed on the teachers' desk or other appropriate position. The aim was to witness the lesson which would become the starting point for the second interview, and not an end in itself. Each informant was told in advance of the lesson that the focus of the second interview would be on aspects of practice which the informant wished to emphasise. Consequently, it was anticipated that the second interview would be driven largely by the lesson as described by the informant, with the researcher acting as witness. The purpose here was to give voice to the teachers, and to gain insight into the meanings held by the teachers about their work, thereby gaining access to their 'implicit theories'.

### **5.3.3 Interview**

The study drew on the method of semi-structured interview on two occasions. Drawing on the teacher knowledge literature which emphasised a biographical or life history perspective, the purpose in the first interview has been to build a profile of each teacher. Following Denzin and Lincoln (op cit. p.164) the participants were involved in creating 'annals and chronicles as a way to scaffold their oral histories' with due regard to Goodson's (1997, p.116) caution against the 'practice of presenting individual and practical stories in the abstract without disempowering those we are trying to empower'.

Within a biographical perspective, the focus was on the teacher perspective (Butt and Raymond 1987), with an emphasis 'not so much on the facts but on the meaning they have for the respondents' (Kelchtermans 1993, p.444). In the case of each teacher, the first semi-structured interview addressed three topics as follows:

- a) Conceptions of music in education
- b) Formative and informative influences on growth of musical knowledge
- c) Perception of the official curriculum

#### a) Conceptions of music in education

The purpose of this has been to ask the teacher for their views on music and so to gain an understanding of the conception of the subject matter espoused by them. It was expected that the manner in which each respondent conceptualised the subject would be informed by the context in which they operated, as well as on their perspective on the role of music in education, in schools in particular and in the school where they work. Information about the school included its place in the musical life of the community together with the place of music in the school.

#### b) Formative and informative influences on growth of musical knowledge

In the case of each of the respondents, educational background in musical experience has been noted and included early experiences in music, at home, in school, in the community. This included preservice education. In making the distinction between formal and informal music experiences, the terminology used was similar to that used in Green (2001, p.16) and described in chapter three.

#### c) Perception of the official curriculum

Because the respondents worked within the same parameters, characterised by a centralised system and a prescribed curriculum, their perspective on the official curriculum was considered important. This also provided a focus for the collection of data in the context of a relationship between an espoused theory and a theory-in-use, and provided a background for the classroom observation where selection of content and method were featured.

Drawing on literature on implicit theories, on espoused theory and theory-in-use, as well as on research on reflection-on-action and personal practical knowledge, the emphasis in the second interview - post-observation – has been on those aspects of content and method selected by each teacher and identified by them as significant. The focus has been on establishing a curriculum emphasis which has included in the case of each respondent, their ‘subjective educational theory’ (Kelchtermans (1993, p.450) and their ‘functional paradigm,’ (Crocker, 1983: Lantz and Kass, 1987).

In addition, the second interview has served as a means of checking aspects of the first interview with each respondent. In this respect, it has allowed for clarification and expansion of themes when appropriate, thereby making a potential relationship between an espoused theory and a theory-in-use explicit.

#### **5.3.4 Orientation to practice**

In the subsequent stage, following the fieldwork, the data from the interviews were analysed and the orientation to practice of each respondent was established. Elbaz (1983) used the term 'orientation' to reflect the way practical knowledge was held and used. This involved pointing to the forms outlined as follows:

- *Orientation to situations*, or how the teacher adapts to suit the particular situation
- *Personal orientation*, or 'the particular perspective and point of view which shapes [the knowledge], however implicitly
- *Social orientation*, which underlines the fact that teaching is not an abstract art but occurs in a social context with implications for the social nature of the teacher's practice
- *Experiential orientation*, where the blurring of a distinction between in-school and out-of-school is replaced by the bracketing of experiences, and a delineation of the boundaries and their permeability and
- *Theoretical orientation*, or the extent to which the teacher is informed by forms of thought and discourse, including academic training.

This way of looking at teacher knowledge has been considered relevant in the present study because it is based on the narrative of experience which, as observed by Clandinin (1986, p.19) reaches 'both into the teacher's practices and into the teacher's personal and professional experiences'. Although framed in teachers' views and behaviours, the organisation of the data in this way has facilitated a particular relationship between content and pedagogy, one which has drawn on the teachers' own conceptions of a subject as the basis for understanding their practice in the classroom. It has moved from the normative and the descriptive to reveal an idiosyncratic



dimension to the way in which teachers tend to shape their practice. It is idiosyncratic to the extent that it is imbued with a perspective embedded in personal values, as espoused by Gudmundsdottir (1990) and discussed in the literature review (in 3.3.2 and 4.2 above).

## **5.4 Methodology**

### **5.4.1 A preliminary study**

Prior to the main study, a preliminary investigation<sup>15</sup> was carried out with three classroom teachers. It involved, with their permission, interviewing each of them, observing their lesson and conducting group interviews with the pupils in their classes. The three teachers worked in largely the same suburban milieu and all were in Roman Catholic schools. The age profile of each teacher was around the same. All went to college at around the same time. Yet, in spite of these commonalities, the interviews revealed that there were differences in the curriculum emphasis of each respondent and in their attitude to music education in school. On examination, it was found that a causal relationship was found to exist between the differences in curriculum

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<sup>15</sup> This investigation was written up and presented as a report to the Department of Education and Science in Stakelum, M. (1999). Primary teachers and music education: interim report. (Department of Education and Science Research and Development Unit). This initial investigation into teachers' perceptions of their practice in music education revealed a summary of categories as follows:

Teachers' perceptions of music in their own lives and communities, its value and function:  
Teachers' perceptions of children's musical responses in and out of school and the processes of their musical learning and:  
Teachers' perceptions of the operation and influence of the music curriculum in general and particularly in their classrooms.

From these, four focus questions were articulated as follows:  
How does teacher's background (i.e. personal history and training) influence teacher?  
How does teacher perceive children's learning in music?  
How does the curriculum relate to (i) and (ii) above?  
How is all of the above incorporated into the teacher's practice?

emphasis and differences in the formative experiences of the respondents. For example, in one case, there was an emphasis on traditional Irish music in the classroom, where the respondent drew on the informal practices she had been immersed in as a child, such as learning by ear and learning to performing within the oral tradition. In another case, where the formative experiences were predominantly in a classical vein, the curriculum emphasis was on formal methods of learning to perform recorder and vocal music.

From this preliminary investigation, the relationship between the formative experiences and the values espoused by the three classroom teachers was noted. It was found that, although the teachers worked in largely the same setting, their musical pathways (Finnegan, 1989) were predominantly different. In particular, two of teachers described how they learned music in an informal setting (Green, 2001) and tended to favour traditional music while the teacher for whom music was predominantly experienced in the formal setting (Green, 2001) tended to favour the formal methods in the classroom. In addition, although each teacher worked in different schools, there were commonalities in aspects of practice. Most notable among these were the perceived constraints presented by working within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum and the extent to which the values held by them differed from those supported at the official policy level.

Following consultation with the teachers, practical considerations were noted regarding aspects of the methods used to gather data. During the investigation, interviews and classroom observation were recorded using audio tape. The use of video as a means of collecting data was discussed. Although the addition of the visual dimension in recording events had advantages, it was agreed among each of the teachers that there would be disadvantages too. Most notably, it was suggested that the practical considerations arising from use of video recording would inhibit the flow of the lesson, that the children might be distracted and that the tension would detract from the 'typical' lesson more than was ideal. It was argued that audio tape would be suitable with, where appropriate, field notes to record gestures, materials used, classroom layout and other considerations as they arose during the observation sessions.

Arising from the preliminary investigation, a number of factors emerged which were used to shape the present study. Firstly, the importance of gaining access to the teacher perspective was recognised and it was decided that the classroom observation would focus on classroom practice from the teachers' point of view. It was considered that this would have implications for the way

in which the classroom lesson would be observed and treated in a second interview. The most important part of recording the classroom observation was considered to lie in its usefulness in initiating discussion with each respondent so as to identify possible themes regarding the relationship between the teacher and the curriculum as enacted in practice. Consequently, a description by the researcher of other details such as gestures and time-on-task were considered not so important.

Similarly, because the nature of the investigation was on the teachers' perspectives of their practice and not an evaluation of their practice, every effort was made to minimise any risk of turning the experience into a justification by them of their actions. To minimise the risk, no reference was made by the researcher to the nature and quality of children's responses or activities. Where a teacher noted the quality of the pupils' performances, it was seen to illustrate a point on the part of the teacher and not given any emphasis by the researcher. Children's responses were taken into consideration when appropriate but did not form any major part of the analysis. Any extension of the research to include children was thought to become overly concerned with outcomes, or with the processes of children's learning and this was considered to be outside the scope of the study. The same applied in the case of including the interviews undertaken with colleagues in the school. In two cases, an interview with the principal was conducted and while it gave an insight which was valuable, it was decided that the focus should remain on gaining access to the teachers' perspectives of their classroom practice, and on making explicit the relationship between their espoused theory and their theory-in-use.

Finally, the relationship between the researcher and the respondents was noted. Two of the three teachers were known to the researcher and the idea of visiting the schools emerged from informal discussions about matters of common interest in music education. It became a model of 'collaborative research' and served as a means of establishing a professional trust which was to shape the main study. Feedback from the respondents in the preliminary study was invaluable and served to refine the research question. From the preliminary investigation, the next stage emerged and contact was made with the prospective respondents.

### ***5.4.2 The main study: initial contact with the respondents***

In the case of four of the five respondents in the main study, initial contact was made in advance of the study. Details of the request were made explicit and a letter confirming the arrangement was written to Ultan, although it became clear that a less formal approach was equally effective and confirmation was made subsequently by phone. Each informant was willing to participate and agreed to the terms as outlined. Both Norma and Fiona expressed some concern that, because they were not working in the classroom, they might not be of much use. The decision was taken to include them, since, although there is no recognition at an official level of specialist music teachers in the primary school system, the likelihood of finding two teachers with their expertise and experience was slim. It was felt that their views and insights would be particularly valuable. Both had had considerable experience working as classroom teachers prior to their present positions as remedial teachers and could be termed veterans (Berliner, 1980). In addition, they were both very willing to become involved.

Similarly, Ray and Ultan were both principal teachers and both were members of the same traditional music group. Also they both worked in relatively similar [rural] settings. As it turned out, the similarity in 'musical pathways' (as described by Finnegan (1989) and discussed in 3.4.3.1 of the present study) was considerable as they both shared biographical experiences, having both worked in the same job prior to teaching. Equally, both had decided to go to college at the same time, effectively changing career at the same time in their lives.

Of the five informants, initially only Patricia was not contacted personally. In the case of Patricia, contact was made through the principal of her school and all the data collection occurred within school hours on the same day.

### ***5.4.3 The contextual factors***

As discussed above (in 5.1) one of the concerns was to understand the practical and to ensure that the teacher perspective was framed in a social and historical context (Goodson, 1990). There

were some contextual factors which were taken into consideration. Because each of the respondents was educated in the Irish system of education, their formative experiences are considered to be framed within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum (as outlined in chapter two above). In addition, the extent to which changes in official policy had an impact on the respondents is recognised as a contextual factor. Most notably this occurred at preservice level. During the 1970s, there were fundamental changes in preservice education. Where previously the training took two years and led to a vocational qualification of a diploma, allowing the recipient to teach in a primary school in the Irish national school system as a national teacher, (NT), in the late 1970s, preservice education was provided over three years and led to the award by a university of a degree in education (B.Ed). Both Fiona and Norma had experienced the two year training programme and qualified with a teaching certificate as NT and had in-service training of the 1971 curriculum. The changes which occurred in the 1970s were well established when Patricia was in college. The 1971 curriculum formed the basis of her training. The course she followed was a three year one leading to the degree of B.Ed.

For Ultan and Ray, primary teaching was a choice made after having had some years in other work environments. They underwent a teacher education programme - the mature students' course - introduced in the 1970s to offset a shortage of teachers. In the case of Norma and Fiona, the training was two years in duration and led to a qualification as a national teacher. They entered college on leaving second level and because the curriculum to which they were exposed in college was the same as that which was in use in schools when they were pupils, there was continuity. On the other hand, in the case of Ultan and Ray, their expectations of preservice teacher education tended to be frustrated by their experience of music and music education in college, where there was no traditional music and which they considered to hold little relevance to their lives. It can be seen that this, coupled with the earlier experiences reinforced the lack of allegiance to music education in the formal setting.

#### **5.4.4 The format of data collection**

The format of data collection is set out in Figure 5.1 below. The main study followed the format of the preliminary study (in 5.4.1). Each respondent was told that, following the observation

there would be an interview in which their views on their lesson content and method would be sought. It was suggested, that, where possible in order to facilitate recall, the interview take place immediately after the lesson. Classroom observation provided a valid means of entering into a collaborative relationship between the respondent and the researcher where agreed meanings can be negotiated and the legitimacy of the practice can be endorsed. In the present study, each interview was audio-taped and lasted between half an hour and an hour. The respondents were assured of confidentiality and were invited to have a transcript of the interview on which they could expand.

<b>Fieldwork</b>		
<b><i>Pilot study</i></b>	<b><i>Phase 1</i></b>	<b><i>Phase 2</i></b>
	Phase 1a) Interview 1 5 cases	Phase 2a) Creating narrative
	Phase 1b) Observation and interview 2	Phase 2b) Reflecting on narrative in an iterative process with the relevant literatures and discussion with tutors and colleagues
		Phase 2c) Interview 3 re. participants' views of their narratives

**Figure 5.1** OUTLINE OF FIELD-BASED AND FIELD-RELATED STUDY

#### ***5.4.5 The location in which the data collection occurred***

Within the school building, there was variety in the physical location in which the observed lessons took place. Patricia, Ultan and Ray worked in the classroom. Norma worked in a general purpose room and Fiona had use of the school hall. Only Ultan and Patricia worked with their

own class. In the case of Ray, as was customary for him in his situation, and by arrangement with a colleague) he had been timetabled to take two class groups, his own (fifth class and sixth class) in addition to third class and fourth class. Norma was preparing the group for a religious ceremony on the evening of the observation. Fiona was in the final stages of preparation for a music festival. Each of these arrangements formed part of the 'typical lesson' as agreed among the participants. The important feature of the observation was that minimum disruption would occur and that each respondent would engage in a lesson which was typical of practice, and not something out-of-the-ordinary.

#### ***5.4.6 The relationship between the researcher and the respondents***

Of the five respondents, three - Fiona, Norma and Ray - were known to the researcher as persons for whom music played an important role both in-school and out-of-school, although the nature and extent of this was not known prior to the investigation. Fiona had worked in the college at the time of the researcher's preservice teacher education and had met occasionally over a number of years at choral events. Norma and Ray lived in the researcher's home town and would have some acquaintance knowledge of the professional life of the researcher, particularly arising from the time the researcher worked as a primary teacher in a school in the town. Although this was not intended to be a feature, it had the effect of facilitating an early establishment of trust and making the initial contact considerably less difficult.

When Ray had been approached about the study and the expectations implicit in participating had been clearly outlined, he agreed to participate. In addition, he mentioned how his friend (Ultan) would be likely to show a keen interest in participating in the study. As Ray had indicated, Ultan showed interest when approached. Thus, Ray had made the initial contact possible and his endorsement of the study inevitably contributed to the establishment of trust and ease of contact in the case of Ultan.

Of the five teachers, only Patricia was not known to the researcher. She was recommended, in response to a request by phone for suggestions, by the school principal as a person who would be likely to be interested. It became apparent during the initial stage of the first interview that, in

the case of both researcher and informant, the absence of any prior knowledge was a little daunting. It became a feature of the initial stage of the data collection to offer reassurance that there was no element of inspection involved. Nor was there a lack of understanding of the context within which the teacher operated, since the background of the researcher included considerable experience as a classroom teacher.

#### ***5.4.7 The research journey***

During the initial stages of the research, the possibility of using video recordings of practice was considered. Indeed, as discussed in 5.4.1 above, a preliminary investigation explored this possibility with three respondents. It was decided by them that the introduction of video into the 'naturally occurring lesson' would be unhelpful and intrusive to pupils and teacher alike. Since that time, developments have occurred in technology and it could be possible to use recordings with discretion. The advantage of having a video recording of the lesson lies in the ease with which the post-observation interview could be conducted. Serving as a useful means of identifying those aspects of practice selected by the respondents as significant, it could also become incorporated into the research design. Selected excerpts could be shown and commonality and difference could become the basis of a group interview.

The study was conducted within a centralised system and using a prescribed curriculum. Although the faith group in the research was predominantly Roman Catholic, this was not intended to be a factor. Schools chosen were either convent primary schools, (as in the case of Fiona and Patricia), a Christian Brothers school (as in the case of Norma) or lay schools under management of the Roman Catholic clergy (as in the case of Ultan and Ray). In addition, each of the respondents had been brought up in the same [Roman Catholic] faith group and each had experienced preservice teacher education at Roman Catholic colleges. Given the history of education in Ireland, with the emergence of denominational education in the latter part of the nineteenth century, it could be argued that the study is biased towards providing a particular picture of practice, to the exclusion of other faith or non-denominational groups. As noted in 2.3.2 above, central to the Roman Catholic tradition have tended to be the promotion of religious hymns, the role of the school in preparing the pupils for communion and confirmation and also a



top-down tradition. With this in mind, there is the potential to replicate the study with these other groups, and to facilitate a comparison of commonality and difference among and between them.

Because of the nature of the investigation and its dependence on the availability of the respondents, the data collection occurred over a period of about two years. The narrative approach and the biographical perspective were central to the compilation of the stories and involved an iterative relationship with the data. During the early part of the analysis involving constant revisiting of the data, it became evident that there was a potential for a level of subtlety and nuance. This was crucial to the emerging thesis. While software packages (such as, for example NVivo) could have been useful in terms of organising and analysing the data, and were trialled, the decision to form categories without the aid of software packages was taken in light of the above considerations.

A major strength of the present study lies in its success in gaining access to the teachers' perspective. It has been argued in chapter two above that Irish music education has had a history of evaluation based on atomistic skills, on 'getting it right' and on an absolutist perspective promoted at a macro level. As is shown in the interpretative accounts, the respondents experienced the contribution of the inspectors who observed their practice as - in the main - limited, irrelevant and unhelpful. Consequently, the notion of a researcher entering a classroom to observe a lesson who was not interested in 'looking for mistakes' was arguably a challenge to the respondents. It was crucial to the investigation that *my* presence was seen in a different light. That this was achieved is evidenced by the fact that the teachers engaged fully with the process.

Much consideration has been given to the manner in which the observation data would be collected and presented. Examination of previous models of collecting and presenting such data revealed a tendency among researchers to predetermine the content and method employed by the teacher in the observed lesson and to assume a common practice bias. Because of the underlying thrust of the investigation (gaining access to the multiple realities of teacher practice), the tendency to apply a rigid structure to the observation has been avoided. The method considered most useful and appropriate was that advocated by Burns and Anderson, (1987) (as discussed in 5.5.1.2 below) whereby lesson segments may be characterised by three major components: the purpose of the segment, the activity format and the segment topic or assignment. This was found to have enough flexibility to capture the perspectives of five respondents working in five

different educational settings. At the same time it provided a framework within which five 'typical lessons' might be captured.

Similarly, when writing the interpretative accounts, the decision was taken not to use headings or subheadings. This was to allow the stories to flow and the reader to get a sense of the narrative. The stories fall into broad themes and it is intended that each can stand on its own as a portrait of practice in an idiosyncratic setting in Ireland. It would be interesting to replicate the study in another [national] setting and see what themes emerge from the interpretative accounts.

## **5.5 Organisation of data**

There were a number of stages in the organisation of data and these are outlined in the next section. The stages have included the transition from oral to written text, and the formation of categories from the data. In addition, issues of validity and triangulation have been addressed as well as the manner in which the findings would be presented.

### **5.5.1 From oral to written text**

During the process of organisation of data, the data from the interviews and the classroom observation have been treated as follows:

#### **5.5.1.1 Interview**

Using the technique advocated by Powney and Watts (1987, p.150) which aimed 'to represent speech reasonably closely to written dialogue' the convention incorporated as much as possible the utterances of the respondents with due account of fluency and coherence for the reader. Occasionally some of the dialogue was inaudible or indistinct, and the sign [...?] was used. The

general structure of the text 'allows for the dialogue to be read in a fairly direct way...and the level of punctuation detail is not always important' (ibid). Wherever possible, the emphasis has been on preserving the conversational style of the interviews.

#### **5.5.1.2 Observation**

In the present study, for the purpose of organisation of data, the lesson has been conceived as lesson segments where each lesson segment has been characterised by three major components (Burns and Anderson, 1987) as follows:

- the purpose of the segment:
- the activity format and
- the segment topic or assignment.

By using this way of organising the lesson into segments, it has been possible to enter the instructional environment with a framework within which to consider the routines of teaching, (Olson 1984) or to observe a repertoire of segment scripts, (Abelson 1981) any of which could be combined to plan and implement particular lessons. This way of organising the observation data has been helpful and has served useful too, as a means of applying consistency across all of the lessons observed. It has been noted (in 5.3.2 above) that the main purpose of the observation was to allow for an exploration of a relationship between an espoused theory and a theory-in-use, as well as to provide a starting point for the respondents to reflect on their practice.

#### **5.5.2 Formation of categories**

Following the initial stage, a second stage emerged which has involved the formation of categories within which the data could be presented and from which the research questions could further be addressed. Drawing on *inter alia* Shulman (1986), Woods (1987), Gudmundsdottir (1990), Clandinin and Connelly (1995) a framework for the organisation of the data was formed. To this end, the focus was on establishing, in the case of each of the informants, a 'story'

incorporating their formative experiences and their orientation to practice. Data were organised into categories as follows:

#### Formative experiences

In-school      primary, second level and third level

Out-of-school   home, community

#### Orientation to practice

The selection and organisation of musical knowledge

The teacher values, both cultural and personal

By organising the data into categories, as outlined above, it was possible also to include the context of practice, situating the formative experiences and the orientation to practice of the respondents in a 'social and historical context' (Goodson, 1997) and in the 'milieu of teaching' (Elbaz, 1983).

### ***5.5.3 Validity and triangulation***

As outlined in chapter four, (*cf* sections 4.3 and 4.3 above), a central feature of the study has been to gain access to the teacher perspective and to reveal the subjective realities of the respondents. In keeping with this, a further phase involved, in the case of each of the respondents, the creation of a narrative (phase 2a) which would capture their orientation to practice and their curriculum emphasis. Following this, each respondent received a copy of their story to read and comment on and a further interview ensued (phase 2c). There was unanimous approval to the stories and each respondent considered that the stories captured the content and thrust of the interviews and observations. Patricia was concerned about anonymity and I have removed the elements that would possibly identify her. Norma reminded me about the endorsement stories which, as an oversight, I had neglected to include. Ultan had given it to his daughter who said that 'he looked very well' in it. Ray was pleased too.

#### **5.5.4 Presentation of findings**

The interpretative accounts are presented as stories in chapter six. As described above, they were compiled from the first stage in the analysis of data and are based on a synthesis of the categories outlined above. The teachers' stories formed the basis for further interpretation of the data. This occurred at two levels, one, at intra-informant level which allowed for causality and the other, at inter-informant level which allowed for the emergence of relationships. Following Denzin and Lincoln (1998, p.191) who noted that qualitative studies were 'well suited to finding causal relationships', in the case of each respondent, the question of time was brought in as part of an explanation; prior events were assumed to have a connection, more or less clear with later events. Further, as observed by Denzin and Lincoln (*ibid*), 'causality is local, taking into account the particular context, the particular setting'. As such, it has been considered useful in the present study to focus on establishing a relationship between the formative experiences of each respondent in music and their subjectively held conceptions of music education, as espoused in theory and as expressed in practice.

Arising from this, a second stage emerged in the analysis which focused on inter-informant interpretation. This allowed for the emergence of themes in respect of classroom practice and orientation to practice. Using the stories as the basis of interrogation, the themes were organised under the broad areas of commonality and difference (as outlined in 4.2 above). The data support the notion that there is commonality in aspects of practice among practitioners working in a centralised system such as that pertaining in the Irish primary school system. As has been seen in respect of the Irish primary school context, (in chapter 2 above), the emphasis on prescribed practices in official curricula has historically tended to establish a culture of music literacy and performance in music education at primary school level. Similarly in respect of research on teacher practice, the emphasis has tended to be on the establishment of an objective regularity (as outlined in 4.4). The extent to which this persists in the case of the respondents is noted in the present study where, as will be seen in the analysis, commonality exists among all of the respondents in respect of transmission of the contents of the prescribed curriculum with an emphasis on music literacy and performance (as presented in 7.2).

However, it is also shown that, although commonality exists in respect of the establishment of an objective regularity, there are differences among the respondents in aspects of their professional

practice. Factors contributing to differences in practice have been identified in the literature as the official policy (3.2.1), teacher beliefs (3.2.2) and the ethos of the school (3.2.3). The analysis of data in the present study has provided evidence to support this and these are explored in 7.3 below. In addition, the analysis noted that, in the case of each of the respondents, to be a teacher of music also involved the selection of some teaching methods and the rejection of others. An examination of the multiple realities of practice occurred regarding the relationship between the formative experiences of the respondents and their orientations to practice. In particular, reference has been made to the values the respondents ascribe to the transformative power of music in their own lives and in the lives of their pupils.

Arising from this, a third aspect of the data analysis has emerged, one which has focused on gaining a balance between the establishment of an objective regularity and the subjective realities. In the literature review, (see 4.4 above) it is suggested that, in order to gain access to the teacher perspective within the parameters of a system such as that in the Irish primary school system, the significance of negotiating the relationship between the subjective and the objective is central.

In so doing, it is suggested that there are limitations in the research which focuses on the establishment of an objective regularity. Most notably, these limitations are caused by the fact that, while they reveal the extent to which teachers are implementing the prescribed curriculum, little is revealed about the causes contributing to tensions or difficulties or the ways in which, when working within the same parameters, their responses to the educational milieu may vary. Likewise, it is suggested that, by focusing on the subjective realities in isolation, the results tend not to take account of the commonalities that exist in teacher practice among those teachers working within the same educational context.

In this respect, the analysis has drawn on the Bourdieuan notion of reading across both subjectivism and objectivism. According to Bourdieu, (1990), subjectivism drew attention to the point that objectivist maps of culture (such as laws, rules and systems) edited out intentionality regulated by cultural contexts – that is, we can only intend what is available to us in a culture. From this perspective, the education system, the curriculum as prescribed and the construction of prescribed practices could be described as objective structures (Bourdieu, *op cit.* p.26) which produce people, their subjectivities and their perspectives. Consequently, it is suggested that every thing, object and idea within a culture only had meaning in relation to other elements in

that culture. This can be applied to the present study, where a connection is made between the practice and the context in which the practice occurs.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research question has been stated. The method and methodology have been identified. A rationale for using case study has been presented as has the use of observation and interview as a means of gathering data. The focus of the study has been described as gaining insight to the perspectives of teachers on their practice and to investigate to what extent formative experiences and the educational milieu can have on their relationship with music as a subject in the classroom. The way in which the organisation of the data takes place has been outlined. The use of story as a means of presenting the teacher perspective has been justified.

# ***The interpretative accounts: teacher stories***

### **6.1. Introduction**

In this chapter there is a presentation of an interpretative account of practice in the case of each respondent. As outlined in previous chapters, the emphasis has been on gaining access to teacher knowledge from the teachers' perspectives, having as its starting point the illumination of the teachers' perspectives of their classroom practice (as outlined in 4.3 above). In addition, it has aimed, like Goodson (1990) not to describe a model of idealised practice but to understand the practice in a context which was both social and historical. Using the categories described above (in sections 1.2.3 and in 5.5.2), an account has been presented of each teacher in which it is intended to expose the content and method of the 'typical lesson' and to make explicit the attitude of each respondent to the prescribed curriculum.



In the case of each respondent, the account is an interpretation drawn from the data which have been organised into two main categories. The first of these has included the formative experiences, involving the in-school and the out-of-school experiences (as discussed in 3.4 above). In describing the in-school and the out-of-school experiences, the differences between the formal and the informal contexts of learning are noted where relevant and methods and practices are noted (as defined in Green, (2001) and outlined in 3.4.2.2 above). In addition, the significance of a biographical perspective in research on teaching (as outlined in 3.4.1) has been recognised as well as an outline of the musical pathways taken by the respondents in the course of their lives (as outlined in 3.4.2.1). The second category is that of an orientation to practice (taken from Elbaz, (1983) and outlined in 5.3.4 above). This includes the selection and organisation of knowledge of the respondents as well as the values they tend to emphasise, at both a cultural and a personal level.

In the interpretative accounts, each person's perspective of their practice is presented, using where possible their own words. Each story starts with a quotation from the respondent which is considered to highlight the particular perspective of the teacher and which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter.

## 6.2 *Ray's story*

Ray is the eldest of a large family and in his late forties. With his brothers, he has been playing music all his life. He doesn't remember much about music in school, where the emphasis – particularly at second level – was on Latin and Greek, with little room for the arts. Outside of the formal setting of the school, he has been playing music with his brothers and friends regularly for years.

On leaving school, Ray spent three years working in his native town in the County Council offices. Following this, he was employed by the electricity supply board and moved to live in a town about fifty miles from home. During this time, he kept his links with home and especially with the musical groups he had formed with his brothers.

After having spent six years working in offices, Ray wanted a change. At that time, in the late 70s, a scheme was introduced in teacher education to offset the shortage in teachers. Under this scheme, people could enrol in colleges of education as mature students, and undergo an eighteen month course in preservice education. This appealed to Ray and following an entrance exam, he succeeded in gaining a place.

On qualifying as a primary teacher, Ray was employed for a few years in a variety of schools in the greater Dublin area. When a vacancy arrived in his home town, he applied and got a job in his alma mater. He spent eight years here and then moved as principal teacher to the rural school where he has remained ever since.

Ray has continued to play in music groups and has been a member of a traditional music group for fifteen years. The group meets weekly in a pub in his home town and the performers are constantly expanding their repertoire, swapping tunes and learning to play new tunes either by tape or from books and collections of tunes. Ray learned to read music when his daughter was learning to play flute.

Ray's philosophy that music is not just a school subject is evidenced in the emphasis he places on the 'social aspect to it'. In blurring the distinction between in-school and out-of-school activities, he wants music to be part of everyday life, a 'living tradition'. At the heart of this is his notion of music as part of the fabric of school and community. In order to achieve his goal, namely to make music accessible to everyone, he uses easily available instruments. Ray gets endorsement from the pupils, both past and present.

*I have a nice photo of them ... a couple of years ago at the Fleadh Ceoil<sup>1</sup> in Clonmel. They were sitting down on the kerb and they were busking... It's good, you know, when you go to the Fleadh, anyone can sit down on the road and play, busking.*

Ray is principal teacher in a four-teacher school in a rural area about ten miles from a market town. He described how the unity and sense of belonging is strong in the country school and this appeals to him on a number of levels.

Ray                      Firstly in the school it is like a big family and every child knows every other child. The seniors look after the smaller ones ...in the school yard as well.

This sense of cohesion extends to the wider community and Ray is impressed with the parental support and involvement in the promotion of opportunities for the children. This is noticeable particularly at extra curricular activities where he has an abundance of cars readily available to bring children to events. Through the agency of the Parents Council, parents organise events to raise funds for the school. This is true too of music where funds raised by

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<sup>1</sup> (pr. flah). 'Literally 'feast of music', referred to generally as 'fleadh', plural 'fleadhanna ceoil', or simply 'fleadhanna', and as a borrowed word in English, often 'fleadhs'. A non-commercial festival of traditional music.... its purpose is to give those interested in playing and listening to traditional music a chance to do both in the favourable environment of a village or town, usually one which has a strong affinity to the music. The fleadh is largely spontaneous but central to it are competitions in which young people of all ages compete in many instrumental, song and dance categories. Awards are trophies, medals and certificates. Solo and various multiple categories are catered to, the object being to provide a competitive edge and sufficient social interest to keep young people involved.' In Vallely, F. (1999). (Ed.). The companion to Irish traditional music. Cork University Press. (p. 134).

the Parents Council have helped to buy *bodhráns*<sup>2</sup> for the school. The area in which he works is 'very much steeped in the GAA'<sup>3</sup> and Ray describes this as the driving force of the whole parish. The GAA organises at county level the talent competition *Scór na bPáistí*.<sup>4</sup> He is pleased with the level of success attained by the school at this and also is proud of the extent to which the pupils have acquitted themselves at *Fleadhanna*<sup>5</sup> and other traditional music events in the public arena. In a sense this mirrors his own experiences with music where there is a particular blend of camaraderie. '[I]t is like one big family. It is camaraderie as well as the music and everything else'. He wants to pass on this opportunity to the children, to give them 'a chance'.

Ray related how there was musical activity in his own family, although he did not hear until relatively recently that his mother's family played in a céilí band. He remembers his father played button accordion by ear: '...a few waltzes and so on'. He remembers being handed a Hohner two-row button accordion at the age of nine. There were no accordion teachers available to him although he was aware of a vibrant culture of performance in the area. Ray was largely self-taught. He learned '*The Story of My Life*' from the radio, picking it up by ear. He played it at home, 'tipped around, learned the odd hornpipe, the odd jig and tunes from an old tape'.

For Ray, this experience in the informal setting was in stark contrast to his experience in the formal setting. In primary school he had a teacher who used to sing songs to them, including songs from nationalistic and military type repertoire, songs in English and Irish. The teacher did not play a musical instrument but Ray remembers 'he used to have a tuning fork and he had a stick and he'd rap out the beat'. He did sol-fa which Ray found 'soul-destroying'. Ray became involved in the performance of a musical in Primary school and he can remember the words to the songs to this day. In secondary school there was no music, 'no room for the arts'. On leaving school he joined the local amateur musical society for a year. 'They were stuck for men' and the patron of the musical society, a Roman Catholic priest was also

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<sup>2</sup> Bodhrán . A shallow, circular frame-drum with a skin of goat-hide. (in. Vallely, F. (1999). (Ed.) *The companion to Irish traditional music*. Cork University Press. p. 28).

<sup>3</sup> The Gaelic Athletic Association, (GAA) was set up to promote athletics, gaelic football and hurling among the 'poor' of Ireland. It was founded in 1884 during the Celtic revival movement. (See de Búrca, M. (1980). *The GAA, a history*. Dublin: Cumann Luthchleas Gael).

<sup>4</sup> *Scór na bPáistí*. A talent contest for children. De Búrca notes that , from the early 1960s, the GAA has adopted the basic concept of the parish GAA club 'becoming the focal point of leisure activities generally for the whole parish, young and old, male and female....and has branched out into participation in a whole range of cultural activities...[including] sponsorship of the *Scór* talent contests'. In de Búrca, M. (1980), p.231.

<sup>5</sup> *Fleadhanna* (fleadh, singular) festival of traditional Irish music. See footnote 1.

chairperson of the local hurling club of which Ray was a member. Not surprisingly, then, the priest would have known Ray and would have been aware of his interest and ability in music.

For Ray, teaching has allowed him to combine his interests in music and sports. Prior to working at his present school, he spent some time as a teacher in his *alma mater* and before that in a school in a suburb of Dublin. In the school in Dublin, when he started teaching he got involved in training the children at hurling and in playing at traditional music sessions. He also got involved with the parents on a social level.

Ray                   ‘...we used to have a sing along...every Monday night and I used to bring the old box. Then I used to come down home for weekends and I started to get stuff on tapes...I started to try to learn more tunes’.

He changed his two-row as he found it ‘a bit restricted as regards Bb, Eb and so on’. He got a three-row Hohner which he found gave him ‘more of a range’.

Ray’s preference was for traditional tunes but not exclusively. With his brothers he would ‘gig’. Their repertoire was eclectic and included popular music. They would ‘play every sort of thing, 50s, 60s, 70s, 80s stuff, everything, musicals, Cat Stevens...everything from folk to Elvis to a bit of country to a bit of everything’. His interest in music continued although initially he used to go to sessions and not play, preferring to pick up the tunes on tape. His experience of music in preservice teacher education was not like this. He had expectations that music would be performance-based, that there would be sessions and lessons to help develop skills in playing instruments. This did not happen.

Ray                   Really it wasn't a living subject if you like Mary. It was an academic subject... very very very ... really detached from... no enjoyment, no social aspect to it. It was just really academic. It wasn't very ambitious at all...I remember having a book Warburton. That's the book we had and I remember there was a cardboard keyboard, a pullout keyboard and we used to try to play, finger a few scales on it. That was the extent of it really. I remember then we had to do: ‘how would you teach rhythm to a first class or second class?’ And all I ever picked up from it was a few clapping exercises... ....and there were actual traditional musicians who while they were in [college] never played music...They played a few tunes outside, there were sessions here and there but they never got a chance to play when they were in college.

He felt that this was a waste of potential and he couldn't understand why the time was not used to provide the students with an opportunity to learn to play a musical instrument.

Ray            But I really felt that it would have been a great idea if for the two years we were there, somebody had said you must learn an instrument, while you are here, take an instrument up, either a whistle or a guitar. Maybe they'd have someone in the college who would teach. Let people be good or bad you know but give them a sort of a feel for the instrument. Well and good if they became some way competent, it would help them teach it later on. But there was nothing like that, you know?

For Ray, participation is central to music education. He considers it vital that children are exposed to music and are given opportunities to participate. In the school he organises music for concerts and for the religious ceremonies which occur during the course of the school year. There are two main ceremonies, communion at 2<sup>nd</sup> class and confirmation at 5/6<sup>th</sup> class. For communion he arranges guitar accompaniment for some of the hymns and for confirmation he draws on a variety of instruments, making use of everything from violins and flutes to tin whistles and *bodhrán*. The children love playing these instruments and contributing to the musical life of the school. 'They love performing'.

In addition to enhancing the musical life of the school through provision of such opportunities for the children to participate in, Ray spends a lot of time organising events at community level. This has included out-of-school activities. Outside of school hours, Ray has arranged that the pupils play in hospitals, in local halls, at concerts and at fund-raising events organised in the locality and further afield.

Ray is careful to foster a particular attitude to music in his school, where the pupils are encouraged to progress but within an atmosphere which places enjoyment at the forefront. In order to achieve this sense of progress, Ray has arranged the timetable to his advantage. The school is organised in four classrooms, each classroom consisting of two class groups as follows;

Junior-senior  
First-second  
Third-fourth  
Fifth-sixth.

He is a teaching principal and teaches the senior classes, (i.e. fifth-sixth class group). For music he combines one big group comprising of his own classes in addition to third and fourth classes. He arranges with the third and fourth class teacher that she takes

environmental studies for him in exchange. Although the double-class groups might be seen as a disadvantage, Ray has used his position as principal teacher to turn it to his advantage, effectively taking responsibility for half of the population of the school, with four of the eight class groups meeting regularly for music. The arrangement works well and allows for long-term planning in music. In effect, Ray has each child for four years in music, during which time he sees 'progress and huge changes'. As a result of this arrangement, the notion of family is further fostered, where music tends to become part of the fabric of the school with the older children helping the younger children.

Ray described how some of his past pupils continued in active pursuit of music. '... a lot of my class seem to be playing away...those who have gone on...' He has maintained contact with some of them and related how he regularly draws on their expertise to help out in the school. He has tried other teachers out but was less happy with them, finding that his past pupils can fit in very well with the ethos of the school, helping to create an atmosphere of participation, giving the children a feel for an instrument, regardless of their ability level. At the time of the interview, one of his past pupils was working in the school and Ray saw this as a 'success story'. The pupils were particularly responsive to him and were learning with 'no pressure on them; it is very relaxing'. Included too in the musical life of the school are opportunities for singing songs from a repertoire of Irish and English language songs.

Ray believes that music is important for the whole development of the child. In this respect, he is in agreement with the underlying philosophy of the child centred ethos of the curriculum (as discussed in chapter two of the literature review). Yet at the same time he believes that the rationale underlying the presentation of music in the official curriculum is divorced from the people. He contrasts this with other ways of engaging in music, particularly music which has a long tradition and which is connected to the people.

Ray                    The old music was traditional music handed down, like ...the Americans, even, the blues and all that ... it was all handed down. It was a living tradition you know ... handed down.

The sense of frustration he feels for the lack of awareness of music as a living tradition in the education system in Ireland is evidenced in his attitude to the inspectors who visit the school. One such story related how, it seemed to him, there appeared to be little logic apparent in their measurement of successful or desirable practice. He told the story of the 'double standards' in the case of two visits made by one inspector, one which was made to his friend

where the emphasis was on the stave and the dots and so on while in the case of the second visit, made to him, the emphasis was not on the aspects of notation.

Ray            A good friend of mine would do songs and stuff in school and would be very interested. A well-known inspector in the area - he has moved on now a few years -he came into the class. He didn't say a word anyway and came up to the board and drew the stave and the dots and so on and the usual, he said: 'what's that?' And one fellow stood up and said: 'sir we didn't do them sums yet'.

Ray described a visit to his school by the same inspector when the emphasis seemed to be on something different.

Ray            The same - it is so funny- I won't say double standards - but the same inspector came to me and he sort of said: 'oh my God what's going on here? ...or was he inferring what's not going on here? ...but the same fellow came to me in [the school] and - we had a mor thuairisc [general inspection] the same year - and I played the guitar and the kids sang a few songs *On a Wagon bound for Market, Dona Dona Dona* do you know that one? And they sang that. I played the guitar and they sang a few little songs and a few tunes with *bodhrán* players and everything and he found it all great.

Interviewer    You gave him a variety, is that it?

Ray            No reference whatsoever to what he was after putting on the board in the other class you know?...or never said 'oh, you never did a piece of that'.

This experience strengthened Ray's view that the official policy was out of step with the realities of the classroom and not worth pursuing.

Ray            So I really think from my point of view, Mary for my enjoyment and for the kids' enjoyment, I think the way I approach it is the way it works best.

In effect, Ray has devised his own curriculum. He is not keen on the official curriculum, having 'nothing to do with the curriculum whatsoever' and thinking it 'very tedious' for the children. He sees no relevance in the curriculum for his needs. While he rejects the official curriculum because it is very tedious for them, Ray has adapted some elements of the systematic and structured presentation of literacy recalled from his description of the textbook he had at preservice teacher education (Warburton above) and his plan for the year is laid out clearly.

Ray            I have this chart I give out first. I get them all...I put it on the booklist. It's on the book list every year, for my class, fifth and sixth.



For Ray, the musical activities he organises generally tend to depend on the instruments he has at his disposal. He wants to make music accessible to everyone. This has included making maximum use of a melodic instrument such as tin whistle in the classroom, not least because it is a relatively inexpensive instrument and one which he considers that everyone can learn to play. In addition, he uses home-made percussion instruments to develop the rhythmic sense. He recalled how, when he started teaching, he used to visit the butcher shop regularly for a consignment of bones, clean them up and use them as percussion instruments for the pupils. This year he has whistles and guitars and a *bodhrán*, last year silver flute, traditional flute, the year before that two violins and a piano accordion. 'It depends really on what is at home'. There is one *bodhrán* and he gives it to one of the children who has a feel for rhythm.

Ray                    One *bodhrán* one person. I try them out. Some people have rhythm and some don't. I find a few that are able to play it. I tip along with that. So we have a ready made band.

Ray starts everyone off on the tin whistle. He considers it important to give children a feel for the instrument, regardless of ability level. To this end, he follows a fairly formal structured system each year, which is progressive and sequential. At the beginning of the school year he puts a standard chart (as mentioned above) on as a requirement in the booklists. The chart outlines fingering positions for notes on the whistle and also has an outline of the major scale. He teaches the scale to the class by referring to the finger positions on the chart. The children practise identifying and locating the position of each finger on the whistle, note by note until they have become familiar with every note in the scale.

In order to check that everyone has mastered the positions, he examines the children by asking such questions as 'the top two fingers off, what note have I?' Then he teaches a tune, starting with simple dance tunes moving through polkas, jigs and hornpipes.

Ray                    I'd give them the notes of the particular song and those who learn the guitar, I'd give them some chords. I'd put it together and it's ...an enjoyable ...laid back ...informal sort of a session.

At the beginning 'there is a ferocious sound' but gradually the sound improves. Ray described how some classes come on in leaps and bounds. A few weeks prior to the interview, he started a jig.

Ray [I]gave them the notes and do it line by line on the board ...play it four or five times...So they are beginning to ...the gap is beginning to widen. There are maybe five, six or seven of them, eight nine ten who can make their way through the jig.

Ray explained that 'more or less all of the children can play A and B, C natural and Csharp. They are at that stage'. He had also started a hornpipe but found it 'tough going'. In order to make the notation accessible to the children, he explained how he used a system of looping clusters of notes at first. This is intended as an intermediary device and at the end of the year he dispenses with the loops and used the stave. His plan was to give out the music and have the notes grouped together,

Ray ...looped together and the notes that I want them to rest on I have a line under them. It is a very basic sort of rhythm at the moment. A few weeks in the last term, then, the last three or four weeks I'll try them then with the stave, you know... before they leave.

Regarding aspects of music education that he emphasised, Ray stressed the factors of enjoyment and extending the repertoire.

Ray Well, first of all the enjoyment of singing what songs we have learned and the enjoyment of playing the tunes that they know together. You know. They really enjoy that. So that is number one thing. And then I suppose .... and then extending their repertoire. Say with that polka they can put it onto their list. They keep a list of what they know. Extending their repertoire ...

He later endorsed this by including that while it was very hard to verbalise it, enjoyment and self-confidence were key elements.

Ray Enjoyment, self-confidence ...an outlet for them...building their confidence, all that, you know?

As mentioned earlier, one of Ray's concerns was to extend the children's repertoire. To do this, he has ensured that he has a number of tunes in different states of readiness, so that the children are familiar with some tunes and learning newer ones at the same time. This also alleviates any boredom which might be an off-shoot from drill or practice. He wants to avoid the situation whereby he 'flogs a song for six weeks and the kids are groaning "oh no"'. He likes to keep moving along a good selection of songs each year. In explaining his reasons, he drew on his own formative experiences.

Ray            Because...I often find...when I was learning the accordion, learning a reel, a difficult reel, I'd love the reel and would say 'I must learn that'. I'd get the music and then you are playing it for a while and by the time you'd have learned it off you'd never want to hear it again.

He wants to keep the interest alive and in spite of the fact that there is 'a big mix' of ability, he tries to ensure that everyone is kept involved.

Ray            And of course I have a big mix.....so sort of to keep a sort of pressure, move along and ...as I say, 'Mary can play a small little bit of whistle in this tune – we'll use that. John can play three chords and the lads sing' and so on.... and we can bring it all together and we have a sort of sit-around session. And you'll find in our school at break time some kids will come in and play whistle. Some take it very seriously.

Ray takes into consideration this 'big mix' and tries to cater for all levels of ability. Some of the children will never get it and some of them can play by ear without the notes. One of the benefits is the increase in their confidence.

Ray            It gives them confidence too, that they can learn a tune... off the board. And I suppose with every tune they are improving their skills at reading, that basic form of reading.

Children who had the option of achieving in music were 'in with a chance', particularly if they found other aspects of school challenging.

Ray            If there was someone who might not be that good at maths or Irish and could play a bit of music you know...One of the chaps there that I mentioned -he would academically now be weak and is excellent at the music you know. And he's in with a chance, you know?

Ray has even adapted the tradition of naming tunes after some of the pupils in the class. Of the pupil referred to above, he did this as a way of encouraging and acknowledging the pupil's effort.

Ray            I called the tune after him because he particularly is very, very keen. He is always playing it at home, the mother told me, and he'd play in there at break between subjects and when we go back into the classroom after break he's always playing. He is excellent, very musical.

During the observation of the 'typical lesson', which took place in Ray's classroom, the musical material was presented on the blackboard and on sheets which were distributed to each pupil. Ray described that this was common practice and that they worked from these on a regular basis. Each pupil played an instrument, working either individually or in small groups. During the lesson the class were starting on a new tune. Ray explained they would continue where they left off at the next lesson.

Ray            We will of course yeah.....and get the chords(?) for the guitar and add the rest to it. The lads more or less have the chords figured out themselves anyway just before we finished.

Ray's lesson was like 'a mini session. They were all tipping away'. Even when he was writing the tune on the board, and had given it out, before the lesson officially started, 'they were starting to [play it]...but they just pick it up very quickly'. During the lesson, pupils occasionally came up to Ray.

Ray            ...no, there is no pressure on them. If anyone likes to come up, they can. There are some then who would play on their own no bother. They are very enthusiastic, you know. You'd have others too but they'd be a bit slow about coming up. And others wouldn't have it as quickly as they would now. Then, they'd have it tomorrow, you know.

Ray was encouraged by this busy atmosphere which confirmed to him that the children were enthusiastic and enjoying the music.

Ray            It is not regimental in any way. As I say they are not a bit inhibited. No inhibitions whatsoever, tipping away playing you know.

Ray described the process like a language.

Ray            As I say they are very uninhibited a lot of the time, playing, you know. It really- to a lot of them anyway - it is just like another language. It is like speaking, you know... it is like speaking to them, in a way, you know, playing away to pass the time which is great now ...when it's wet. On a wet day now, when we keep them in, they'll be playing away.

Even when Ray was not directly engaging with the pupils, he was acutely aware of the progress they were making.

- Ray There are some then who'll even be jumping ahead of the posse you know, whose ears are becoming even more developed, the ear for music. And even after I played it then once or twice before I went to the music, the notes on the board, some of them are beginning to...you know... they would have a fair portion of the notes in their heads, you know...on the ear
- Interviewer And how would you know that, Ray?
- Ray You'd hear...I heard some of them trying it, you know... even before I had to stop, some of them you know...even, you know when I went over ... just talking to them for a minute or two, just during that few minutes when we were talking I could hear a few of them starting to pick it up.

Ray is keen that the children learn to read music and tries to look for signs that they are not depending solely on the ear.

- Ray A fellow in front of me, now [S....B.....] he was starting to play a couple of the notes, you know....
- Interviewer So he'd be like that in all the tunes?
- Ray Yeah. And it was obvious that he wasn't reading off the... you know....you'd have a few like that you know... they'd figure it out without looking at the board you know? And there are some who do that all the time then, who are very good on the ear. And of course then it can be a disadvantage. You'll have some then who won't want to submit themselves to the discipline of the notes. They'll say: 'oh listen, it goes something like this', you know.... and it might be inaccurate or whatever. Some people don't like to look at the notes of they want to be able to do it all by ear, you know?

The sense of solidarity and cooperation was evident among the children in the process of learning the tune and where necessary, Ray intervened to provide additional support.

- Ray Yeah. I try to get around to them, one to one, to see where they're stuck and so on. Some never pick up a whistle. A lot of them, now, the majority of them would play at home.

However, because of the number of pupils in the class, it is practically impossible to give individual attention each pupil.

- Ray As a matter of fact, you never get...if you are teaching it to one... you never get as far as three or four because they are sitting beside the one or two that know and they pick....those who are interested and those who are sort of ...but yeah, we'd show them the basic beat at the start and it is quite simple for the polkas and so on... and even the hornpipes. We are learning a hornpipe at the moment - The Plains of Boyle - for... the jig then, it's a difficult one but ...it is difficult for a while on the *bodhrán*.

In summary, where Ray's formative experiences were of two distinct types, one bracketed in formal methods and the other in informal practices, in his capacity as teacher he has drawn on both. He has succeeded in mirroring in school the atmosphere he found so appealing in

the traditional group with which he is associated. Partly this is attributed to ensuring that the sense of music as a living tradition is maintained, where the repertoire is constantly growing, that the children are enthusiastic and enjoying the challenge of learning new tunes.

He rejects the official curriculum on the grounds that it turns music into a set of prescribed practices, with no relevance to the lives of the pupils or to his own life. Everything he organises and initiates in the musical sense is underlined by his intention to make the connection between music and the lives of the pupils accessible. He ensures that there is a variety of instruments at the disposal of the group. As if preparing the children to take their place in sessions when they leave, he arranges for them to play at various times during their time in school. He believes that the pupils share his goal and he was encouraged by the fact that they are always tipping away. At the same time he expects them to practise and uses a strategy devised by him to examine their level of progress and to ensure mastery. Because he wants everyone to play the tin whistle, he has adapted the formal method of music literacy to suit his needs, and developed his own system of notation as a sort of intermediary device.

### **6.3 *Ultan's story***

In his early fifties, Ultan grew up in a small village in the 1950s. One of four children, he was the only child to show any interest in picking up the songs his father used to sing. Over the years, the family acquired a mandolin and an accordion. Ultan took possession of the mandolin and occasionally experimented with it, picking out some tunes on it. It was not until years later that he would play in public with any degree of confidence.

Ultan left school and got an office job with the national electricity supply board. Located about fifty miles from home, it was far from ideal for Ultan who had commitments to play sports in his home town. It was during this time too that he met Ray who was working in the same place. They would regularly arrange to travel to places around the country where there were live music sessions being held. At the time, Christy Moore and Planxty were particular favourites of his.

It was through Ray that Ultan found out about the possibility of enrolling in a teacher education course as a mature student. He was keen to return to his home place where he was heavily involved in coaching a hurling team and considered that teaching might provide an option to achieve this. In contrast, promotion within the electricity company would probably take him to a large city, where his contact with home would be more difficult to maintain.

As he had hoped, teaching afforded him this opportunity and, on qualifying, he got a job in a school near home. Some years later, he got a promotion to his present position as principal. His wife bought him a mandolin for his fiftieth birthday and he is currently learning to play this. He has maintained his contact with Ray and through Ray's encouragement he has succeeded in learning to read music. This has led to his membership of the traditional group where he continues to develop the skills and confidence in performance. He plays the banjo and mandolin in the group. He has also found an outlet for performing the songs he picked up from his father and to learn new songs from other members of the group.

For Ultan, music, hurling and the Irish language are connected to form something of a sense of place. He considers that school is a place where this bond can be strengthened. He believes that the official curriculum can serve the children and the community well if it can be used to nurture this sense of place. He wants to make the connection tangible and to replicate the informal approach to music with which he grew up. He is conscious that he might be a bit 'one-tracked' in his emphasis on traditional Irish music.

*I do a good lot of fly fishing on the old river and I remember when I was younger we always thought that Jaysus the lads who do fly fishing, like it must be some kind of an exclusive art that only a few are chosen to be able to handle it...and we sort of always had a notion that the guys would be able to tie up flies, fishing flies. So now we are all doing it and there is no big deal about it at all. But it is amazing how... sort of... one could have this preconceived notion and when you are really dragged into it and it's done in front of you and taken nice and handy, there isn't that mystique around it at all.*

Ultan is principal teacher in a six-teacher rural school of about 165 pupils. The school has seen a drop in enrolment since it reached a height of 249 pupils in 1989, and Ultan attributes it to the fact that the village is close to a market town which attracts a wide variety of employment and life style choices. Musical life in the village is rich and varied and includes set dancing, traditional music and an interest in light opera. In addition, the village is home to an abbey in which there is an adult choir and a folk choir. Both choirs are directed by teachers with past associations with the school. Some of the pupils in the school are members of the folk choir.

Ultan emphasised the local and the sense of place.

Ultan            Let it be history, let it be geography or let it be nature study ... I think it is a terror if the kids don't know the name of the trees that are planted outside the front of the school and they could tell you all about the hardwood forests of Bosnia.

He is particularly keen that the school reflects a sense of place in the village. The school gets involved with raising money for the school including a sponsored swim, traditionally held on



St. Stephen's Day (Boxing Day). He wants the children to experience the sense of place in the school.

Utan I think it would be a terror if the children left the school and didn't know as much as they could about the Abbey below in H-----. Everyone knows about other aspects of Irish history. I am just simply saying that it is relevant to their own lives and their own place Mary.

Utan is conscious of his role as a principal.

Utan I suppose it is rooted in my own experience that ... I always felt as a teacher that a lot of what happens in the school, particularly as principal, reflects your own views on things, and maybe a bit of your own personality. For example, I always loved the old hurling and I promote it strongly in the school. I would imagine that if I were into basketball, as the principal I'd say basketball would have a certain priority in the school. And likewise with other aspects in the school. I always have this genuine liking for Gaelge - and while we don't spout it at every hands turn, we have a fairly firm base of Gaelge in the school. And I suppose that to a degree reflects my own views of it as well. That is not to say that I'd impose that on anyone in the school but it kind of filters through.

This notion of filtering permeates throughout his approach to music education. It can be seen in the way in which he takes care to promote a sense of enthusiasm about music.

Utan I'd kind of half hope that they would pick up my old enthusiasm for it off my own participation in music. Sometimes we'd be doing it a little like, I'd say: 'by God isn't that some stuff. Look at this. Wait till you hear this'. And I would be kind of enthusiastic for it. It is the same way in the bit of hurling I'd be doing with them Mary, or the Gaelge.

He presumes that during their time in school the children will have been exposed to lots of different types of music and those aspects he neglects to cover, the other teachers will compensate.

Utan I don't know ...sure maybe, in the course of time they will Mary...and, as I say...I do know now that the other teachers would in the various classes have exposed them infinitely more to that than I would.

While Utan appreciates the type of choral music performed by the choir in the Abbey, he considers himself somewhat unworthy of a deeper appreciation of it. He favours traditional music himself and says it is the genre with which he is comfortable. His hope is that, at the

completion of their time in primary school, the children will have a repertoire of jigs, polkas and a reel:

Ultan ...that they would know the difference between a reel and a jig and a polka, and that maybe it would inspire them later on to improve themselves and become accomplished.

He knows that some of his past pupils have done so, and takes pride in this. In a sense this confirms the objective to which Ultan aspires, namely that he would 'have made a contribution to their ...lives afterwards'. Conscious that there are many facets to music and anxious to expose the pupils to a variety of experiences, he wonders whether his approach is 'one-track' meaning they don't get as much exposure from him in areas of the music curriculum such as listening to recorded music.

Ultan Maybe I'm sometimes conscious that they will never get to know that the world is much bigger than that. But sure they will I suppose in time.  
Interviewer Well, what would they have...what do you think they are missing out?  
Ultan Maybe a bit of old classical, maybe listening to a bit of old classical music or knowledge of the old orchestral pieces or...  
Interviewer Right, and what would you think they'd get? How would that benefit them?  
Ultan Maybe if they saw that Jesus, look there's a whole bigger world of music out here. We've a narrow little...

Ultan sees a connection between hurling and music. He described it as 'nearly a spiritual thing', and something with which he grew up. For Ultan, the sense of place in the school setting mirrors his own experience. Having grown up in a village steeped in GAA, the village is the centre of activity for him. It is as if the song galvanises the village together. Part of this power he believes comes from the fact that a song has the power to tell a story which is associated with the community. The association of this is something that was always part of his life, for as far back as he can remember.

Ultan So I always sort of grew up with the thing that the song sort of like that type of song is nearly a spiritual thing. It is a bit like hurlers talk about spirit...and this thing a dressing room, this spirit, this thing that you can't quantify, that is not tangible, that you can't measure but is continuously referred to as spirit...spirit in a team, or lack of spirit in a team.

According to Ultan, music shares something of the same spirit.

Ultan And I think music must be close enough to that. Somehow maybe it is as near as you can get to vocalising or quantifying this spirit thing.

According to Ultan, this spiritual bond is palpable and strong and can permeate the village. In the music context, he is particularly keen on song. 'I think the song tells a marvellous story' ...and 'is nearly a spiritual thing'. Ultan makes the connection between hurling Irish and music explicit. Drawing on his own experience, he describes the importance of a particular song with which is associated and how, at times of celebration in his home village, when the supporters of the local team would gather in the centre of the village to greet their team on arrival home with the winning trophy, they 'all invariably chant for it'.

Ultan                   And I end up singing this song off the top of a lorry and you would hear a pin fall in the [centre of the village] and you would definitely know that it touched their soul...They'd come out with half empty and half full glasses and you would hear the old pin fall and you definitely would see them with arms around one another while the song would be going on.

In his teaching, Ultan wants to pass transmit some sense of this powerful association between a song and a sense of place to his pupils. To this end, he has provided a sort of anthem for the school, based on the tune of a well-known song and the words of a poem about the locality. Evidence that this anthem succeeded in providing a spiritual bond for the pupils was found in the extent to which it stays with them, even long after they have left school. He recounts how, some fifteen years later, some of his past pupils still remember that song and associate it with the school.

In contrast, Ultan's own formative experiences in school did not have the same impact on him. Rather than forging a bond, he described how the music experiences seemed alien and remote to him. Ultan went to an all boys' school in a small village, similar in size to the one in which he is teaching. As was fairly typical at the time, music was taken by a female teacher.

Ultan                   They swapped over. The master had no music whatsoever whereas she did. So he went upstairs maybe once a month and it was a big sneering session when she came down to us. And we seized the opportunity to go to town. Shameful now I have to say.  
Interviewer        The poor woman!

He described how the methods used by the teacher used to mystify him and how irrelevant the whole experience seemed to him.

- Ultan           And I'll always remember she used to go (sings with hand signs) s-m-d and it gave us ample opportunity to display loads and loads of sneering and ignorance, which I have to confess we did!
- Interviewer    You don't do that yourself now.
- Ultan           No, but ... God ... she did ... she gave us ... those of us who liked the old few songs, we learned a few from her but it was all the old tonic sol-fa which I always found a bit confusing anyway but God knows there probably is loads of valid reasons for them, and I keep looking for them, but why the tonic sol-fa should be there the other way of reading music is there.
- Interviewer    The dots?
- Ultan           Yes.

Outside the school setting, his own formative experiences in music were predominantly informal. He learned songs from his father who learned them in turn from his mother who was 'a lovely old singer and she gave him an awful lot of old songs' which he in turn gave to Ultan. As a result, Ultan has 'heaps of old songs'. Ultan believed that he has learned the traditional values from his father and without the transmission of songs, many of them would be lost. He described the process as follows:

- Ultan           He used to sing them and I'd pick them up. I'd memorise the old words. I have old songs that would probably be dead and gone definitely I'm certain they'd definitely be dead and gone if somebody didn't sing them....He couldn't read but he had a great old ear or it and he would say no, no, no Ultan, you are singing that wrong. It goes like this. And I'd pick it up.

Ultan recalls how later he appreciated the songs as telling a story.

- Ultan           I always felt that, especially when I went on a bit that if the old songs ...survived that long they must have a great old story to tell. And when I listen to them, a lot of them would be of the locality...they have a lovely story and it is just like the seasons, the old story doesn't change.

Secondary school doesn't feature to the same degree of prominence as an influence in his formative experiences in music education as does his primary school. Apart from the fact that the family acquired a mandolin and an accordion, Ultan's memories of this time could be described as unremarkable. Having left school, he worked for five years and continued his interest in traditional music. In his spare time, during the week and at weekends, he would travel to hear traditional music being played at venues throughout the country. Occasionally he would bring his mandolin to the sessions but did not play an instrument there, 'nothing in a sort of a worthwhile way'.

Like Ray, Ultan decided to become a primary school teacher relatively late in life. He described how a motivating factor was that, on qualifying as a teacher, he could move back to his native place where he would be able to continue with his love of hurling. He considered the music he experienced in college not to be 'relevant to traditional music.' He described how the focus on keyboard skills and being required to 'handle the old piano keyboard in a number of keys'. Although Ultan learned songs by ear and had a large repertoire, he regretted not having had the chance to learn music literacy. The lack of this ability became increasingly apparent when he tried to take up the banjo. He described how he was helped in demystifying the notion of music literacy.

Ultan            Going back to my own school-going experience, when we were going to school and that is back in the 60s, the early 60s and late 50s, we never actually had the opportunity to develop any level of musical literacy. And when I subsequently tried to get the old banjo going and maybe try to be part of the traditional group that plays in the [local pub], I had to fall back on [Ray] great old friend of mine to demystify the whole notion of musical literacy and sit me down and show me the five lines and the four spaces and produce an old jig and enable me to slowly read off the old jig. And I can read now.

There was also a question of confidence attached to playing and a sense in which one became accepted as an interpreter of the song. Ultan described the process by which he eventually was accepted as a worthy member of the group.

Ultan            [Ray] dragged me into his own house and went to great trouble showing me the old playing it with me and giving me enough confidence to eventually go in... and I'll always remember M. C---y. He used to play the drums inside and he would be a real connoisseur of an old song and I was only going in a couple of nights and didn't I have the misfortune of sitting beside M. And then someone said Ultan will sing an old song now and he said go on so till we hear you

It was like an initiation ceremony and Ultan was being asked to prove his ability.

Interviewer    A sort of test, a test piece?

Ultan            Exactly. And I sang the song and when it was over I was very conscious of what M.'s reaction was going to be and he tapped me on the knee and he says By Christ, he says, as good as ever I heard. So I was delighted then. It really did an awful lot for one's confidence.

Because Ultan had to struggle so much with music literacy, he tries to ensure that his pupils will not have to contend with similar obstacles. In this regard, he believed 'that the curriculum would serve the school community well if children would have the opportunity to leave the school with some bit of musical literacy and maybe an appreciation of music'. He

considers these to have value for the children and is keen that the children are given many opportunities to acquire skills in music literacy. If children could read music they would be able to pick up tunes and thereby develop a sense of independence and autonomy as musicians.

In order to promote the development of music literacy in his students, Ultan has adopted the following strategy.

Ultan I'll tell you what I do whether it is heresy of the worst type or not I don't know. Say when we get the old five lines and the notes written on them ... I allow them to put a letter under the note and in order to facilitate them a bit more in the beginning then rather than having the actual notes I would put down the letters

Interviewer And they can all follow those?

Ultan They can follow them yeah. They can find them on the old instruments and they can follow them. But I'd hope now as we go along that at the end of the year we might be able to just have the old lines and maybe wean them off the letters.

Ultan described how there was a voluntary aspect to membership of the Irish traditional music group in his class. Of the class - twenty eight pupils in all, - the tendency was for the boys to choose to play hurling in the morning with the girls opting to play music. Ultan notes that 'some boys have done it too, but not many'. He likes this because he doesn't want a situation to arise where music education becomes like 'flogging a dead horse, where there might be lads in it that haven't their hearts in it' and are only wasting his time and theirs. Generally, these music experiences happen at breaks during the day, 'slotting it in during the day, ten minutes in the morning'.

Regarding instrumental music, resources in the school include an accordion, a piano, a fiddle and whistles. The children bring in their own instruments on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. They play in groups, largely voluntary and self-directed, traditional music during breaks and in the morning before class starts. During the school day, at Ultan's suggestion, they might occasionally take out the instruments to break the tedium of the day. In other areas of learning, music has found a place too. Vocal music is used to enhance stories in history. Ultan picks out songs that are relevant to the stories. As mentioned earlier, he has adapted the words of a song to make it fit the school as a sort of school anthem. In this sense he tends to combine a sense of lived experience and aspects of the prescribed syllabus in his approach to teaching.

Ultan uses music in the timetable as a means of breaking the routine of the day.

- Ultan We try to sort of break them out of the sit down classroom routine for the old bit of music.
- Interviewer So, why would you do that?
- Ultan I don't know, I suppose, Mary... I'd say maybe there is a bit more freedom when they are out of their desks....even if they want to stamp their old feet or move their old shoulders around a little bit. I suppose... I suppose I think the actual physical sort of semi-circular shape of their, of where they are ...does it lend itself nearly better to the bit of music rather than they sort of sitting in their places....

It is a strategy which Ultan uses in other areas of the curriculum. When asked whether he would do that with other subject areas, for example geography or history, he explained.

- Ultan The only thing is we would move them out, we do move them out of their places now regularly for dramatising an old bit of Gaelge or an old English poem or an old Irish poem. They could be standing on top of desks or they could have a chair this way.

The potential of the song to illuminate aspects of the complementary aspects in the curriculum was a factor in Ultan's choice of repertoire.

- Ultan The old history book I use is a little one called *Past Times* and it kind of chronologically goes through the history, the history programme in sixth class. That sort of suits me in my [particular?] situation. To each event in history right up until 1916 there's an old song attached.
- Interviewer It's a great way of making it come alive, isn't it?
- Ultan I think it is. We dramatise the old history as much as we can too Mary. We could go in there now and could act out the Michael O Dwyer scene in *The Glen of Imaal*. And have the shots going and the lads in the corner and they firing shots and lines. And they do the actual... they dramatise the old poem because they actually know the entire poem, the Michael O Dwyer poem of *The Glen of Imaal*.

Part of the success for the notion of solidarity and enjoyment is based on the leadership of some key pupils. He didn't want the pupils to feel as if they were staying in against their will, preferring to snatch a few minutes in the morning and a few minutes at the break and at lunchtime. Ultan acknowledged that R...., a keyboard player was 'the cornerstone of the whole thing...a 'smashing kid every way'. When Ultan was playing hurling with the boys, the girls would assemble in the general purpose room and organise a rehearsal among themselves. He relied on R..... to organise the practice.

Ultan described the effect of this strategy of the voluntary approach which he fosters in the school.

Ultan            I could be trying to deal with a parent or up in the old office and I'd hear the old bit of music going along outside [which is] nice.

It served as an indicator that the pupils were enjoying music, and at the same time putting in the effort and working collaboratively. It reinforced his aim that the children were enjoying participating and encouraged him to continue with his strategy of 'freedom' rather than coercion. The sound of the children playing justified to him the success of his own goal. 'Because they want to, they do it'. He described what the alternative might be like.

Ultan            ...if I kind of, kind of maybe forced twenty of them into it...there'd be mayhem and they'd go to town and they'd be messing and fooling.

Music is good for achievement for all the children, not just those who are academically bright.

Ultan            [Pupil A] is an old divil of a lad there and he hasn't got a note no more than a crow, the craythur. Jesus he loves it. His two little old eyes light up when we'd start it and he's in the thick of it.

He wants all the pupils to participate. In this regard, he accepts that there are varying degrees of participation, ranging from the efforts of those children who are clapping their hands without producing a note to the leader who organises the sessions in between formal lessons. He tries to encourage all efforts, and believes that, by drawing on the more confident and proficient players to perform for those who are less sure, he can help to achieve this.

Ultan            Even some of them there wouldn't have...hadn't a notion. To them now the clapping of the hands is partaking in the thing without producing a note but partaking in it....the ones with the better voices would get the opportunity to let the ones with the lesser voices hear them and the others would appreciate it then as well...

During the lesson, there was evidence that the children had strategies for identifying different types of time signature. This was particularly apparent in terms of recognising a jig. Ultan explained the method he used for checking whether the pupils could distinguish between dances. Typically, he would sing part of a reel and tap the four beats 1-2-3-4 and then ask the pupils: 'right lads, what am I humming now? Is this a jig or a reel?' I would try to draw the old distinction between the jig and the reel'.



Ultan found working with songs a little different to working with instrumental dances. He explained that, whereas the differences between a jig and a reel were relatively easy to discern and describe, in the case of the songs performed during the lesson which was observed, the rhythmic aspect didn't appear to be very obvious.

Ultan            A lot of the old songs now that I have mentioned and the things I was trying to do there wouldn't be a great deal of rhythm or definitive beat to it. So I sort of felt that maybe it was a little old area now where we could introduce some sort of a thing that would accentuate a beat.... 'Tisn't so much, like... as they said, some of them described it as a nonsense. The words aren't of any great consequence at all and sure the little old tune is modest. But definitely there is a ...1-2-1-2 and so on

In spite of this, he worked at getting the children to focus on the 'beat or the rhythm'.

Ultan            ...and that was if you like the thrust of that old lesson to try to get them to recognise the beat or the rhythm. That we could put in any old words and we could call it 'Fine day, fine day' instead of the old nonsense words that are in it, that are in the song, Mary.

Interviewer    And you got them marching as well, didn't you?

Ultan            And a bit of marching. Exactly yes. That was the purpose. I suppose that was the purpose of that.

During the lesson there was also use made of percussion instruments, 'every kind of a yoke' from those in the school percussion instruments and others which have been accumulating over a period of time.

In summary, Ultan sees the importance of transmitting the contents of the prescribed curriculum and believes that during the course of their time in school, the pupils will have been exposed to a wide variety of musical experiences. For his own part, he wants to ensure that the children get a good grounding in their own tradition and leave with a sense of place. He draws on his own formative experiences -particularly those at an informal level - to justify his position.

## 6.4 *Fiona's story*

Now in her late fifties, Fiona has been involved in music all her life. Her parents were interested in music and created opportunities for her to take part in musical activity from an early age. Formal piano lessons were provided for her from the age of six and continued throughout her schooldays, culminating in the attainment of a teaching licentiate during her first year in college.

Her experience of choral singing started in school and she was introduced to Latin motets at the age of ten. The convent school which she attended had a strong emphasis on music and it was through the nuns that her exposure to classical music and traditional Irish music occurred. Fiona sang in the school choir (SSAA) and played button accordion in a céilí band during her time in secondary school. The band rehearsed during school holidays and, with them, she travelled to the US. The band also appeared on national television in Ireland. She continued with the band until she left school and became a student teacher in Dublin.

Following her qualification as a teacher (in 1968), Fiona joined the staff of the school in which she currently works. Over that time, whilst teaching, she has developed her interest in music, graduating with a BMus in 1972 and a postgraduate qualification in teaching at second level. She has also taken lessons in harp and singing. She had planned to undertake postgraduate study in music education but had to abandon it for personal reasons.

Fiona expressed a keen interest in music education at primary level and in the school in which she works in particular. Now in her late fifties, she spends much of her time working with those pupils from the school who show promise as singers. She devotes a lot of time to this outside school hours.

In replicating the musical content and teaching methods she experienced in her own life, Fiona has replaced the musical culture of the area in which the school is located. She emphasises choral music, with a repertoire taken from Anglo-Irish and western art music.

She draws on syllabuses prescribed at Feis Ceoil<sup>6</sup> and other competitive festivals. Fiona believes that school can provide experiences for the pupils which would not normally be available to them. There are structures, at both institutional and municipal level in place which serve to support and scaffold the musical space she has created. Concerts and festivals, competitions and tours promote the 'sense of the good' afforded by music.

*But one time...this is a funny story...we were working - in the choir - we were working on words especially the t at the end of the words and there was a girl in the front row who just wasn't getting it and I was getting her over and over to say it and somebody along the line was getting a bit fed up listening to me so she said up to the girl Lisa Jane, she said, you're saying it common, will you say it posh? And the girl got the message straight away.*

Fiona's formative years were spent in a rural village four miles outside a city on the west coast of Ireland. Support for music was encouraged at both in-school level by the nuns and out-of-school by her parents. Fiona described the nature and extent of her early musical activities as follows:

Fiona            There was one nun in particular who was very gifted with music and she tended to take the singing from about third (class) up so we got a great grounding and a great love for music you know and a lot of Irish music but all kinds really, a great love and also then that teacher ingratiated us into the Church choir and we had Latin motets and everything. We did it from an early age.

Following her secondary education, Fiona studied to become a primary teacher in a college in Dublin. At the time, the course lasted two years and led to a qualification of National Teacher (N.T.). This course was one of pedagogy in the main and unlike its successor, the B.Ed. there was no liberal arts course of study attached. On coming to Dublin, she continued her musical studies both within the college and in the college of music in the city. These studies were extensive and included lessons in voice, harp and musicology.

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<sup>6</sup> Dublin Feis Ceoil (festival of music). Originally set up in the late nineteenth century to promote Irish music, today the Feis Ceoil is used as a platform for student performance from a variety of genres and styles. (See also the author's (2004), p.77f. for an account of the context in which the Feis Ceoil was established).

She described her memory of different approaches in performance practice, most notably that used in the oral transmission of traditional music and that used in western classical teaching. Regarding the transmission process in traditional music, she described how the teachers had their own system of numbers to help in the teaching of the button accordion.

Fiona            Well ... you know the way they press in the notes and draw...they would number the notes, the keys, the little buttons. And if you were pushing the accordion in, there was a little dot, and if you were pulling it out, there was a line. So it was push and draw. They had their own system.

She felt this method suited everybody, particularly those who, unlike her, did not have the advantage of having a musical background.

Fiona            ...if you have a musical background you'll pick up anything. But the others who had no musical background picked this up. It was a very simple way of getting the...of teaching.

She described the extent to which learning by ear was used.

Fiona            Now, they didn't teach you note values or anything like that it was just simply what were the notes. But of course you'd pick it up by ear and...if you hadn't a good ear there wasn't much point in doing it anyway!

In contrast, she described how, in the classical genre, there was less emphasis put on such oral transmission. Rather, the emphasis was on notation. Fiona's main interest is in western art music but, as she explained, her experience extended also to music in the oral Irish tradition.

Whereas her own schooling took place in a rural area on the west of Ireland, the school in which Fiona teaches is in an inner city location on the east coast. In this sense, it is markedly different from her earlier experience. However, she considers the school to be very significant in terms of music. Over one hundred years old and designated disadvantaged, the school in which she teaches originated from a need to 'cater for the poorest of the poor' in the city. With the exception of some absences due to career break or for study purposes, Fiona has been there all of her working life which, at the time of the interview was in excess of thirty years. For as long as she can remember, there has been a great emphasis put on music in the school. She attributed it to the convent-school culture.

Fiona            I think in general where there are nuns they have always fostered music. That is my experience, from my own school, and then, when I came here the nuns fostered music.

Her own formative educational experiences were based in a school in a Roman Catholic tradition and under management of a religious order of nuns. Her overall impression was that she came into the primary school 'with a very good background to teach'. The school has created opportunities which include visits from the BBC Philharmonic and taking part in programmes organised by the Outreach section of National Concert Hall. Perhaps the most significant contribution has been the formation of a choir and the creation of opportunities for the pupils to participate in festivals throughout the country. She needs to have a goal to work towards and preparing the choir to participate in the festival allows this to happen. She differentiated between the musical life of the children outside school and the music they do in school.

Fiona            They would do the stagey stuff like the stuff from musicals and ...just songs...stagey songs... and tap-dancing and that kind of thing.

Fiona has seen changes in the milieu over the course of her time in the school. She described how, when she first arrived to teach in the area,

Fiona            ...the children would come in and say can I sing for you and they would have all kinds of tap-dancing and...they loved it. They just loved it.

After a while, and having been introduced to a different experience in school, the pupils learned to adapt.

Fiona            But once...whenever we did choir and did the good stuff they always loved it. And the parents love it.

She felt that, although there were differences between music experienced in the in-school setting and that experienced in the out-of school setting, the parents were well disposed to the work she was doing in the school.

Fiona            If the parents are out for a night, say in the pub they'd sing all types of things and they'd really let their hair down but they just seem to appreciate the nice stuff as well.

Although she is employed as a generalist teacher, Fiona's qualifications are such that she really is a music specialist. Fiona has a post of responsibility which includes providing music for religious ceremonies, most notably communion and confirmation. She prepares the children for singing at these. This is done by a group different from the choir and since it is held outside school hours, on a Saturday, is on a voluntary basis.

Fiona We usually get a good turn out. A lot of them would be from the choir. Some of them would not be from the choir. But anybody who turns up is welcome. That is the way we work it.

In contrast, the school choir is very formal and membership comprises about fifty girls from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class, chosen by audition at the beginning of the year. Rehearsal time is precious.

Fiona We have one hour a week for choir on a Tuesday...it isn't really an hour either...it is about three quarters of an hour...I don't teach notation as such because it is just an hour a week and my main thing is to get the songs done with them. If I had them every day of course I would do loads of that. But that is supposed to be done in the classrooms and ...I'd see the notation on the board so obviously they are doing it.

Fiona is conscious of the particular role music plays in her pupils' lives. Music is a 'great outlet for them' and provides a source of enjoyment for them.

Fiona The inner city community is very close knit. I have seen the difference it has brought. There is so much enjoyment from it...when they finish school...the enjoyment music and art can bring to them.

In addition, she is conscious of the role of the school in providing such a musical experience.

Fiona I think any ...any children...any children like good music if they get it. You know if they grow up with it, if it is inculcated in them in school.

In particular, she considers this to be very true in the context within which she works, namely the inner city. She explained how she hoped to change attitudes through the use of good music, by which she meant '[the] sort of stuff we would do for Feis Ceoil and ...in general ....you know, they would be in a classical vein'. Although this music was different to the music they did at home, she felt they appreciated it, not least because it opened up possibilities for them in their life outside school.

Fiona Because I can't see that a lot of them are going to go into third level and ...you will get a few here and there going in but I hope that will change.

She believes that the children are getting a great experience here going to Feis Ceoil and song festivals where they have a chance to see other choirs in action and interact with them. Fiona was proud of the achievement of the choir.

Fiona They have a sense of rising to an occasion. Whereas they might break your heart during the year a bit, they do rise to the occasion when it comes to the...and they are really all about their business when they go and they are very good at observing other choirs. We have that instilled into them... they are out to enjoy themselves, and to really enjoy the day and to listen to other choirs.

In addition, they are often called upon to perform at events organised at a local level, whether at civic receptions or as a showcase choir.

Fiona They sometimes sing in concerts in the local area and are called upon now and again and it is a great sense of pride. The choir were delighted to be asked and the organisers of local events wanted to have them in it, so there is a pride in it.

The role of the school is critical in the inner city because, in Fiona's view, it is not in the culture of the people in the area to avail of the opportunities at a formal level.

Fiona It is going to take a long time to change that because it is very hard to change social and cultural backgrounds, you know ...it just takes a while. It is not in their culture to go on to third level which is a pity, but I think gradually now they will....you know ...a few go every year.

In this sense, music 'is a great outlet for them'. Fiona described her orientation to practice as follows:

Fiona I think the whole thing is to have them actively involved...and I think there should be a great emphasis on songs, on music making and I think the notation and all that should spring from that you know.

When asked to elaborate on how this could be brought about, Fiona explained further:

Fiona What I mean is ...take out the notation, teaching it in an isolated way without the nice song singing to back it up is probably .....won't catch on. I think if you have them singing and enjoying music then you can take out ..if you have a simple song ..take out something simple to illustrate the notation. What I mean is ..say now when I used to have second class and teach them the three line stave. Whenever we had a simple song I would then say let's see now how we would write that. And they would work..... I'd get them to work out the beats, the half-beats...

When she worked as a classroom teacher, she adapted a similar strategy.

Fiona In the classroom situation, to teach notation I would always try to use a song with notation we are learning at the time or I would get a simple song to back up what I was...and I would get them to work it out and I found that was great.

When Fiona was a classroom teacher she used to try to incorporate the technical aspects into her teaching, not in an isolated way but within a context that was relevant to the children.

Fiona           OK, you can do it in isolation as well and just do exercises in note values but I always liked to relate it to something we were doing if I could. It wouldn't always work out. But I found that makes it very interesting for them.

Now that she works with the choir, her repertoire is the Feis<sup>7</sup> syllabi and she gives the children the music, believing that they'll pick up the notation by osmosis. She believes in dynamics and words emphasis. She found it great to give them the music. According to Fiona, they don't like it if she doesn't give it to them. 'They may not be able to read it perfectly but they know the notation goes up or down'. They go into the note values and especially the dynamics.

Fiona           They are good at that, the different markings. They look out and they can tell you all these, where there is loud, soft, where there is crescendo, diminuendo. They are used to the dynamic markings.

When the choir was settled in position, Fiona did a series of warm ups. These prescribed practices were part of a routine for diction, which focused on loosening up the jaw

Fiona           ...and getting them to project their voices forward on the vowel sounds we did aw, eh, ee, eye, oh, oo with an m consonant in front maw, meh etc. And an l, law, lay, lee and then aw on its own. That is just to get their voices forward and then we did one to loosen up the jaw...ta-te. It is the scale going up in thirds...and then ta-te-ti, putting in the middle note and then we did a four note one ta fa te fe using the French time names...and then we did some downward scales...[and] It's a lovely day today going up the scale...we did Pearls pretty Penelope please just to practise the p sound just going up. And we did...I meant to do ....they were warming up exercises to help...it helps their general singing

The choir was arranged in two groups, first and seconds. Preparation for the festival was underway. They were in the final stages of learning. Fiona described that she was concerned with drawing the children's attention to certain aspects, the 'usual things to watch out for'. She explained they were working on four songs, two of them two-part songs. The emphasis was on putting the final touches to them.

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<sup>7</sup> Feis, abbreviation of Dublin Feis Ceoil (Festival of music). See footnote 6.



Fiona So when we started off ... we got them to sing it through once and then we went back, took out the bits that needed work...especially the end of *The Dream Seller* ...we wanted to get the head tone in that so we got them to hum and to place the voice where they hummed. That is what I do anyway, get it right up in the top of the head. I sort of say come out the forehead, out the top of the head and get them to hum first and then place the voice where they were humming. So that little bit was a bit scrappy when we started so I went over it a bit and it's still not the way I want it but I've a few days' work to do to it yet.

Similarly in the case of dynamics:

Fiona ...just drawing their attention to...you know...where there is a crescendo and diminuendo....the dynamics mainly.

In addition, she emphasised the character of the pieces:

Fiona ...and the kind of song it is, it is a dreamy song and nice soft tone, a nice good head tone. And then the other song, *A Funny Fellow* is a complete contrast, a lively song, and again we went over the part work in that because it is a while since we've done it. So we went over each part and we picked out little bits here and there as well.....and they had a lot of leans you know and that and trying to get that out. The second verse is a complete contrast to the first. It is really pianissimo. I don't think it came off very well.

And regarding the rhythmic aspect, she explained her emphasis.

Fiona I was trying to get them to do the one two. They'd very easily put that into four without ...

Rehearsing with two parts was not easy and Fiona had to juggle with time.

Fiona Occasionally I would let one group go earlier than the other and I would keep one back and work on them

Interviewer Yes?...just for the line rehearsal...?

Fiona And then, occasionally I would take them completely separately but there isn't...you know ...it is very difficult to get the time to do it.

There was a sequence which she followed. This included the words, the notes, the dynamics and the rhythmic detail.

Fiona I would put emphasis on the notes themselves, not singing the correct notes to see that they were singing in tune and the rhythm. We would then zone in on the dynamics, very much on the dynamics. But before we do that we zone in very much on the words. I would spend a lot of time at the beginning, just on words, before they hear the tune and I would concentrate on getting the initial consonants and lengthening the vowel sounds to get it

nice and smooth. We would do a lot of work on the vowels and the consonants at the beginning. No music ...so that they have....that the words are crystal clear then when they sing and the tone is much better if they have done a lot of work on ..I'd say ...biting out the sound. You know in a quiet way, a soft way getting the initial sounds out well ...

The beginning of the year is difficult in that she has to 'do so much work on the words...' and to 'get them up to standard'. This was particularly challenging in the inner city context where 'the general accent around is real inner city Dublinese and they don't pronounce words properly. They never pronounce the *t* at the end of a word.' Fiona attributed this to the area from which the people come.

Fiona            Think of the typical Dubliner... the way they speak and that is where we are coming from, you know and the general background of the children as well. It's....a lot of problems around, drug-related problems, one-parent families

Fiona explained why she emphasised diction and meaning, on getting across a story:

Fiona            because when I am doing the words I tell them: 'you are telling a story and the most important thing is to get the story over, to whoever is listening to you...whether it is one person or a bigger audience or whatever so I do a lot of that, get the story over. And if people don't hear the words, if people don't know what the story is about, you are not singing properly'.

Central to her goal is to give the children a sense of achievement. Balanced with this is the notion of sense of enjoyment.

Fiona            I would like them to leave with a sense that they love singing, that they love music and that they enjoy it and that they would want to continue with it, that when they go to Secondary school they would want to be in the choir in the Secondary school... that it wouldn't be something that would be imposed on them. Yeah, a sense of enjoyment, you know that...yeah, this is something I want to continue on with... that it was so nice.

Specifically regarding choral music, Fiona added:

Fiona            ...you asked me what would I want...have them leaving ... a sense too of...you know of...how would I put it...of aiming high, you know, that they would always want to get the best....make the best of any song they would sing...a sense of high standards I would think.

In summary, for Fiona, the nucleus is the school. 'It all comes from the school'. Fiona's commitment extends beyond the school day. She organises extra rehearsals, travels with the choir to concerts and festivals all over the country outside school hours and is involved in

arranging the music for religious ceremonies. While she was on career break she continued her involvement with the music. This commitment is reciprocated. Some of her past pupils continue to study singing with her. This pleases her and the children make sure before they leave the milieu of the school that they sort out the practicalities which will ensure that they can retain the links with the school, even when they move on to the next stage of their schooling. Fiona believes that the prescribed curriculum is good. Although not working in the classroom, she dwells on the skills outlined in the curriculum. She believes that her role as teacher is powerful in terms of its potential to transform the children's lives. Music has an impact in terms of the choice it can offer and it is an emotional outlet.

## **6.5 Norma's story**

At sixty four, Norma was the eldest of the informants and, at the time of the interviews, was one year away from retiring. Her earliest musical memory at home was of dancing and singing on the kitchen table as a very young child. She says that her mother had a lovely singing voice but was quite reticent about singing. Her father died when she was very young, but her father's sister lived nearby and played piano. Norma remembers Christmas sing songs with her aunt playing the piano and the nieces and nephews singing along.

Norma was educated in a convent school where music was encouraged. There were concerts held regularly and she always had an active role in these. During this time, she also took piano lessons. In addition, there was great emphasis put on plainchant. Her school was successful in plainchant competitions which were held during the annual plainchant festival held locally.

Norma went to a convent secondary school and was a boarder. Here she was introduced to operetta and choral music. On leaving school, Norma attended the same college as Fiona, albeit a few years earlier. Here, she was exposed to courses in western classical music, classroom pedagogy and choral singing. During her time in college, Norma was invited by her school music teacher to train and conduct the school choir at a competitive level. She recalled that this experience was a positive one and spurred her on to pursue her interest in choral music. On qualifying as a primary teacher, Norma initially taught in a small two-teacher school near her home town. Here she got involved in the plainchant festival again and continued to prepare choirs for competitions.

Norma has been in her present school for twenty five years. Over the years, she has taken a variety of courses in music, ranging from one-day seminars to in-career courses of one week in duration. More recently, she has enrolled in a diploma course in sacred music and, at the time of the interviews, was preparing for exams in composition, conducting and liturgical history. She has also formed her own church choir and regularly conducts the choir at church services.

Norma has three children and they have always been actively involved in music. Between them, they play piano, flute, accordion and guitar. They also sing at weddings, in a folk group and, on occasion, help out their mother by singing in her choir.

Brought up in an environment which fostered formal methods such as those organised by religious choral groups, Norma is a keen advocate of the official curriculum and makes every effort to inculcate a sense of performance in her practice. She sets high standards for herself and the pupils in school where, against the odds, she has introduced choral music. She measures her success not least by the endorsement she gets from her past pupils.

*And I don't allow them to sing at all - end of story. They sit beside the child who is a good[?] voice and they never open their mouth. I will not allow it...and after a month or two I try again...and he'll say: 'teacher am I a listener or am I a singer today?' And we went on with that until Christmas...and 'teacher am I a listener or am I a singer?' 'I'll try you again in another day'. The whole year the child never opened his mouth...and by the end of the year he was a little bit coming but it was the end of fourth class before that child was able to sing and he is one of fifteen standing up tonight. And I found that it has worked with so many.*

Norma has been working in the school (the *alma mater* of Ray) for twenty five years. Set in a market town, the school is single-sex and consists of boys ranging in age from 7 to 12. Originally founded by the Christian Brothers, the staff, under principalship of a male lay teacher, is now entirely secular and balanced fairly evenly between men and women. For the pupils, entry is at 2<sup>nd</sup> class and there are three streams in each of classes from 2<sup>nd</sup> class to 6<sup>th</sup> class. In the school, there are fifteen members of staff, among them teachers with particular areas of responsibility, like herself in the area of learning support. Essentially, this means that Norma steps in to allow the class teacher some one-to-one time outside the classroom with a child who needs extra help. This usually lasts for sessions of one hour a week. When Norma has access to the remainder of the class, she takes them for music. There is also time for her to take a selection of boys from 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> class once a week from their class. During this time, Norma works in the area of vocal and choral music.

Because of her background, and given the prevalence of the tradition of sacred choral music in her formative experiences, it is not surprising to find that Norma's interest is strong in the area of choral music. Educated in religious order schools at primary and secondary levels, she was exposed to music from the beginning. She has clear memories of classes in primary school.

Norma I remember even...these thoughts were coming into my head...in second class doing ...dramatising *Phil the Fluter's Ball* you know. We were dressed in the *Beautiful Miss Bradys*. I was one of the beautiful Miss Bradys in the long dress... So I mean music played a very big part in my own primary school days because I had teachers who were really interested in it and loved it.

As a pupil herself, in fourth class she was 'roped in' to sing in the parish choir and remembers singing motets and other Latin music. She recalled an incident which has stuck in her mind and gives an impression of both the standards set and of the pressure to which the pupils at the time were subjected. At a rehearsal somebody was singing a wrong note and everybody was asked to sing on their own to discover who the 'culprit' was. She describes how her heart was pounding at the thoughts that they might think it her. The incident has stayed with her and reminds her of the differences between the times when she was a child and the children today. She sees big changes in the standard and content of music since her days at school.

Norma You know, but I mean I am talking about back in ...I did my leaving cert in 1958 so prior to that, ... say ... about the years 1950 or around that I mean we were doing- in school, all we'll say fourth, fifth and sixth class - we were doing all two part stuff all the time.

Interviewer But as you say, would that because you were in a convent school?

Norma I would think so. I would think so. I suppose always there would have been one nun in the school if you think back who would have been into music and say Sr. C-----I in D----- she's still alive in K-----y ...but she would have been the one right through my school days....Saturday was only for specifically for plainchant for Mass and for choir, you know ...that kind of, ....you know ...for Church choir and confirmation and plainchant.

At secondary school, as a boarder in a convent school, she did the choir exams run by the Department of Education and also remembers being involved in operettas, in particular The Bohemian Girl. She also learned to play piano. During her time in preservice teacher education – (she attended the same college as Fiona) - she continued her involvement in choral singing and later joined a ladies' choir. Her first teaching position was in a two-teacher school and within the first year she had established a plainchant choir. 'It was the done thing'.

Norma's interest in music has continued to the present time. At the time of the interview she was enrolled for a diploma course in sacred choral music which involved considerable commitment, both in terms of time and course work. She did it because she was involved with a church choir, having been approached by the local priest to start it in the locality eight years previously. Her children too, are involved in music and play regularly with their own friends. She started and conducts a church choir which rehearses twice weekly and performs at Church on Sundays and feasts.

Although she considers the contents of the 1971 curriculum with its emphasis on musical literacy, sight singing very important, Norma noted that some of the examples in aspects of music appreciation (or listening to music) hold little appeal for the pupils, and cites *Peter and the Wolf* as a case in point. She is familiar with the sections of the curriculum and described how she used to include vocal technique and ear tests when she was teaching in a classroom. She is ambitious for the school and for the pupils in the school. She compared her situation with other schools in the area and with schools in other parts of the country. She recalled visiting a school and being very impressed with what was achievable. She described the effect of seeing a music event in a school.

Norma            I thought 'oh Lord isn't this something terrific? Why can't we do something like that here? If we could only....'

Even when she compared the level of musical activity in her school with other schools in the area, she felt there was much room for improvement.

Norma            And even a smaller thing, I remember going down to the [neighbouring school] to their school concert and seeing [named teacher] with a choir you know and I thought 'well, when we do singing in our school there is no two-part stuff involved' - just all plain straight singing you know and I said 'well, if it can be done there... surely we could strive to...'

She termed this 'real choir singing' and distinguished between it and what happened in her school thus.

Norma            ...you know ... when they are taking part in school concerts and a song comes in to the middle of a play and they sing off any old way.... or anything, whatever would go with what drama they are doing. And I mean I know the parents enjoy it and all the rest but I think there's so much more could be done with that. With a bit of training and a little bit of coaching and everything else, that it is possible to do it you know, and if it is there why not do it, you know.

Having witnessed what was possible at primary school level in other areas, she was motivated to change the situation in her own context. The task was daunting for, in Norma's opinion, teaching in a boys' school presents challenges. Her experience is that music in boys' school is perceived to be not typical for boys. She used the term 'cissy' to explain this. Her wish would be to change this perception.

Norma           ...I feel that boys, from the time they start at primary school ...if it was seen as a subject like other subjects but it is not. I mean they see it as something as an extra, not as a...and I am forever saying when they come to fifth and sixth class they will do anything to get out of singing, literally anything to get out of singing.

In trying to counter this, she tries to present music as the same as any other subject.

Norma           ... and you say to them: 'look, you don't say to your teacher "I am not doing history because I don't like it" or "I'm not doing maths because I don't like it" or "I'm not doing Irish because I don't like it". Your music is the same as any other subject' ... you know?

At an organisational level, music is constantly under threat from sports on the timetable. Initially there was opposition but Norma persisted,

Norma           ...because there are so many children who are not into sport and the CBS is always - well ...I suppose, all boys' schools - there is nothing but sports.

Over the years, Norma has introduced elements to the school which changed the music scene from one which was predominantly hymn-based which she termed the 'four hymn syndrome'. She found it difficult to manage initially, not least because it clashed with the ethos of sports.

Norma           I mean I had such rows, real, real, real rows here to start, to establish that Wednesday evening after school was choir and that there could be no training, no matches for anything because if it was one against the other and if there was a game or training there was nobody at choir, nobody.

She persisted and has succeeded in establishing the ethos which had so much impressed her. The repertoire is wider and more ambitious, including that prescribed by the national



children's choir, to which she became affiliated a number of years ago.<sup>8</sup> By being affiliated to the choir, Norma has access to a network which gives her support outside the school, connecting her with other schools in the locality who are participating in the national children's choir. Norma is very pleased that she made the move into the national children's choir.

In explaining why she considers it to be of enormous value to the children, she draws her own memory of such activities in school.

Norma            Because I loved choirs as a child. Sr. C-----I in D---- and doing our two-part singing ...I really loved choirs.

In addition to encouraging musical activity through participation in the national children's choir, she encourages music in the school in other ways. This includes drawing on outside resources and expertise. Groups of musicians have visited the school and have been well received by the pupils, who, as the principal observed, for two hours were engrossed and could have gone on for longer. This gives Norma much encouragement and she views it as an endorsement of her work.

At the time of the interview, Norma was preparing a group of boys to sing for the 'ceremony of light', a religious service as part of preparation for confirmation which was scheduled to take place that evening in the local church. She distinguished between two types of practice, one which was for everyone and the other which was reserved for those who would be entering for competition.

Norma            I would say, if I was able to ...pick out the best of them, then you would, you can get a lovely tone but when you have all these others not so good which you can't do in school unless you are doing something for competition or something like that, you know?

Norma felt that there was potential within the group she was working with. They represented the best of her singers, the 'pick of fifth and sixth', and were known to her through

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<sup>8</sup>The national children's choir (cór na nóg) was set up in 1985 as part of European Music year and since then occurs every second year. A repertoire is set out and participating teachers learn the prescribed repertoire at practices organised for them at regular intervals. When the repertoire has been introduced to the teachers, they in turn teach the music to their classes. This culminates in a network of performances organised at local, regional and national levels. . McCarthy (1999, p.152) noted that, '[i]n addition to heightening awareness of music during that year, the project was intended to grant music a higher profile in primary education, to promote singing and expand the repertoire of songs currently taught in the schools, to highlight the importance of music in the social and intellectual development of children and to give children an opportunity to perform to a high standard in venues otherwise unavailable to them.'

involvement through the years. She calls on them for events such as the Christmas concert or the carol service.

Because of the nature of her post, (described earlier) she is confined to half-hourly sessions once a week. This puts pressure on her and on the children to cover the material she has chosen. Generally at the beginning of the each school year, Norma plans to follow a systematic scheme in notation and reading but then interruptions start with preparation for Christmas concert, and religious ceremonies. Although she might want to cover a lot of ground, sometimes she finds the pupils' reticence a difficulty. Of the fifty or so children she takes in the choir for confirmation, only about half of them would sing.

Norma           ...every Friday from Christmas till now I take the confirmation singing up in the sixth classes. And I mean if I was to take the two sixth classes there is about fifty something up there - I would only ...there wouldn't be half of them singing...literally half of them...they wouldn't open their mouth.

Although she has raised the standards and has widened the musical world of the school to include outside influences, there are additional pressures arising from holding these ambitions. This becomes acutely obvious when Norma prepares for performance in the public arena. Because of the public nature of the events, Norma is conscious of the standard needed for the pupils in order to make the additional work they take on seem worthwhile. Norma knows that 'they know in a way they can survive without music' and tries to achieve a balance. On the one hand, she wants to acknowledge the enthusiasm of those who turn up for practices and doesn't want to 'stifle that... so what we do is we only take the ones who are enthusiastic'. Not only would she 'love to feel that they enjoyed it', she also wants the children to feel that they would want more, that 'it wasn't just a question of getting out of whatever work was going on [in the classrooms] upstairs'.

Norma           And I would love to feel that, if I said to those this evening now: 'will you stay in for a half an hour this evening?' that a sizeable number of them would want to do it.

She is encouraged by the enthusiasm shown by past pupils and by parents who have praised her work. She recounted how this praise comes about. Some of her past pupils turn up at the concerts to support the boys who sing in the national children's choir. In addition, she gets endorsement *via* her own children. Her story of the past pupil approaching her son in a pub was a case in point. A third source of endorsement comes from the parents who appreciate

the option offered by music to boys who would not be particularly good or interested in sport.

In contrast, she puts little purchase on the official means of endorsement of her work, namely the inspectors. Whereas she described herself as a keen advocate of the principles recommended at official policy level, she was critical of the support offered by the inspectors. She was particularly frustrated by the perceived lack of awareness, on the part of the inspectors of the effort it takes for those teachers, like herself, who try to fulfil their obligations in spite of the constraints such as time.

Norma            It is very, very difficult to find time and that is why I feel ... that really there isn't given the proper support by people like the inspectors...to teachers.

In addition, she criticised the lack of emphasis shown by the inspectors to the various aspects of music as prescribed in the curriculum, where they are 'not insisting on it...when they come to our school to do a *Tuairisc scoile*...' <sup>9</sup>

According to Norma, people like her, working on the ground, who spend considerable effort and energy fulfilling the requirements of the official policy makers, do not get enough recognition. She described how, when she had a class to teach, she would have been meticulous in her preparation and contrasts this with the apparent lack of thoroughness with which her colleagues approach the inspection.

Norma            - now I am talking against the teachers now on this...but I mean I saw myself the last *Tuairisc scoile* I would have had before I went into this because I wouldn't have a class to do it and I would have made sure that I would have had every area of the Curriculum prepared and ready for my *Tuairisc scoile* but I was probably the only teacher in the school and I felt at times you know they couldn't care less. They would nearly say go on, go on, get through it. But I was going to make sure they were going to sit through it and see that I had done my vocal techniques and I had done my ear tests and I had done...but I don't know whether it was going over his head or not, you know that sort of a way?

One of the drawbacks of her present position is that, while she may well be covering a lot of music, the class teacher is not. This tends to result in a certain laxness in the school with regard to music.

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<sup>9</sup> *Tuairisc scoile* (school report): a general school inspection intended to occur every four years.

Norma            Because most times [the inspectors] come into the school and say well how is singing done and they'd say oh Mrs. So and So does my singing for me or we are doing *cór na nóg*. That teacher didn't have to do anything for the class, no choir or any music you know what I mean?

Her view was that the class teacher should not be exempt from some responsibility.

Interviewer    So you feel that every teacher should teach every subject, well, be accountable for every subject?

Norma            Absolutely. Say that the teacher said oh Mrs D----- does my music for me well then [the inspector] should say well let Mrs. D----- come up here and show what music she is doing.

With such an approach, there is the danger that inspection could become reduced to singing a song.

Norma            How does he know? I might only be going up and teaching them a song...but I would think most of the inspectors when they come in, they would say 'well, maybe you would sing a song for me', and that is music, that's covered.

When she had the inspection, she found that inspector was very impressed with her work. She was somewhat surprised to find that her repertoire of two part music was considered 'adventurous' or ambitious by the inspector. Although, at the time of the interviews, the 1999 curriculum had not been introduced to schools, Norma herself was familiar with it and is very positive about it, and 'would love to be starting off with it'.

Since getting her qualification as a remedial teacher, Norma sees a connection between her work as remedial teacher and music, where listening is key. Like Fiona, Norma makes the connection between vocal music and speaking explicit.

Norma            And surely if they can't speak properly they can't sing properly.

Interviewer    Right! That's an interesting one.

Norma            You know? They can't because they can't pronounce their words. So to me I would say pronunciation and listening are the big big things.

In her room, there were no desks and the children sat in rows. This contrasts with her practice in the regular classrooms where desks are there. In that case, her strategy differs.

Norma           What I would do with them in desks is I would put three in a desk and I'll run the two desks in together ...because if they are isolated I feel ...if there is the support of one another around them. Whereas if you have three or four separate rows and there is two sitting here, neither of them are too sure of it and the fellow behind them is a good bit back in a seat whereas if they are that bit closer together ...

Norma used her hands to gesture. She explained how this strategy was useful in her circumstance, not least because it helped her to keep order and a sense of purpose as well as to serve as preparation for performance.

Norma           I do always. I do because I find particularly with boys, I don't know with girls, the first time you...if children are not used to seeing you using your hands, they kind of...first of all they think it's funny and they start to giggle.

This reaction tends to happen when the children have not been gradually introduced to the notion of hand gestures during rehearsals.

Norma           I tend to use my hands quite a bit with them. But you know kids...who haven't been used to seeing teacher using their hands in front of them ... they don't take much notice of you, whereas if they are used to you doing it, they'll watch you and then it comes much easier if you are doing a concert or something like that that they really know what expression...what expression you want to get out of them.

Whereas the children were standing for the warm ups, they were seated for the body of the lesson. There were two groups, one singing the top line and the second singing the lower line. Each group was taught separately. Part of the reason for Norma's inclusion of the warm up was to improve diction.

Norma           I like to do the warm up exercises, you know and I find, I suppose even since I went into remedial teaching how few children can speak.

Norma believes that her interest in drawing attention to elements of diction has heightened since her involvement with phonics. She described the 's's.' as a 'little bit of [a] hobby horse'. In addition, she had difficulty getting the pronunciation on the word '*laudate*'.

Norma           ...their Lau DAW – te. Of course lads -I don't know if girls are the same- they'll always do the lau DW ahhh te(demonstrates scooping).

The warm up was organised and ordered in such a manner that the pupils were standing alongside their desks while Norma was directing from the keyboard at the top of the

classroom. During the body of the lesson, in contrast, the space was more like a little choir. Norma agreed with this observation and suggested that it was probably because the pupils were familiar with the material that she was circulating.

Norma            When they know it and I want to be able to be down there to listen are they really getting the notes or is there two or three who have the tune and they are good and strong and they are covering up for all the others

Regarding the development of listening skills in the pupils, Norma included strategies such as giving a starting note.

Norma            I want them to hear it and I want them to be able to take their own note and to hum it.

Norma used her singing voice occasionally in order to keep the children in tune. In addition, it allowed her the flexibility she needed to circulate. By moving away from the piano she was better able to assess the extent to which the children were attentive and successful in learning the material. She found this a useful means of overcoming the constraints offered by the huge numbers of pupils in the classroom.

Norma            ...because I mean if the whole crowd of them there, there would be one or two of them there totally off and if I do I would put him beside a very good strong singer.

Norma drew on small groups to sing at a time. In this way, she had a certain control over the performance and could discretely identify those singers who were inaccurate without singling them out. She spends quite a lot of time working on the technical aspects of voice production, focusing on vowel sounds, including 'the aw's or the oos as well as the consonants.' She focuses on the shape of the mouth, 'I'd say how can you say aw without, with your mouth across, you know, or lips across, you know' and listening skills. She would love 'to see primary kids able to do basic sight reading'.

In summary, Norma believes in the value of music in the school and has worked hard to promote it. She is positive about the contents of the official curriculum and wants to cover every aspect of the contents as prescribed. She focuses in particular on vocal performance. She is ambitious for herself and for her pupils – particularly since it offers an alternative to sports in the school. She sets her sights on achieving best practice, and on attaining the

standards reached by other schools. In addition, she uses her own formative experiences in music as a guide to what is attainable.

## **6.6 Patricia's story**

In her late thirties at the time of the interviews, Patricia was born and raised in Dublin. Interest in music was fostered by her mother who was keen to promote music in the house. Impromptu musical evenings formed part of Patricia's childhood memory, where everyone would have a party piece. Her brother learned to play the accordion. Her sister is particularly talented and plays the concertina and the flute. Now in her late thirties, Patricia has great time for music and appreciates the skill and discipline required to become accomplished. She describes herself more of an appreciator and a listener than as a performer, although she has a keen interest in set dancing and enrolled in tin whistle lessons as an adult.

Patricia played recorder in school at primary and second level. She attended an all - girls convent secondary school where there was a vibrant musical life. The school took part in operettas, teaming up with the students from the all boys secondary school nearby.

Following her secondary education, Patricia attended the same college as Ultan and Ray. Unlike them, however, she did not enrol in the programme for mature students but in the three year undergraduate B.Ed programme. On graduating, in 1983, Patricia got her position as teacher in the school. She taught for a few years before taking a career break. During her career break, she travelled with her husband whose work commitments led to long spells abroad. She took a tin whistle with her and intended to practise but, because her children were very small at the time, she didn't have much free time. At the time of the interviews Patricia had just returned to her position in the school and was adjusting to changes which had occurred during her five year absence.

Daunted by the requirements of the prescribed curriculum, Patricia's fear is that she won't acquit herself well in front of the pupils in her class or the inspectors who visit. She is critical of formal methods of teaching music such as those she learned at preservice teacher education level, not least because of the level of skill required by the teacher and the demands they place on time in the school day. Her love of music extends to all types and genres and she wants to give the pupils a broad range of experiences. The social inclusiveness of music is highlighted and she wants the pupils to leave school with a party piece, something which they can use to contribute to a group.



*No. I just think that...I lack the technicalities of music, like taking out a tuning fork and say for singing well you know start there you know whereas I either go with memory or go with the tape and we were told never to go with memory because you are going to be off key invariably you know but like they seem to ...there are a few good voices in there and that have good ears and they just seem to know what the note is since the last time but that is kind of going on hope rather than [expertise]...(laughs)*

At the time of the interview, Patricia was teaching in a convent school in a suburb of Dublin. As a generalist classroom teacher, Patricia had responsibility for the full range of curriculum subjects. Recently returned from a career break of five years, she was trying to find her feet in the school again. Patricia described the sense of isolation she felt on her return to the school at the end of her career break. She attributed the sense of isolation to the fact that the teachers with whom she shared a class group tended to work in isolation and consequently weren't overly aware of what goes on in other classes.

Patricia            Because each teacher works in isolation, they rarely get a chance to compare what they do.

She missed the connection with the other teachers who were teaching in the same class group. It had been her experience to be in close contact with her colleagues prior to leaving for the career break when she worked in the infant classes. In this area, where she worked for five years, the school had a good record of class teachers working together, particularly in the area of team planning. One of the effects of the lack of communication with the colleagues in the class group to which she returned as teacher was that she met resistance to the sharing of ideas. When she returned from her career break, she taught 4<sup>th</sup> class for the second time only in her career. There was another teacher teaching 4<sup>th</sup> class who had many years' experience teaching at this level. Patricia recounted how, when she approached her at the beginning of the school year to suggest working together, she 'dismissed me outright'.

Since Patricia last taught in the school, there have been a number of changes. At a personal level, she has had two children and her attitude to music has relaxed. On an institutional level, a change of principal has occurred in the school. The previous principal had been very keen on music, inculcating choral and recorder work. Patricia agreed with the policy of teaching the pupils to learn to play the recorder.

Patricia ...I like the recorder in this school because it teaches them how to read music and gives them an interest in music and they can pick and choose their instruments then after that.

In the school there is a choir, from 4<sup>th</sup> class to 6<sup>th</sup> class which is taken by one of the teachers. Patricia doesn't feel confident to take up with a choir, although she recognises the need for one in the school. According to Patricia, there is a long tradition of music in the school and trophies going back for choral examinations and festivals. She suggested that the most she would be comfortable with would be a recorder ensemble. It was the custom in the school for each teacher to be responsible for preparing their class for an annual school concert which later became bi-annual. Patricia also taught hymns to first communion class twice. Then she taught confirmation hymns to 5<sup>th</sup> class one year as they traditionally sang for the confirmation ceremony.

There were twenty seven 3<sup>rd</sup> class pupils in her class. They are all girls as is fairly typical in convent schools where, from 2<sup>nd</sup> class upwards, single sex predominates. While the policy in the school is that recorder playing is provided for all pupils in the school, guitar lessons are provided for a very small, select group only. Because the new principal has introduced the idea of providing guitar lessons on Friday evenings, it was not uncommon for the pupils in Patricia's class to avail of such extra-curricular activities. Out of twenty seven, seven took lessons in musical instrument playing which included cello, piano and keyboard. She was conscious of these pupils in her classroom and the extra expertise they had, believing that 'the ones who play the piano outside school ... are teaching me theory some of the time'.

Whilst she returned from career break refreshed and with new enthusiasm, she was also suffering from a temporary lack of confidence. This was particularly so in the case of music.

Patricia I don't know what anyone else is doing in music like apart from this... the 3<sup>rd</sup> class songs ....I just want to get these ones done [Pied Piper<sup>10</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> class selection of songs]. And I am even behind.

Being 'behind' doesn't concern her too much however, as she will have the same class group for two years and anything she has not covered in the scheme for the first year may be covered in the second year. In that sense she has a certain leeway.

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<sup>10</sup> A scheme of books in music education for primary level in Ireland.

For Patricia, a central aspect to music education is the notion of constant exposure, or time devoted to practising. Formal music lessons included the vocal and the instrumental.

Patricia ...I think it's important that there is a few music lessons every week and like maybe one instrumental and one singing and that they sing something every day, whether it be a religion song or a song they've already learned.

Her day is framed accordingly, beginning each morning with ten minutes of class time devoted to practising the recorder. Her belief is that if the children practise regularly they will become proficient. To this end, she begins each music lesson with revision, as a sort of preliminary to the main lesson. It is her belief that such regular work will make practice automatic and that the children will be able to do things without thinking.

Patricia Oh. we always kind of revise the notes separately before we go to the book....just to refresh their memories I suppose and ....that it is not always tunes they are playing either, that they are listening to notes and that they can move from one to the other. I suppose like a warm-up finger exercise, really, rather than reading music just call out notes ad hoc and they can play them and I like to kind of do the steps as well, like B and then Bb so that they can do it without thinking after a while.

When asked why, Patricia explained the revision in terms of a warm up.

Patricia Like a warm up...yeah... I do a warm up in basketball, I do a warm up, like when I do maths as well, we do mental maths before we get into maths so just the same in music really.

The children bring their recorder to school every day. This ensures that there is the minimum possible gap between those who practise and those who don't. She explains this further.

Patricia There is a few of them you see that don't practise at home no matter what you do and even in school I know that they haven't picked up the recorder since the previous day so there will be a gap in the class between those who practise and those who don't...

While she concentrates on recorder and vocal music, her commitment to music education extended beyond developing performance skills. She believed that there was a place for music appreciation and listening to music.

Patricia I mean there will be people who never play or people who dislike singing but people who still go along to a concert and enjoy it, you know?

She has always loved music. Patricia grew up near the area in which the school is located. It was in the convent primary school where she began her schooling and weekly recorder lessons formed part of the music activity in the school. She is the eldest of five and each of her siblings learned an instrument. Her sister was bought a guitar and her brother the accordion. She described how, in some cases, children in school were discouraged from singing. This happened to Patricia's sister who has had an uneasy relationship with singing ever since. The memory of this has stayed with Patricia.

Patricia described her secondary school experiences in two ways. One was informal and involved a musical where her teacher would put on a musical every second year where they would team up with a local secondary boys' school. She enjoyed that very much and related how everyone who wanted to participate was welcome. The other aspect was formal and described in terms of prescribed books. She had a recorder and progressed somewhat from the black book to the blue book. She tired of the recorder after a while and felt that they weren't progressing much. Patricia thought the secondary teacher was an excellent teacher and remembers that there was no exclusion. Everyone was involved, regardless of ability, and this appealed to Patricia.

Patricia feels that her own relationship with music has been affected by the lack of time she has had to practise. Her personal circumstances have contributed to this.

Patricia            But I have two young children at home. I just haven't had time to do it, you know?

In spite of the constraints on her time, she has tried to catch up with her interest in music and traditional music in particular.

She recently went to Comhaltas<sup>11</sup> lessons on tin whistle to 'try and get back into it'.

Patricia            I love music. I love sessions. I do set dancing, you know? So I like listening to music. I haven't become a player...

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<sup>11</sup> Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann. (trans. Company of musicians of Ireland). It is described as '[t]he largest body involved in the promotion of Irish traditional music. Its aims and objects are 1, to promote Irish traditional music in all its forms, 2, to restore the playing of the harp and uilleann pipes in the national life of Ireland, 3, to promote Irish traditional dancing, 4, to create a closer bond among all lovers of Irish music, 5, to co-operate with all bodies working for the restoration of Irish culture, 6, to establish branches throughout the country and abroad to achieve these. Its constitution directs that it is non-political and non-denominational and membership is open to all who sympathise with its aims and objectives (and who keep its rules)' In Vallely, F. (1999), p.77.

As was the practice at the time of entry to the college of education, Patricia had to do a music test and she chose to perform a piece on the tin whistle. In college, at preservice education level, she feels they presumed she had a better grounding than she had. She explains her reasoning for this.

Patricia            I never took piano lessons and I feel inadequate. I know nothing about keys. I can't use a tuning fork.

She attended the same college as Ray and Ultan. Whereas they studied for a diploma in education as mature students, she underwent the three year undergraduate B.Ed programme. In college she described the nature of music education.

Patricia            We had to teach intervals. We had to teach pitch. We had to teach tone. We had to teach sight reading.

She finds that the practices prescribed in college are not possible because they take up too much time.

Patricia            I mean there are so many facets to music and to be honest I haven't even looked at the new curriculum yet.<sup>12</sup>

Patricia has decided that instilling a love of music in the children takes precedence over the prescribed practices.

Patricia            It is fine if you have all day to teach music....you don't either... all you can do is give them a love of it and do a little and hopefully that their interest will take them to music outside school or even singing lessons or whatever it is or at least that they have a party piece.

Given the constraints of time, she has decided to focus on what is achievable, namely '...that they don't mind standing up or sitting down in front of a group and singing a song'.

Patricia            I feel I have achieved what I have set out to at that stage.

In explaining why she considered music important in school, Patricia drew on her own experience as a mother.

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<sup>12</sup> At the time of the interview, the 1999 curriculum had not been presented to teachers. In a later interview, Patricia pointed out that the timing of the interview was prior to any in-service days in music

Patricia Well, from the time you are a baby - well I see from my own children - they like music. They love music and you can teach them so much especially the younger age like vocabulary through music and songs. So then it leads on to other things like movement. I mean music is something you can appreciate till you die. It is a life long love and I think if you don't like music... I don't know ...I think there is a lacking in someone almost. Like everyone likes some kind of music. There is nobody who dislikes music, is there? People like dancing or some song on the radio or ...all teenagers buy cassettes and tapes and CDs.

Patricia was keen to develop in the children a sense of value, particularly in relation to an appreciation of taste in music in themselves and a tolerance for the tastes of others. In this she made a distinction between 'liking' and 'tolerating'.

Patricia I want them to be exposed to all kinds of music and I suppose listen to all kinds of music, not necessarily like all kinds of music that they should know their likes and their dislikes but that they shouldn't frown on someone if she likes classical or she likes country music, either.

To expand on what she meant, Patricia referred back to her own early experiences.

Patricia because I know myself, I suppose....my mum would always have liked country music and I never liked it. I suppose it was because she liked it as well, a generation thing and yet when my first was born -she is four and a half now- and she just loved the steady beat and I found myself switching to that channel because she loved it. I never thought I would see the day. I have become tolerant myself you know? I wouldn't say now that I hate country music whereas I would have always said it before.

She also mentioned the effect of groups of visiting musicians as a means of developing a tolerance for all types of music. School visits from professional musicians were very effective:

Patricia and even with Graffiti Classics [a group of visiting musicians] coming in here you know and like some of the kids would never listen to Classical music but the guy on the double bass, he was so funny. He was such a clown now and they got to every single kid there. It was amazing.

Evidence that the children have had positive experiences in music in their previous class was found by Patricia in the enthusiasm and tunefulness with which the children approach song and recorder. She wanted to build on this and also believed that constant exposure to music would make them more comfortable with the notion of playing or singing.

Patricia would like the children to leave with sight reading ability, with a repertoire of songs and with the ability to play the tunes in the black book with 'confidence and understand what they are playing rather than just playing... and maybe have two or three tunes that they can play without looking at the music as well'. She wanted to prepare them to be able to sing in public, in the context of mother to child, as well as among friends and family.

Patricia Well that they have...if someone asked them to sing a song at a party..... that they have a song that they can sing and that they like to sing...at least one.

Patricia drew on her own formative experiences in music to explain the value she placed on being able to contribute to the musical life of home and community.

Patricia In our house, when we had visitors ...like there were always people in our house.... but if someone came in and ...like ...a music session started, you know?

She stressed the difference between contributing to the group and showing off

Patricia Like, it is nice to not show off but like have a song or a dance or something you can do....to feel that you are contributing to the group, and that you are not the only one sitting on the sidelines you know?

In her own life, she found this important this 'sitting on the sidelines' was something she experienced herself. Music was a way of being included.

Patricia ...I remember I used to play [sports] when I was qualified. I was 23 or 24 and I was in a [sports] club and we used to always have a weekend away and there was lots of musical people in that group because it was mostly made of teachers as well. It would always turn into a session at the end of the night and we would all be sitting around and everyone had to sing a song or recite a poem or do something, anything. Even tell a joke, you know?...I was always very shy and in the beginning I didn't like this at all and I wouldn't sing but year after year after year the same thing would happen and it got to the stage that you would be so embarrassed if you didn't have anything to contribute. And they move onto the next person. You were never forced to. It was free choice. But it got to the stage that I said Gosh, I have to have something now for this weekend away and you'd go and learn a song.

Interviewer You're great! But I suppose you were contributing.

Patricia Well I only have two songs that I would sing in front of anybody, you know.

This spills over to her practice in school.

Patricia           And then I find the more I am teaching kids the less inclined they are to learn things off by heart, you know. It is only by repetition they pick up the words really. You can't say learn this verse tonight like the way we did in school. They just don't do it....even with poetry I find that is kind of a problem. You know, that they don't like learning words off. And we don't have the time for the constant repetition that it takes to keep them refreshed, you know.

Patricia realises all too well that her influence over the pupils is limited, particularly regarding the amount of time they devote to practising.

Patricia           and I mean you can't force them....They can all play the notes.... I wouldn't put it down to ability. It is just some of them don't practise at home. You need to practise an instrument if you are going to become proficient.

She draws on her own formative experiences to support her idea about practising:

Patricia           but you see I don't practise and I feel that to play an instrument well you have to practise because it shows. I mean it is so obvious - somebody who practises and somebody who doesn't, you know.

Although she doesn't have time to practise, she has good intentions and even tries to brush up on her skills during the time spent in school:

Patricia           And actually partly that was ...my reason for going back to the beginning of the book at Christmas was that I would go along with it and refresh my memory.

Although she is confident that the pupils in her school get many opportunities in music, she was concerned that her contribution was not adequate and that she was not covering enough work. Since there is every likelihood that she will have the same class for the following year, she intends to catch up if necessary then.

While she pointed out that there were many ways to engage in music, extending beyond singing or playing, Patricia believes that the tapes and materials are a support in helping her to cover all aspects of the syllabus and drew on published materials whenever possible. In particular, although she didn't have to stick rigidly to the scheme prescribed, she was pleased that such schemes existed.



Patricia           And then I feel at least if I follow this I am not overlapping with what has been done last year or what is coming next year, if you are switching classes, you know. Otherwise if you are just choosing from an open book and you go to teach and they say oh we did this before.

On the informal side, Patricia likes to have a selection of materials available for seasonal activities. This included a home-made 'Hallowe'en tape....so we had a kind of Hallowe'en party and we had this music and there was everything from Ghostbusters to the Monster Mash.'

Interviewer       In terms of the school year then, you'd have Christmas, Hallowe'en...?  
Patricia           Christmas, Easter, Hallowe'en. I have no Easter music. All the hymns we do around this time of the year makes up for that. And then Summer. They just bring in whatever they want basically.

The lessons given in recorder by the music specialist are demanding of the children and Patricia wants to support the learning. This involves regular systematic practice. She has recorder every morning for ten minutes in favour of twice a week. In this way, the chances for the children to forget to bring in the recorder are less likely to occur.

Patricia           You see if you only do it twice a week as well there will be more children who will forget their recorder - in inverted commas, you know - whereas at least if I say I am doing it every day - now I might only do it four times a week, depending on what is on a particular day, you know - at least I know they have it in the bag and they won't come to school without it except after a weekend there is often a few who have been practising it you see and leave it out on the Monday so that is understandable.

Patricia explained that she doesn't organise the classroom in any particular way for music lesson and the pupils sit in desks, as they do for the other subjects. During the observed lesson, the children were engaged in a variety of activities. These activities ranged from reading and playing notes on the recorder in treble clef to humming and whispering. She also introduced the note Bb on recorder and focused on the natural sign. The Italian terms *fine* and *da capo* were also explained. While she was explaining to the children what fingering to use, Patricia did not play the recorder. She doesn't feel confident and feels the children will pick out her mistakes. This lack of confidence was in evidence also, during her teaching. Patricia doesn't play the recorder herself but offers support to the children by pointing to the finger positions and aspects of technique verbally.

She explained that although she has her recorder in the classroom, it remains in her drawer during the lessons.

- Patricia ...I don't feel comfortable instrument-playing. Yeah, because I will make mistakes. I know everybody makes mistakes and I am very tolerant of them making mistakes ...
- Interviewer But would you not want to be just one step ahead of them?
- Patricia Well in theory I am but like if you ask me to play that piece now, I could play a flat instead of a sharp. You know, like, I'd know the fingering but like, B, Bb would kind of catch me

One of the strategies she used was to replicate practice on a ruler, particularly aimed at drill in finger work. She overcame her own feeling of lack of success in the recorder by describing the process to the children whereby they would imitate.

- Interviewer You go by ear then, you sing it? You call it out and they play?
- Patricia I call it out and they play it...and if someone is playing it wrong, I can hear that they are not blending in with the others and then maybe I can see where the hole is not covered properly maybe, you know?

Her lesson is methodical, systematic and carefully graded to move from the known to the unknown. She was aware that, in the song there was some material previously not covered and that ideally she should spend additional time at this.

- Patricia Actually I probably did skip a lesson because I should have spent a lesson on that particular natural sign but I felt it is very confusing.
- Interviewer Some of them knew it, though.
- Patricia Some of them did. They are the ones who do music outside school, you see. But then I know for some of them now... even reading English words ...is that they probably don't see any difference between a sharp sign and a flat sign so there is no point in getting into heavy ground there so I just thought I'd throw it at them and if they see it in the middle of a line they'll know what it is hopefully. So I just thought I'd dwell more on the fact that the song was a shanty rather than the actual technicality of the symbols, you know? So I suppose it was an English lesson as well, like roving and roaming

Another strategy for achieving her goal involves keeping the children focused. In the case of recorder drill, this included outlining the rhythm and pulse of the tune. During the lesson she sang along with the words but this was not typical.

- Patricia Well normally I would clap but because you were there I felt I didn't want to put them off playing because they were kind of showing off to you that they knew the tune. But normally I would clap right through a tune if it was a new tune but if was a tune they already knew I wouldn't clap.
- Interviewer You'd clap what? The notes, is it?
- Patricia Just the beats. You know, when I'd get to a semibreve, I'd clap four times, you know

Similarly with regard to the notes on the stave, the children called out the notes by letter names prior to playing the tune. She found that this was a good way of focusing their attention.

Patricia [B]y asking some of them what's the first note you kind of focus them... just on the beginning of the tune so they'd guess and they'd say is that F and they can work out the rest because they do know like we do the stave on the fingers...FACE and then every good boy deserves fruit

Although the goal was to focus the children on achieving success at practice, Patricia was keen to balance the desire to achieve with the enjoyment aspect. She did not want to single out anyone. This was particularly noticeable when identifying mistakes in the playing. On the one hand she wanted to correct the error while on the other hand, she wanted to be sensitive to the feelings of the children.

Patricia So if I hear a few off notes I will go around like that group by group so I can pick out....I am not always right but generally I can pick out who's not playing the note properly ...but it doesn't seem like I'm focusing in on one person when it is the whole group that's playing, you know?

When asked why she would not want to focus in on one person, Patricia explained:

Patricia Because the few that don't get the notes properly are the few who are very shy in the class and I don't want to put them off.

At the same time she wanted to avoid being overly competitive and sought a balance in choosing pupils to play for her and for the class.

Patricia Well you see I don't ask them...they would all love to ...the same few all the time would love to play individually for me and then the same few would be retiring and would never play in front of the class, you know?

Patricia was amazed at how adept some of the children have become at picking up the errors. It was as though it was evidence of the proficiency they had achieved. They were becoming as accomplished as she wanted them to in the area of listening.

Patricia And they were quick, weren't they? To pick up that I wasn't singing the right line? I was amazed, really amazed.

She observed too, that the children's attention was remarkable during the listening to music session. She played the entire ballad of *A roving*, putting it in context. She used the

children's reaction and attention as a guide to whether to complete the listening activity or to shorten it.

Patricia I was thinking of turning it off half way through and then I thought... well I could see Elaine singing it and I was just watching her to see - she seemed to know some of the words as well - I was watching her and I was thinking gee maybe she has learned this before, you know?

There were occasions when individual children were encouraged to demonstrate activities for the class. One such involved conducting the group. The class had had this experience with a visiting group and were eager to try it again. One girl tried to conduct with two hands.

Patricia That was very adventurous. They are not afraid to try new things as a class. I have often noticed that about them before.

While she fosters a sense of inclusiveness, she doesn't want to put the children under pressure to perform.

Patricia Well, you see I don't put the spotlight on them unless they want to. So I'd say who'd like a go at this and by going around to each group then maybe I can kind of weed out the quieter ones, you know?

The 'quiet ones' remind her of herself in school.

Patricia They are the ones who don't want the spotlight on them at all. And I would have been myself like that in school too...that maybe I would have known the things but I wouldn't have had the confidence to volunteer the information and put my hand up and that sometimes had I been asked I might kind of freeze, you know and not done myself justice maybe and there are some...there's about three now...

Interviewer You are aware of that? As a teacher, you know?

Patricia But only because there is a few others who would hog the limelight like the whole time and..... I mean they are lovely kids too but they don't give other people a chance to contribute to the class.

In this sense, music was different to other subjects. It allowed visibility to people.

Patricia Well, anything like that that could be very individual like music where these ones who shove themselves forward all the time, they like to show off you know and the other ones then who don't like to show off but still might know it and would like a little bit of recognition maybe. I think it is important to draw them out too.

While she was careful to get a balance between those who 'like to show off' and those who 'don't like to show off', there was a danger that performance in a group might offer a hiding

place for those who aren't able to keep up with the class. She has to work at distinguishing between the 'quiet ones' and those who are struggling to keep up.

Patricia            Because music is something you can really kind of cover up. I mean they could be fingering away there and not actually blowing and I wouldn't know the difference unless I had them down to one group...you know? Like, you could easily cod me sitting in the class.

There were times in the lesson when Patricia used her singing voice. When asked about this, she explained that she used the voice for the purpose of making a clear distinction between performing the exercises and performing the tune.

Patricia            Well, just so that they know that it is not just an exercise in a book. It kind of distinguishes it from the exercises and the drill line, that it is a song and that once they know the tune in their head they can hum it they can sing along and that they can learn the words to the song themselves.

Regarding the medium of tape, Patricia was initially hesitant about the effectiveness of maintaining the level of interest but she felt that, although they weren't all listening she could hear 'a kind of buzz' over at the other side of the classroom.

In summary, Patricia described that the children loved getting a turn to stand out in the front and take over, acting in the role of conductor. In this sense, they were imitating practices modelled by the group of visiting musicians who had performed for them earlier in the year. The pupils were also playing, humming and whispering, again in imitation of the practices they had done with the visiting group. In addition, Patricia described that the focus was on 'the new tune...*John Smith Follow Fine* -and the terminology in that, *fine* and *da capo* and just the term shanty that they'd know. If they heard a similar sounding song before that they could say; "well maybe that is a shanty"...'.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, in the case of each of the informants, an interpretative account of their practice has been presented which has recognised the significance of a biographical perspective in research on teaching (as outlined in 3.3.1) and everyday conceptions of music education (as outlined in 3.4.2). The emphasis has been on gaining access to teacher knowledge from the teachers' perspectives, having as its starting point the illumination of the teachers' perspectives of their classroom practice (as outlined in 5.1). In order to do this, the data have been organised into two main categories, one concerned with formative experiences and the other in which the focus has been on each respondent's orientation to practice. Formative experiences included the in-school experiences and the out-of-school experiences (as outlined in 3.4 above) In describing the in-school and the out-of-school experiences, the differences between the formal and the informal contexts of learning have been noted where relevant and methods and practices have been noted (as defined in Green, (2001) and outlined in 3.4.2.2 above).

Drawing on Elbaz, (1983), the orientation to practice has been used to reflect the way in which practical knowledge was held and used (as outlined in 5.3.5 above). This has been informed by the everyday conceptions where, (as described in 3.4.2 above), the teacher knowledge base has been taken to be broader than that outlined in a prescribed curriculum. The emphasis has been on the narrative of experience (as described in 5.3.5 above), and the focus has been on revealing an idiosyncratic dimension to how teachers tend to shape their practice.

In blurring the distinction between in-school and out-of-school activities, Ray wants music to be part of everyday life, a 'living tradition'. His philosophy that music is not just a school subject is evidenced in the emphasis he places on the 'social aspect to it'. At the heart of this arguably lies his notion of music as part of the fabric of school and community. In order to achieve his goal, namely to make music accessible to everyone, he uses easily available instruments. Ray gets endorsement from the pupils, both past and present.

For Ultan, music, hurling and the Irish language are bound together to form something of a sense of place. School is a place where this bond can be strengthened. Conscious that he might be a bit 'one-tracked' in his emphasis on the traditional, he believes that the official

curriculum can serve the children and the community well if it nurtures this sense of place. He wants to make the connection tangible and to replicate the informal approach to music with which he grew up.

Fiona has replicated the musical content and formal teaching methods she experienced in her own life, emphasising choral music, with a repertoire taken from Anglo-Irish and western art music. She draws on syllabuses prescribed at Feis Ceoil and other competitive festivals. Fiona believes that school can provide experiences for the pupils which would not normally be available to them. In order to preserve the musical space she has created, structures have been put in place, at both institutional and municipal levels. Concerts and festivals, competitions and tours promote the 'sense of the good' afforded by music. She has worked hard to replace the musical culture of the area in which the school is located.

Brought up in an environment which fostered formal methods such as those organised by religious choral groups, Norma has found that the official curriculum allows her scope to indulge in her own musical interests and she makes every effort to inculcate a sense of performance in her practice. She sets high standards for herself and for the pupils in the school where, against the odds, she has introduced choral music. She measures her level of success, not so much in terms of the support she gets from her peers but from the encouragement she gets outside the school, including the endorsement she gets from her past pupils.

Patricia's love of music extends to all types and genres and she wants to give the pupils a broad range of experiences. The social inclusiveness of music appears to be highlighted in her practice and she wants the pupils to have something to contribute to a group in later life, most especially in the form of a party piece. Patricia's fear is that she won't acquit herself well in front of the pupils in her class or the inspectors who visit. She is critical of the recommendations made at preservice teacher education level regarding the formal methods of teaching music. She considers them to be largely impracticable in terms of the time constraints and level of skill demanded.

In the next chapter, the analysis of the data is presented. In the case of the five respondents, it is shown that, while there are commonalities in practice, there are differences too. In this sense, the everyday conceptions of music education, including the musical pathways (Finnegan 1989) are explored. So too is the extent to which a relativist or absolutist perspective (Brändström, 1999) may be seen to inform their practice. Drawing on Bourdieu,

(1990) it is shown how differences in teacher practice can be accounted for by attending to those values and dispositions gained by the respondents from their cultural history which tend to stay with them across contexts. Reading across both objective regularity and subjective realities, it is noted that the values and dispositions which were experienced in a biographical context by the respondents as positive have tended to be replicated by them in their classroom practice. Those values and dispositions which were experienced by them as negative have tended to be discarded and replaced by those which they experienced as positive.



## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### ***Analysis***

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, an analysis of the data is presented in respect of the research questions posed in the study (in chapter five above). The research questions were concerned with, in the case of each respondent, a description of the nature of their professional activity in music and an investigation of the factors which contribute to their orientation to practice.

There are three ways in which the analysis of the data has occurred. Firstly, the selection and organisation of musical knowledge has been examined in respect of the five respondents working in an institutional setting such as that in contemporary Irish primary schools. It is shown (in section 7.2) that commonalities exist among the respondents regarding the transmission of a prescribed curriculum with an emphasis on performance and the development of music literacy. It is noted that such commonalities in practice may be described as evidence of the establishment of an objective regularity. In section 7.3 of the analysis it is revealed that, although there may be commonalities in teacher practice, there are differences too. As outlined in chapter three above, sources of these differences have been described as tensions or constraints. Factors contributing to these tensions have been identified in the literature as the official policy (3.2.1), teacher beliefs (3.2.2) and the ethos of the school (3.2.3). Evidence of the

existence of tensions in practice is presented in respect of the five respondents in the study. In addition, the ways in which the perspectives held by the respondents on the ground, working in the idiosyncratic setting may differ from the perspectives espoused at official policy level are investigated and the impact of such differences on their professional activity is discussed.

As stated at the outset of the thesis, a consideration in the study has been to offer an alternative to those studies in which assumptions about practice are made. It may be observed that, at the end of section one of the analysis, there is evidence to support those assumptions about practice which have been made in discussion in the Irish context (supporting an emphasis on song singing and music literacy in music education at primary school level). However, as the analysis will show, in section 7.4, evidence is presented of a view of teacher knowledge which is broader than that presented within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum. Such a conception of teacher knowledge is shown to be multi-faceted and one which is influenced by formative experiences, both in-school and out-of-school (in section 7.4.1). In section 7.4.2, the notion of replication of the positive aspects of their formative experiences in their practice is explored. Arising from this, in section 7.5, evidence is presented that the respondents in the study were not simply engaged in transmitting aspects of a prescribed curriculum but were concerned with emphasising the transformative power of a curriculum in their own lives and in the lives of their pupils. Particular attention is drawn to the relationship between the values they considered performance to have in their formative experiences and in the context of their professional activity in the classroom.

A third aspect of the analysis is presented in 7.6 which examines the teacher stories in the light of the particular social and historical setting within which the practice takes place (the context of practice) and which recognises that the respondents have themselves been enculturated into a set of practices (as evidenced by their formative experiences). Central to this part of the analysis is Bourdieu's (1990) use of the terms cultural field, cultural capital and 'habitus' (as described in chapter four above).

## ***7.2 The selection and organisation of musical knowledge in an institutional setting***

It has been pointed out in the literature review (see 2.4, 2.6 above) that, in research on teacher practice, there has tended to be an assumption of homogeneity among teachers who were perceived as working within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum. In addition, it was noted that, since the inception of the Irish national system of education, the official policy has emphasised music literacy and performance with a predominance of song singing (see 2.3 above). Taken together, such tendencies have contributed to a view that teachers operating within the parameters of a centralised system are engaged in establishing an objective regularity. The findings in the present study support this and are presented in the section below.

### ***7.2.1 Establishment of an objective regularity; transmitting the curriculum***

In the interpretative accounts of the five respondents, there is evidence that performance and music literacy are seen as an integral part of their professional activity in music education. During the lessons observed, for example, each of the respondents included a large dimension of performance which, in the case of Norma and Fiona was almost exclusively vocal and with an emphasis on western classical music. In the case of Ray and Ultan, the emphasis tended to be on traditional Irish music, including both instrumental and vocal performance. Patricia was found to have an eclectic mix and her professional activity in music education included instrumental performance by pupils (using a descant recorder) and vocal performance (exemplified in the lesson by the inclusion of a Canadian sea shanty in the repertoire).

In addition, in the case of each of the respondents, there was an emphasis on the development of music literacy. She used music literacy as a means of teaching the elements of music, the dynamic markings, and other aspects of performance. Using the official curriculum as a guide, Norma covered vocal technique and sight reading. Patricia's approach tended to be governed almost exclusively by the preservice training she had in college and by a reliance on published materials and music schemes recommended by the school. She was systematic and specific

about the order in which she presented the sharps and flats to the children, not least because it was expected that she would support the work of the visiting recorder teacher and would need to cover a certain amount of ground in advance of the recorder teacher's visit. Ultan tried to demystify music literacy and, in order to facilitate them a bit more in the beginning 'rather than ...depending solely on the notes', he allowed the children to put a letter under the note. His intention was that, by the end of the year, he might be able to dispense with such an interim strategy and 'might be able to just have the old lines and maybe wean them off the letters'. Ray has emphasised the importance of music literacy to such an extent that he included a self-made literacy table in the book list at the beginning of the school year.

In summary, regarding the nature of their professional activity in music, there is a level of evidence in the study to support the notion that the respondents are engaged in transmission of the contents of a prescribed curriculum. This is exemplified in the emphasis each of them has placed on the importance of music literacy and performance. To that extent, they are working within the parameters set down at official policy level in the Irish institutional setting and there is a level of commonality among them in respect of their professional activity in music education.

In the next section, evidence is presented of the extent to which differences in practice exist among the five respondents, even when working within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum. As noted in the literature review, there was found to be tension in practice when the perspectives held by the individual teacher working at a micro level in the classroom differ from those being promoted by the official policy makers at a macro level. Whether these tensions exist in respect of the five respondents and contribute to differences in their practice is addressed in the next section.

### **7.3 Factors which influence teacher practice in an institutional setting: competing perspectives**

The literature review has pointed to the fact that in research on teacher practice in the institutional setting, there was evidence of competing perspectives at play (see 3.2 above) which were considered to affect teacher practice. In this body of research, official policy was identified as a factor (as outlined in 3.2.1 in respect of the Kyriakides (1997) study of the perceived sources of influences on a sample of Cypriot primary teachers). In addition, tension was found to exist among teachers when the beliefs they held about a subject were different to those presented in the prescribed curriculum (as outlined in 3.2.2 in respect of studies in science education (Lakin and Wellington, 1994), in mathematics education (Andrews and Hatch, 1999; Lerman, 1990) and in music education (Teachout, 1997; Brändström, 1999)). A third area of research was presented which identified the ethos of the school as a factor which influenced teacher practice (such as the study undertaken by Yuen-Fun Ng and Morris (1998) in the area of music as outlined in 3.2.3). In the present study, it can be seen that, even within a relatively small number of respondents working within the parameters of a centralised system and using the same prescribed curriculum, there are competing perspectives at play which have led to tensions or constraints in teacher practice. The next section presents evidence in support of each of the factors identified in the literature review.

#### **7.3.1 Official policy**

The official policy espoused at a macro level is evident in the prescribed curriculum and in the intervention of the inspectors to ensure that the policy is put into practice at local level. Insofar as this policy did not compete with the policy espoused at the micro level of the classroom, Norma and Fiona tended to find the official policy relevant to their practice. Both had worked in their schools for many years and had a wealth of experience in the classroom. Although neither of them was in a position of power, each had managed to carve out a niche for themselves and to

implement their own policy in their setting. In Norma's case, this was in the area of choral direction and in Fiona's case it was in the area of vocal coaching. In both cases, it was clear that their professional practice in music education fell within the parameters of the official curriculum. They endorsed the formal methods and the content espoused at official policy level, with its emphasis on sol-fa and singing.

In contrast, for Ray and Ultan, the views held at official policy level were considered by them to be irrelevant to the situation 'on the ground'. This is particularly evidenced in their dismissal of the input of inspectors in appraising their classroom practice. For both Ray and Ultan, an orientation to practice tended to be influenced more by what *they* themselves considered relevant and appropriate to their particular setting. Although neither of them had been in their particular school setting for as long as Norma or Fiona, it is suggested that, because both Ray and Ultan were principal teachers, they had the power to negotiate the relevance of music in their particular school context and to introduce aspects of practice which they considered to be relevant. This included reinforcing their own view of what was of value and having the autonomy to draw on past pupils to endorse their practice. One such example is to be found in Ray's anecdote about the visits made by the inspector. He described how the inspector called to two different settings – one was to the classroom of a friend, the other was to his own classroom – and the comments of the inspector to the practice in both settings reinforced to him the 'double standards', or lack of relevance he considers the inspector to have. In one classroom, the inspector expressed dissatisfaction with the nature and extent of music being taught while, according to Ray, the inspector had no difficulty with the same lesson in his class. What was significant to Ray was that, in both cases the same type of activity was being undertaken.

On the other hand, Patricia displayed evidence of tensions in practice, particularly regarding matters of official policy as enacted in the local setting. This particularly was noticeable in the manner in which the recorder teacher had assumed a level of authority over Patricia's pupils and Patricia was relegated to the position of acting in a supplementary role. It is evidenced also in her difficulties with the introduction of a policy in the school to restrict guitar lessons to those pupils who would pay for lessons and who would stay behind after school. She was unhappy too with the expectation that each teacher would send their pupils to a general rehearsal in the school hall in preparation for a school concert with little prior consultation with the individual class teachers. This, compounded with her own lack of confidence in implementing the contents of the music curriculum prescribed at official policy level, tended to add to the level of tension expressed by her in her practice.

### **7.3.2 Teacher beliefs**

As was seen in the literature review, when the beliefs espoused at a macro level differed from those held by the respondents, tension or conflict tended to result at a micro level. In the present study, this is evident in the case of Norma who believed that music should be a vibrant part of school life. There was a prevailing view that sports held a dominant place in the school and she wanted to give the pupils in her school an option. She introduced elements to the school which changed the music scene from the 'four hymn syndrome' to include a children's choir. Because there was resistance initially, there was opposition from the staff but Norma persisted. She latterly had the support of the principal and also drew on those outside sources – in particular from groups to which she was affiliated - which gave support to her beliefs about music in school. Endorsement for what she did was found, not necessarily among her colleagues but from the past pupils themselves.

On the other hand, there was no opposition to the beliefs held by Ultan and Ray in the school context. Both believed that music in school should be part of a living tradition and succeeded in fostering this belief, by providing an atmosphere of enjoyment and highlighting the relevance of music in the school. The beliefs held by Patricia were that there should be a tolerance for people's tastes and she made every effort to promote this in her practice. Sometimes this led to tension between her and the other teachers and she tended to compromise. In the case of Fiona, who held strongly the belief that music was a great emotional outlet for the pupils, institutional and local support was drawn upon to promote the 'good music' in school.

### **7.3.3 Ethos of the school**

The ethos of the school was seen to be a significant factor in Fiona's relationship with music in the context of her professional practice. Because she had the approval of the school authorities, she was able to effect huge changes in the school and to introduce the notion of 'good music' to the school. By 'good music', she intended classical music, with which she was very familiar. In promoting the 'good music' she drew on those formal methods (outlined in 3.4.2.2) which were

part of her own formative experiences. She observed that the ethos of the inner city was not one of classical music and that most of the parents listened to 'stagey stuff'. Because the ethos of the school supported the 'good music', however, it was possible for her to supplant the 'stagey stuff' with the 'good music' and to establish a place for 'good music' in the school and among the pupils. In the case of Norma, she had a similar objective but, because there was a strong ethos of sports in the school, it took her some time to establish a place for music in the timetable and to ensure that there was institutional support for her work in choral music.

In the case of these four respondents - [only Patricia did not refer to past pupils] - past pupils were considered to reinforce the validity of the particular ethos which is inculcated in the school. As has been seen in the case of Ray, he has maintained a good relationship with past pupils who have continued in active pursuit of music and he draws on this expertise to foster music among his pupils. One of his past pupils, Johnny teaches guitar to the pupils. He has 'tried out other teachers but this guy is fine' by which it might be discerned that Johnny was *au fait* with the type of the ethos which existed in the school and was seen to be actively promoting it. Under Johnny's guidance, the children could learn with 'no pressure on them...it is very relaxing'.

Ultan told the story of how he used an anthem as device to construct a particular ethos in the school, and one with which the pupils could identify when they left the school. That this had the desired effect was evident in his account of meeting past pupils who continued to associate the sentiments of the anthem with the particular ethos he intended to promote in the school.

With Norma, approval for the ethos she wanted to promote came also from past pupils. They turned up at concert venues to wish the school well and to compliment her on the amount of pleasure they gained from being in the choir when they were pupils. They even sought out her own children, asking them to tell her how much they valued her input.

Fiona has made every effort to keep the ethos alive and even when the pupils have moved on to secondary school, she has continued to help them and to support them in their music studies. Although the ethos of music in the school was different from the ethos of music in the community, it would appear that the pupils perceived the support to be of relevance. Arguably, they had made the connection between what Fiona was doing for them and the value it held or had the potential to hold in their lives.



### **7.3.4 Summary**

It has been shown that, within the parameters of a centralised system and using a prescribed curriculum, in the professional context of the classroom there can be tension in practice when the perspective held by the teachers differ from those held at a macro level. These competing perspectives - identified in the literature review as the official policy, ethos of school and the beliefs held by teachers – have been examined in the context of the five respondents in the study. It has been noted that the way in which the respondents in the present study respond to the tensions at local level has a bearing on their professional activity. Although Ultan and Ray expressed their concern of the relevance of the music content as set out in the prescribed curriculum, neither of them had allowed this to interfere with their practice. They both had the power to pursue their own beliefs in the idiosyncratic setting, and had all but dismissed the official view.

Patricia too, had tensions in respect of her lack of agreement with the content and methods prescribed. Yet, because she had little power at local level, she had little room to act on her own beliefs about music. Both Norma and Fiona were advocates of the official view and although they did not have positions of power as such, the support for their practice was implicit at official policy level. Tensions such as, in Norma's case, the introduction of choir practice as an alternative to sports were resolved through persistence on her part with promoting her own beliefs.

Taken together, it can be seen that tensions existed among the five respondents in aspects of their practice. The causes of such tensions may be attributed to the differences between aspects of official policy and the policies espoused by them, the differences between the beliefs espoused at official level and their own beliefs, and the extent to which the ethos they want to promote is compatible with that being promoted in the school generally. It has been shown that, even when working within the parameters of an institutional setting, and with the same prescribed curriculum, there is a variety of convictions and meanings at play which have influenced the way in which each respondent relates to music in the idiosyncratic setting.

The next section of the analysis examines this variety of convictions further, and points to the existence of a knowledge base which tends to be wider than that held within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum.

## **7.4 Evidence of a multi-faceted nature of teacher knowledge in teacher practice: interpreting the curriculum**

In this section, the knowledge base of the five respondents is taken to be wider than the parameters of the prescribed curriculum. As indicated in the literature review (see 3.3 above), there was evidence of a relationship between the knowledge held by teachers and the context in which the knowledge was formed, with reference to Shulman's (1986) identification of the teacher's conceptions of subject matter knowledge as multi-faceted (as outlined in 3.3.1) and Gudmundsdottir's (1990) connection between the values held by teachers and their classroom practice (as outlined in 3.3.2). In addition, it was noted that Clandinin and Connelly (1995) considered the professional knowledge landscape to be wider than the school setting (as discussed in 3.3.3). It was suggested that teachers draw on a variety of convictions and meanings - conscious or unconscious - that have arisen from experience to form their knowledge.

In addition, the origin of such views and values were explored in the literature review (as presented in 3.4 above) where the relationship between teacher practice and their formative experiences was explored. The next section presents the evidence to support such points of view in the present study. In-school and out-of-school experiences of teachers are used to extend the knowledge base of the respondents, and to define teacher knowledge in terms that are wider than the parameters of a prescribed curriculum. Using this broader conception of teacher knowledge, section 7.4.1 explores the extent to which the formative experiences of the respondents had an impact on their practice.

### **7.4.1 Impact of formative experiences on teacher practice**

It is observed that formative experiences of the respondents were imbued with both positive and negative emotions, with words such as 'irrelevant', 'alien,' 'soul destroying' and 'tedious' used to describe the negative and words such as 'belonging', 'inclusive' and 'enjoyment' used to express the positive. In particular, the experience of music in the in-school setting was

experienced as negative by Ultan and Ray while Norma and Fiona described their in-school experiences as positive. Patricia was less obviously in one or other category.

#### **7.4.1.1 Negative and positive in formative experiences**

For Ray and Ultan, the in-school experiences were negative and largely irrelevant. Ray had no music at second level, recalling how his music education largely happened at primary school. Here the professional activity of the teacher was based predominantly on formal methods. Ray learned music by sol-fa and was in a musical: 'Ali Baba'. Ray felt the experiences he had at preservice teacher education level were soul destroying. He couldn't understand how there was no opportunity for the student teachers to play traditional Irish music, if only to give them a taste of it. Instead, the same formal method of teaching literacy through sol-fa that he encountered at primary school was used in preservice teacher education.

Like Ray, Ultan's formative experiences in primary school comprised song singing and development of music literacy. He had a vivid memory of the experiences and described the sol-fa method and hand signs used by the teacher. Ultan found music at preservice teacher education difficult but was encouraged by his lecturer to stick with it. Also, like Ray, he found it largely irrelevant. He tended to prefer those aspects which he could relate to, namely those which emphasised a sense of the local and a sense of place.

In contrast, both Norma and Fiona had a positive experience in the in-school setting. Norma recalled how music was treated very seriously in school both at primary and secondary level. She was in the plainchant choir which rehearsed regularly on Saturdays. As a result of this, she learned to sing plainchant from notation and was able to sing in parts from about the age of ten. It appears to have been strict, as the story about making the wrong note testifies. This did not dissuade her from continuing her interest in music in secondary school where she participated in musicals. Her enthusiasm extended to preservice teacher education where she was encouraged to continue with choral music activities.

In Fiona's case, primary school music consisted of membership of a plainchant choir and singing choral music. The structure of the plainchant choir was similar to that experienced by Norma as a child and was also organised by the clergy at a diocesan level. Fiona learned to play piano and took formal lessons from an early age. One of her teachers pushed her to succeed and she recalled how she often had piano lessons outside of normal school times. Although she found the teacher cross, she enjoyed her piano lessons and overall has retained a positive attitude to the

experience. At secondary school level, the emphasis in music continued and she did 'all the grades in piano'. She also belonged to an Irish traditional music group and recalled the system of notation which was used. This interest in music continued at third level and she loved every aspect of the music programme during her preservice teacher education. She was introduced to all kinds of knowledge and experiences, including voice training, choral activity and musicology.

Patricia had aspects of both negative and positive feelings about her in-school formative experiences. Patricia's negative memory of in-school formative experiences was dominated by the boredom she experienced when learning recorder in primary school. There was great emphasis put on a textbook as an indicator of one's ability. Progress tended to be marked solely by one's place in the book. She recalled how bored she became with the book and how she eventually lost interest in the recorder. She also remembered the negative effect the professional activity of another teacher had on her sister which in turn left a negative feeling with Patricia.

In contrast, she had very strong positive feelings about the teacher she had in secondary school. She attributed the positive feeling she had for her experiences at secondary school to the fact that participation was emphasised and the music teacher included everyone, regardless of ability. Her experiences at college, during her preservice teacher education were predominantly negative and she felt alienated from the music education culture promoted there. She had not done music to leaving certificate level (or final examination at secondary school) and felt ill-equipped for the demands of the preservice teacher education course. This resulted in making her feel like an impostor, a feeling which has persisted in her professional practice and which has coloured her view of her own abilities and effectiveness in the classroom.

#### **7.4.1.2 Summary**

In this section, the formative experiences have been described as negative and positive. Key areas in the positive experiences were the extent to which the respondents had a feeling of membership, and of belonging to a group. In addition, music was seen as a vehicle of self expression and was considered to add value to their lives. In contrast, the negative experiences were those for which the respondents had no sense of music's relevance to their lives. For Ultan and Ray, the music they encountered in the formal setting of the school was alien to them and unrelated to their lives, whereas for Norma and Fiona there was little difficulty in relating to the music they experienced in the formal setting of the school and their in-school activities appeared

to complement the activities they were involved with outside school. Patricia was somewhere in between.

In the next section, it can be seen that, where the formative experiences were negative, these tended not to be replicated in practice but to be replaced by those aspects of their formative experiences which were positive. In contrast, where the formative experiences were positive, these tended to be replicated in practice.

#### **7.4.2. Replication and replacement in teacher practice**

In Ray's case, he wants to replicate the positive experiences he had of music and these tend to be drawn from the out-of-school context.

*I have a nice photo of them ... a couple of years ago at the Fleadh Cheoil in Clonmel. They were sitting down on the kerb and they were busking... It's good, you know, when you go to the Fleadh, anyone can sit down on the road and play, busking.*

For Ray, initiation into this culture is central. He described how he learned the tunes as a child and gained access to a world of music, in way that was predominantly informal and where each member of the group was like a family. This process of enculturation (as outlined in 3.4.2.2 above) is at the heart of his orientation to practice. In addition, he draws on a relativist perspective to practice (Brändström, 1999), where everyone can take part, at whatever level is suitable for them. Priority is given to keeping music alive, like a 'living tradition' and to making it accessible to all the pupils. He tries to create an atmosphere in the school, where they are 'all tipping away' with 'no inhibitions whatsoever' and 'relaxed'. This atmosphere he works so hard to create and sustain in his school and classroom practice is in contrast to the in-school experiences he had as a child where his memory of the input of the teacher lay in behaviours which fit more easily into what Brändström (1999) termed the absolutist notion of music education. From Ray's account, it would appear that priority was given to skill acquisition, with little attention to the inclusiveness he emphasises in his own practice. Teacher behaviours included beating the rhythm of a piece of music out to a stick, with an apparent lack of connection between the teacher and the music.

According to Ray, the notion of music as a living tradition was not evidenced during his preservice teacher education in college where, as noted earlier, he described his encounter of music as ‘soul-destroying’ and ‘detached’. Not surprisingly, then, his response to official policy (as discussed in 7.3.1 above) has been that it holds less value than his own view of what counts as music, and the beliefs he holds about best practice are those which are based on his own out-of-school formative experiences –predominantly informal –rather than the in-school experiences he had at an early age.

Fiona’s belief is that ‘it all comes from the school’, by which it is likely that she felt the change in the pupils’ circumstances would be effected only if the change was initiated by the school. In Fiona’s view, this practice of leaving it all to the school is particularly prevalent in the inner city. While opportunities for participation in music activities are abundant within the catchment area of the school, with colleges and concert halls within walking distance, she is acutely aware of the distance - culturally and psychologically - to be travelled by the residents. She explained how the world within which the pupils live in the inner city is alien from the world to which she wants to expose the pupils. One of these worlds is the world of the school where they learn the ‘good stuff’ while the second world is the world of the home where they learn the ‘stagey stuff’.

Although these two cultural milieux contrast sharply with each other, the story below - told by Fiona - gives an insight into her understanding of the situation and of her pupils’ perception of her professional activity.

*But one time...this is a funny story...we were working - in the choir - we were working on words especially the t at the end of the words and there was a girl in the front row who just wasn't getting it and I was getting her over and over to say it and somebody along the line was getting a bit fed up listening to me so she said up to the girl Lisa Jane, she said, you're saying it common, will you say it posh? And the girl got the message straight away.*

She has convinced the pupils that singing in a choir is a valuable exercise, that hard work and dedication pay off, and that skills of critical reflection will give them a currency which they can use in the ‘big, big world out there’. In light of this the ‘funny story’ has a particular resonance. It is funny, no doubt because it shows in sharp relief the enormity of the task with which Fiona is engaged. Also it shows the extent to which the pupils are cooperating, and able to identify with two cultural worlds, one located in their out-of-school context and the other found in their in-school setting. As pointed out by Fiona, the success of her practice is measured not least by the number of pupils who will continue to pursue the ‘good stuff’ in secondary school. In this sense,

the provision of a continuity of access is central to the process of initiation into the 'alien culture'. The beliefs she holds about music education in an institutional setting tend to be compatible with those espoused at official policy level and this has resulted - in her case - in a relative absence of tension in enacting a prescribed curriculum.

Insofar as they both drew on formative experiences which were positive, Ray and Fiona have similarities. In Ray's case, these positive experiences were predominantly those informal practices he experienced in the out-of-school setting, while in Fiona's case, they were largely those formal methods experienced in school. Both respondents want to make their pupils independent and assured, to be able to 'hold their own' with their peers. However, where Fiona depends for her success on the constraints of the in-school setting, namely by framing the practice in a formal way, Ray has all but eroded the constraints of the in-school setting, and replaced it with the out-of-school setting where the informal practices prevail. Where Ray expects his pupils to practise at home, for Fiona it all comes from the school.

The differences between in-school and out-of-school experiences appear to have had a big impact on Ultan. Brought up in a house where music was part of the life, he learned ballads from his father and his grandmother. By the time he went to school, he had a treasure trove of such songs, picked up by ear. He described how the songs brought the spirit of the locality to life for him and filled him with a strong sense of belonging to the village community. He integrated this love of music in his adult life by singing in the village. His commitment to music is evident in the struggle he had with trying to learn to play new pieces of music. Ultan described how he learned by imitation, by osmosis and by eliminating mistakes. He was engrossed in the activity.

On the other hand, as described in 7.4.1.1 above, his attitude to music education in the in-school setting has been described as negative. His description of the methods used by the teacher (including the use of hand signs and sol-fa) and the lack of relevance of the repertoire are indicators of his bewilderment. He could see no obvious link between these formal methods and the informal practices he experienced outside school.

Interestingly, unlike Ray who has dismissed the formal methods as irrelevant and unhelpful, Ultan has tended to be somewhat more forgiving and has tried to put the 'alien' practices into some context in his professional activity. His comparison of fly fishing and music literacy brings home the way in which he has tried to make sense of his experiences, and to bridge the gap between the 'alien' and the familiar.

*I do a good lot of fly fishing on the old river and I remember when I was younger we always thought that Jaysus the lads who do fly fishing, like it must be some kind of an exclusive art that only a few are chosen to be able to handle it...and we sort of always had a notion that the guys would be able to tie up flies, fishing flies. So now we are all doing it and there is no big deal about it at all. But it is amazing how... sort of one could have this preconceived notion and when you are really dragged into it and it's done in front of you and taken nice and handy, there isn't that mystique around it at all.*

This metaphor appears to capture succinctly his orientation to practice. The informal way in which music is approached during the school day, with no coercion, where the focus is on promoting an allegiance to a sense of the local and on initiation of the pupils into a culture which is local are all evident in Ultan's case.

Efforts to bridge the gap between the 'alien' and the familiar have included the following strategies: adapting the notation system with the intention of 'weaning them off' in due course: weaving the ballad into other areas of learning, and constructing a school anthem by uniting a tune (known to the pupils) with words which help to connect the local experiences with the wider, unknown world. These strategies are evidence too, of a relativist perspective in music education, where everyone can participate.

In Norma's practice, there is evidence that she considers the pupils to be the apprentices and herself to be the expert. In a sense, she is building up a sense of mystique akin to what Ultan has spent much of his adult life trying to unravel. The absolutist perspective in her orientation to practice is evident in her description of the method of initiating the pupils into the 'world of music'.

*And I don't allow them to sing at all - end of story. They sit beside the child who is a good[?] voice and they never open their mouth. I will not allow it...and after a month or two I try again...and he'll say teacher am I a listener or am I a singer today? And we went on with that until Christmas...and 'teacher am I a listener or am I a singer?' 'I'll try you again in another day'. The whole year the child never opened his mouth...and by the end of the year he was a little bit coming but it was the end of fourth class before that child was able to sing and he is one of 15 standing up tonight .And I found that it has worked with so many*

For Norma, the importance is that the pupils achieve mastery and she makes every effort to ensure that this occurs. The fact that she does not allow them to sing is evidence of the emphasis she places on the product and on getting the results. Inaccurate singing is a 'pet hate' of hers and she expects the pupils to listen and pick up the tune. This method mirrors that used in the plainchant choir to which she belonged as a child. She described the occasions when the



plainchant choir director spent time trying to eliminate inaccurate singing and listened for wrong notes. The memory of such experiences remained with her and she recalled how, like the other members of the plainchant choir, she feared that the choir director would find her guilty of the offence or that she would be identified as the 'culprit'. In spite of such vivid childhood memories, Norma has drawn on a similar strategy in her professional practice. Although she considers the children of today different in attitude, with less interest in committing to the discipline of practice and to the demands of working to a goal, she continues to strive to achieve the standards she remembers from her own youth.

The extent to which Norma was influenced by these formative experiences at in-school level can be seen in the zeal with which she wants to replicate these in her own practice. A keen advocate of choral singing, Norma had her heart set on giving the pupils a chance to participate in choral performances, including public performances. However she has put restrictions on those children who can participate. Whereas, with Ultan and Ray, every child can participate in music activities, with Norma the pupils must satisfy some prerequisite conditions, (as evidenced in the account above). She considers this to be successful and cites the number of past pupils who have returned to the school, expressing their gratitude to her for creating opportunities to participate in musical activities in school. Spurred on by this endorsement, she feels justified in prohibiting the pupils from participating until she is confident that they have achieved the standard she sets.

Patricia places great store by performance and includes both vocal and instrumental. She wants all of her pupils to leave school with a party piece, or some musical item they can use in the out-of-school context. As reported in the interpretative account, Patricia taught the pupils a sea shanty during the observation of her 'typical lesson'. During this lesson, she was careful to put the song into a context for the pupils, emphasising both the story and the genre. She chose the song because she liked it and had learned to sing it herself when she was on career break. Unlike all of the other respondents, Patricia did not perform in the classroom, preferring instead to give directions about performance.

It would appear that the formal methods to which she was exposed during preservice teacher education have left her with a feeling of inadequacy as a music educator. It seems that music education for Patricia has become a complicated and complex enterprise, for which she feels ill-prepared. This has been evidenced also in respect of her discomfort with the notion of playing the recorder for the pupils. She was content to observe the extent to which the pupils could

reproduce the fingering patterns in the book rather than to act as a model herself. She explained why.

*No. I just think that...I lack the technicalities of music, like taking out a tuning fork and say for singing well you know start there you know whereas I either go with memory or go with the tape and we were told never to go with memory because you are going to be off key invariably you know but like they seem to ...there are a few good voices in there and that have good ears and they just seem to know what the note is since the last time but that is kind of going on hope rather than [expertise]...(laughs)*

Because she doesn't appear to feel confident in the role of model or expert in the institutional setting, she relies on establishing a bond of trust with the pupils. She hopes the pupils won't exploit this bond of trust and won't 'cod' her or pretend to work at their recorder. Although she has questioned the usefulness of some of the teaching methods promoted by the lecturers during her preservice teacher education, she has not dismissed them as irrelevant. Instead she has little purchase on her own knowledge and experiences, dismissing them as invalid. This is exemplified in her attitude to including tape recordings of songs in the classroom. She has views about the usefulness of using a tape as a pedagogical aid in teaching a song. However, in spite of the success she has had in using the tape occasionally in the classroom, she does not consider it to be good practice and dismissed it as an invalid method of teaching. Instead, she considers the 'technicalities' described in college to be the desired practice, even though such a method as prescribed in preservice teacher education has taken up considerable amounts of her time in the school day.

The tension in practice (discussed in 7.3 above) may be attributed to the difficulty she has in reconciling her own belief in the promotion of tolerance for everyone's taste in music with the school policy of prescribing the textbooks and music schemes, effectively imposing a particular set of tastes on her. Arguably, this tension is compounded by the role prescribed for her, where her classroom practice is dictated largely by external forces (for example, by the specialist recorder teacher and the organiser of the annual concerts).

The practice of using taped recordings of songs is the method of learning chosen by Ray to good effect. In his interpretative account, he described how useful it was for him to make taped recordings of tunes for the purpose of learning with ease. Ray described how he learned his first tune on the guitar by ear, from a tape. For him, therefore, there is every reason to introduce such a practice into the classroom. His personal experience of learning through imitation, and with the used of a taped recording, is a positive one.

It is difficult to imagine how Ray would dismiss such a practice in favour of the prescribed practices recommended at preservice teacher education, as Patricia has done. In contrast, however, it would appear that she puts great emphasis on the use of a tuning fork as a pedagogical aid. Unlike Ray and Ultan, for whom it holds no importance, she considers the use of a 'tuning fork' an important teaching skill and identifies her inability to master the skill as a limitation. The difference lies, arguably, in the extent to which each of them has confidence in their own professional activity and the extent to which they depend on external agents for validation.

### **7.4.3 Summary**

It can be seen that those formative experiences which were described by the respondents in positive terms tended to dominate practice in the formal educational setting. For Norma and Fiona, the positive experiences were those which they experienced in school and were predominantly formal and characterised by the conception of music promoted in the official curriculum. The repertoire they use has been drawn largely from the western classical genre, with an emphasis on choral music. In contrast, for Ultan and Ray, their positive experiences of music tended to take place in the informal context. For them, music in the educational milieu is considered to be an integral part of life in school and takes place in largely informal settings. The repertoire they draw on is predominantly traditional Irish, with instrumental music used by Ray and the song favoured by Ultan. As was evident in the case of Ray, for Ultan these experiences were predominantly out-of-school experiences and characterised by everyday conceptions (as described in 3.4.2 above) rather than the view put forward by official policy documents. In the case of Patricia, there are conflicting messages which have tended to be reflected in her practice.

## **7.5 Understanding commonality and difference in teacher practice**

It has been seen in the literature review (in chapter two) how, at official policy level in the Irish context, the selection and organisation of musical knowledge has supported the notion of music literacy and performance. As has been pointed out earlier in the analysis, there has been evidence of a level of commonality among the respondents in respect of their professional activity, with an emphasis in the case of all of the participants on performance and on the development of music literacy. In addition, it has been seen that, in an institutional setting and within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum, there are competing perspectives which affect teacher practice at a local level. As indicated in the literature review, these were identified as official policy, teacher beliefs and the ethos of the school. These have been explored in the case of the five respondents and evidence of competing perspectives has been presented. It has been seen that the participants responded to the tensions in different ways and this contributed to differences in their practice. Significantly, differences occurred in respect of the manner in which each respondent tended to interpret the official curriculum in the context of their own idiosyncratic setting and of their own formative experiences.

In addition, however, the present study has revealed that, on its own, this information provides only a partial account of teacher practice. The respondents were not simply interested in performance or the development of music literacy for its own sake. In particular, it is seen how each respondent tended to encourage a level of participation among the pupils and to interpret the notion of performance and music literacy in light of this. The extent to which participation was encouraged has been discussed in terms of the notions of absolutism and relativism (as discussed in 2.4.3 above).

In the next section, the evidence is drawn together which makes explicit the connection between the orientation to practice of the respondents and the emphasis they placed on participation. In some cases, there was an emphasis on the absolutist approach to performance while in others, the tendency was to adopt a relativist approach.

### ***7.5.1 Performance and participation: relativism v. absolutism***

In order to ensure that all can participate, Ray has tailored some music and supplied some arrangements which take into account everyone's level of ability. In this sense, it might be argued that he has a relativist approach to performance, whereby each person is contributing at his or her own pace. The important point is that they are 'all tipping away'. He participates in the activities with the pupils, adding a line of harmony in where necessary. Ultan, like Ray is interested in the participation of the pupils. To him, it is conducted largely on a voluntary basis and the pupils organise their own groups and times for practice. He occasionally sings a ballad and contributes on the mandolin at the classroom activities.

In contrast, Norma might be classed as an absolutist regarding her approach to performance. While she wants all the pupils to participate, there is a minimum requirement needed and until they reach this level of attainment, she doesn't allow them to participate. Norma models the singing line and by use of gestures, shapes the lines. In addition she plays the melodies on the keyboard. In Fiona's case, there is evidence of a two-tiered approach to performance. On the one hand, there is a voluntary aspect to music for church services, communion and confirmation. By making it voluntary, everyone can contribute, regardless of ability. On the other hand, access to the choir is restricted to the 'talented few'. By using auditions, she can control the intake and ensure the continuation of the high level of commitment and standard demanded. Here the orientation to practice is on the acquisition of skills pertinent to 'getting it right'.

For Patricia, there are aspects of both relativism and absolutism in evidence. The emphasis in her practice is on the full participation of the children. She doesn't want to lose anyone and is conscious that some of the children are way ahead while some of them will never get it. For Patricia, the important factor is practice as 'practice makes perfect'. In spite of her ability to play the recorder, she does not offer herself as a model of practice, and prefers instead to watch for mistakes in the children. In this sense, she tends towards an absolutist view and is concerned with eliminating performance errors.

At the same time, she has taken every opportunity to ensure that, in the course of her own practice, she does not replicate the negative aspects of music education she experienced in the in-school setting. For example, she draws on the memory of inclusiveness which impressed her as a pupil in school. One of her ambitions was to ensure that all the pupils in her class had a

party piece so that they would not feel left out. In this sense she adopts a relativist perspective and wants everyone to participate and makes every effort to scaffold the pupils learning, drawing on published materials as a pedagogical aid. It is clear too, however, that the standards she applies in respect of her own participation are rigorous and, in effect, absolutist. It is reasonable to conclude that the lack of confidence in her ability to 'get it right' may be due in part to the fact that she has not yet resolved the tensions between wanting to pass on her love of music and the way in which this might be achieved in the idiosyncratic setting.

In summary, this section has drawn together the evidence which makes explicit the connection between the orientation to practice of the respondents and the emphasis they placed on participation. In so doing, it has focused on the notions of absolutism and relativism.

A second aspect of the orientation to practice among the respondents lay in the emphasis, in the case of each of them, on performance and its value for children as a means of gaining access to a particular community, or as a means of giving the pupils a sense of belonging. The extent to which there are commonalities and differences among the five respondents in respect of this is discussed in the next section.

### *7.5.2 Performance and community: local v. the 'big big world'*

There is evidence in the interpretative accounts that each respondent wanted the pupils to build on the relationship with music that had been initiated in school. Their belief that music is important for children is influenced by their own formative experiences and the value they consider music to have had in their own lives. In various guises, they want to pass on this opportunity to the pupils, and thus to empower them to belong to a particular community. To the extent that music literacy was seen as a means of access to a world to which the pupils could belong, the contents of the prescribed curriculum were seen to have relevance.

In the case of both Norma and Fiona, their earliest experiences were based predominantly on membership of a community of music-makers, mainly in a choir, as singer and later on as conductor. They have continued this into their life in school and aimed to pass on their own love of music to their pupils. Norma referred to the richness of experiences the world of music

offered to her own sons and daughter, citing examples of how they experienced the world of music in a positive way. She also held that music is a way of connecting to 'the big big world out there' and not just confined to the world of the classroom. For her part Fiona was keen to inculcate the 'good music' in the school and thereby to give the pupils a connection with the world of choral music and to pass on the positive feelings she experienced in her own life. In her case, the 'big big world' was represented by the world of choral music performance.

As described in 7.4 above, for Fiona, the 'big big world' was made up of a world which was markedly different to that experienced by the pupils in the inner city. Membership of Fiona's world of music would enable the pupils to travel, as a member of a group of 'experts' away from the inner city to other places in this world. She encouraged the children to be critical of their peers and this helped to increase the worth and value of their expertise. She hoped that their interest in maintaining membership would persist in the secondary school and made every effort to bridge the gap, offering lessons in voice training where she thought it was warranted. Although the world of classical music was available to the pupils with concert hall and schools of music only a stone's throw away, Fiona explained that it was not part of their culture and, but for the intervention of the school, the children would not gain access to the 'big big world' that it offered.

Whereas Fiona's emphasis lay in giving the pupils access to a world which was outside the locality, Ultan was keen that the pupils in his school would feel part of the area in which the school was located. In Ultan's 'world of music', membership involved belonging to the local area and developing a sense of place. To this end, he even constructed the anthem as an emblem of membership, and was convinced that there was little value attached to an understanding of the 'trees in Bosnia' when the children were ignorant of the trees in their own locality.

For Ray, the school was like a family and the 'musical world' promoted by him was that of the traditional musician. He emphasised the attributes of the community of musicians in such a world - laid-back, enthusiastic and largely self-motivated to learn - and he took every opportunity to promote the value of such a view of the musical world to the pupils. One of the strategies was to include former pupils - particularly those who had the same attributes as those above - and to invite them back to share their knowledge with the current pupils. The use of such a strategy inevitably gave the pupils a glimpse of the 'big big world'.

Like Ray, Norma drew on former pupils who endorsed the values she had inculcated in music education in her idiosyncratic setting. Norma wanted her pupils to belong to the 'big big world out there' and also to avail of opportunities which would help cement their sense of belonging. Events such as the national children's choir gave the pupils access to this wider world. Although she experienced many obstacles she persisted, driven by her conviction of the value of such experiences in the lives of the children.

For Patricia, the emphasis lay on becoming a member of a tolerant community, where everyone is accepted, regardless of taste in music. Of the five respondents, she is the only one to have availed of a career break and to have lived and taught outside Ireland. Perhaps her experience of teaching abroad has contributed to her sense of identity which is not tied up with a particular view of 'Irishness' (such as that espoused by Ultan) or of a particular view of a school community (such as that espoused by Ray). Unlike these views which tend to emphasise the local, Patricia's perspective on participation is arguably rather more eclectic and connected to the 'big big world' in a broader sense. The 'big big world' is composed not necessarily of like-minded musicians or determined by a particular type of music (as in the case of Norma and Fiona, the world of the choral performer or, in the case of Ray and Ultan, the world of the traditional musician) but an eclectic gathering, such as that one might find in a sports club. Her belief in the social power of music extends to her notion that music can enable everyone to contribute to a group, rather than 'sitting on the sidelines'. Her aim is to equip the pupils with the means of belonging to such groups in the future and where they can perform a 'party piece' in social gatherings.

### **7.5.3 Summary**

Thus far, in the analysis, the evidence has pointed to commonalities among teachers regarding their transmission of the prescribed curriculum. Each respondent has placed an emphasis on performance and the development of music literacy. To that extent, they may be described as working within the parameters of an institutional setting and concerned with the establishment of an objective regularity. However, it is contested in the present study that, while there is evidence that the teachers are implementing a prescribed curriculum, on its own, such evidence reveals little about the multiple realities that can exist in the idiosyncratic setting. Little is revealed about



the possibility that, when negotiating the same parameters, the teachers might respond in different ways. In order to get a relatively complete picture of practice, a second aspect of analysis has been undertaken, one which has moved towards describing a multi-faceted view of teacher knowledge, where the teacher knowledge base has been taken to be wider than that defined within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum.

Within such a framework, a number of issues have been examined. These have included an investigation of the difference between those conceptions of music education espoused at official policy level and those espoused by the teachers on the ground as well as the impact that such competing perspectives might have on practice, (particularly when, as noted in 7.3, they tended to lead to tensions in practice). Arising from this, in section 7.5, evidence has been presented that the respondents were engaged, not only in transmission of aspects of a prescribed curriculum but also were concerned with transformative aspects of the prescribed curriculum. Particular attention has been drawn to their relationship with music - both in-school and out-of-school - and the value they considered it to have in their own lives. This has led to a description of the subjective realities in the case of each respondent.

A third aspect of the data analysis has emerged, one which has focused on gaining a balance between the establishment of an objective regularity and the exploration of the subjective realities as they pertain to the five respondents. In particular, the connection between the formative experiences of the respondents and their orientation to practice is noted. This is the focus of the next section.

## ***7.6 Reconceptualising research on practice***

### ***7.6.1 Introduction***

A central point in respect of understanding teacher perspective relates to the contextualisation of practice within the objective structures of a culture or what Bourdieu (1990) has termed the

cultural field. As described in 4.5 above, Bourdieu used the metaphor of cultural field for representing sites of cultural practice. Bourdieu understood the concept of cultural field to refer to fluid and dynamic, rather than static entities. Cultural fields, that is, are made up not only of institutions and rules but of the interactions between institutions, rules and practices. The relevance of using this notion of cultural field is such that it offers an alternative to the notion of research on teacher practice which was confined to the establishment of an objective regularity and where teacher practice tended to be considered in the abstract. The next section looks at the school as a site of practice and shows how Bourdieu's view of cultural field may be used to understand the static and dynamic elements in a centralised system. Such a view also allows for a conception of the professional knowledge landscape (Clandinin and Connelly, 1995) to be used which is larger than the classroom (as outlined in 3.3.3 above).

In the literature review, (see 4.6 above) it is suggested that, in order to gain access to the teacher's perspective within the parameters of a system such as that in the Irish primary school system, the significance of negotiating the relationship between the subjective and the objective is central. In taking this approach, Bourdieu's (1990, p.26) use of the term 'objective structures' has been drawn on to describe the education system, including the curriculum as prescribed and the construction of prescribed practices. In addition, Bourdieu's (op cit. p.25) notion of subjectivism has been adapted to draw attention to the point that objectivist maps of culture (such as laws, rules and systems) edit out intentionality regulated by cultural contexts – that is, we can only intend what is available to us in a culture. In so doing, it is suggested in the present study, that limitations in research on teaching are caused by focusing exclusively on the framework of the objective structures and on the establishment of an objective regularity.

### ***7.6.2 The cultural field; the static v. the dynamic in sites of practice***

Using Bourdieu's (1990) term of 'cultural field' to describe the Irish educational context since the inception of the national system of education (in the 1800s), the findings in the present study may be understood as follows. It may be stated that the cultural field has promoted, in the case of music education, a conception of music which emphasised the development of music literacy and performance (as outlined in 2.3 above). Within this field, it is not surprising then (as evidenced in section 7.2.1) that the teachers in this study have tended to draw on music literacy

and performance in their own practice. They have been immersed in an educational system which has promoted a particular conception of music education, one which has emphasised performance and the development of music literacy skills. Their teachers have, in turn, been immersed in the same system. The dominance of a cultural field which is particular to the Irish context may be further evidenced by the predominance of music literacy and performance to the exclusion of other aspects of music education. Little evidence was found of other practices, as for example one of composing or indeed one of purposeful listening to music. It might be concluded from this that, where the cultural field is perceived by the respondents to be strongly supported structurally, it is likely to become the dominant culture.

### ***7.6.3 The cultural capital: values and interests***

According to Bourdieu (1990), the amount of power a person has within a field is dependent upon that person's position within the field, and the amount of cultural capital they possess. Taking this notion, it has been seen in the present study that the extent to which the teachers could assert their particular view tended to depend on the amount of cultural capital they held. In this respect, the power and autonomy of the teachers in their schools have played a central role. Those who had status in the school tended to have the power to assert their view of what counted as important or to hold value. So, in the case of Ultan, the cultural capital he valued tended to emphasise the local, even though his interpretation of 'local' was quite selective and limited to his own definition of what 'local' meant. Somehow the choral activity held regularly in the Abbey (only a stone's throw from the school) did not figure among Ultan's interests. Had the conductor of the choir still been the principal teacher in the school, it is likely that the definition of 'local' might be accommodated to include the notion of participation in choral activities. Indeed the status of music may have been significantly different. However, because of his position in the school – as school principal – Ultan was in a position of power and thus could influence the type of values being promoted in the school. This is evidenced in terms of the priority given to a sense of local, as defined by him.

In this light, consider Norma's situation where she changed the emphasis from the 'four hymn syndrome' to include a wider repertoire, once again reflecting her interest in defining what counted as important. Thus, although her position of power was not supported structurally (as

Ultan's was, for example), she had reinforced a form of cultural capital which allowed her to behave in a position of power. With regard to Norma, her length of service bestowed on her an autonomy which allowed her to persist in effecting changes to the ethos of the school. After many attempts, she succeeded in asserting the form of cultural capital which reflected an emphasis on the particular type of music she valued. This helped to put music on some kind of level footing *vis a vis* sports in the school.

Patricia had little authority and spent much of her time fitting in with other teachers' views of what counted as important. As it was seen earlier, this led to some unsatisfactory work situations and frustration in her practice. One of the causes of this frustration could arguably be attributed to the lack of support she got from her colleagues. Like Norma, she wanted to make some changes in practice (for example with regard to the methods used to teach recorder in the school). However, unlike Norma who had spent most of her working life in her school setting, and had taken every opportunity to promote her own values and interests there, Patricia had broken her service in the school, in effect distancing herself from having any real say over which of her own values might be inculcated. This is evidenced in her story about the difficulty she had in asserting herself in the school on her return, when she described how the other 4<sup>th</sup> class teacher 'dismissed [her] outright'.

Consider how strongly the influence of the inspectorate and the methods of learning recommended by the preservice teacher educators at college level had on Patricia. In spite of her interest in and previous exposure to an eclectic choice of music, she deferred to the official view in her professional activity. So strong was the influence on her that she was convinced of her lack of ability to demonstrate for the pupils and did not dare play the instrument for the pupils in class. Contrast this with Ray who declared that same system to be irrelevant to him and to his pupils. Arguably the cultural capital he valued was that experienced by him in the out-of-school setting, one which was, for him, a living tradition and consequently very relevant.

In some cases the cultural capital had to be invented or constructed from nothing. This was especially true in the case of Norma who drew on the national children's choir performances to justify the value of choral singing in an institution where the dominant culture had tended to be one of sports. In this case, she worked hard to endow cultural capital on the music activity. As described above, this included exposure to performance and endorsement at every opportunity. Fiona had the support of the school principal and the civic authorities. In addition, the record of

achievement at festivals conveyed additional cultural capital on her particular orientation to practice.

In the next section, the notion of 'habitus' is discussed. As described in 4.6 above, the 'habitus' was defined by Bourdieu as the 'durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisations ...[which produces] practices' (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, p.78). In other words, as outlined by Webb et al. (2002), 'habitus' can be understood as the values and dispositions gained from our cultural history that generally stay with us across contexts. These values and dispositions allow us to respond to cultural rules and contexts in a variety of ways but the responses are always largely determined by where and who we have been in a culture.

#### *7.6.4 The 'habitus': reproduction and transformation*

In this section, the 'habitus' (as outlined above) is considered to be the means by which the values of the school may be inculcated and reproduced within the child. Taking this view, it is suggested that the child will take to school the 'habitus' acquired in their early years within the home, and that 'habitus' will be acted on by their experiences at school. So, for Bourdieu, (1990), home and family life also play a significant role in social reproduction, as the degree to which the child's family 'habitus' fits in with the school 'habitus' has consequences for the success of the child in acquiring the values, dispositions and cultural capital that characterise the school.

Commonality in respect of the 'habitus' acquired by Norma and Fiona may be evidenced in that they both were enculturated into a western classical tradition, with an emphasis on vocal and choral repertoire. Their parents supported the music activities and formal lessons were made available to them. It can be seen how this influenced them in later life when they identified with the values inculcated at home and tended to reproduce it later in their personal lives. For Ray and Ultan, too there was commonality in the 'habitus' acquired by them. Both had the same reaction to the teaching methods and the content of music in school. Considering it 'irrelevant' and tedious', they preferred the informal practices and the traditional scene in which they had been enculturated. In their teaching, they reproduced aspects of this 'habitus'.

In the case of Patricia, there was an element of both western classical and traditional music in her formative experiences. The difference in Patricia's case is that her parents wanted their children to be performers and, with the exception of herself, all of the family achieved this ambition. The lack of confidence in her ability to perform in the classroom can arguably be traced back to this absence of her identity as a 'performer' at an early age in her family.

In the case of Ultan, the irony is that, although he is on the one hand careful to inculcate a sense of place, he is selective about which culture he draws on. Because he grew up in the traditional setting and loves a song, he favours the traditional song in his practice. In the same village setting, there is an Abbey with a choir and a tradition of sacred music. However, because he does not feel confident to tap into this, he excludes this in his description of the sense of place. In effect, Ultan is passing on his own view of cultural identity and not necessarily that of the locality into which the pupils are born. Because he is the principal teacher, he can continue and support his policy and in effect create a culture in the school, as evidenced by the 'anthem'. He tries to break down the barriers caused by the sense of mystique experienced by him as a child.

In contrast to Ultan for whom the locality was key, for Fiona there is no such attempt to marry the music with the locality. Indeed, she described how the 'stagey stuff' which she found to be popular on her arrival has now all but disappeared from the school, even though it is very popular in the inner city.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, it has been seen that there are commonalities and differences in professional activity among the respondents in the study. It is shown that there are aspects of commonality regarding the extent to which each respondent engaged in transmission of a prescribed curriculum, with an emphasis on performance and the development of music literacy. In addition, it has been revealed that, although there may be aspects of commonality in teacher practice, there are differences too. Sources of these differences have been described as tensions

or constraints and the factors contributing to these tensions have been identified as the official policy (3.2.1), teacher beliefs (3.2.2) and the ethos of the school (3.2.3). The analysis of data in the present study has provided evidence to support this and this has been explored. The limitations of an appraisal of practice which assumes a common practice bias have been noted and it has been shown that, while the results point to the establishment of an objective regularity, such information provides only a partial account of teacher practice. Such research does little to understand the complexities involved in teaching on the ground. The participants in the present study were not simply interested in performance or the development of music literacy for its own sake. In particular, it is seen how each respondent interpreted the notion of performance and music literacy with a particular emphasis on the value they considered it to have in children's lives (as discussed in 3.3.2 above).

Regarding the multi-faceted nature of teacher knowledge in teacher practice, it has been shown how, in the case of the present study, each respondent has interpreted the curriculum in their own unique way. A contributory factor to this uniqueness has been identified as the formative experiences, both in-school and out-of-school (in section 7.4.1). It has been noted that, even working within the same centralised system and using the same prescribed curriculum, the nature of their professional activity in music education differed. Sources of the differences may be connected to the impact of their formative experiences on them (as outlined in 3.4.1 above) as well as to the context of practice (as outlined in 3.3.3).

It has been seen that the formative experiences of the respondents had significance in two ways. Firstly, it can be seen that in the in-school setting, as outlined in the literature review, there was an emphasis on music performance and literacy. Commonality existed most notably, as was expected, in the emphasis on formal literacy in school where the methods used were formal as described by Green, (2001) and noted in 3.4.2.2 above. In contrast, music in the out-of-school setting was notably different and included, in the case of each respondent, a combination of methods and practices. These differences are considered to contribute to the subjective realities of teaching.

In the third part of the analysis, attention has been given to gaining a balance between the establishment of an objective regularity and an exploration of the subjective realities. Central to this part of the analysis has been the adaptation of the Bourdieuan (1990) terms 'cultural field', 'cultural capital' and 'habitus'. The term 'cultural field' has been adapted to refer, in respect of music education in the Irish setting, to describe a particular conception of music, one which has

been established since the inception of the national system of education in the nineteenth century. It is said to embrace both in-school and out-of-school experiences and to include both formal methods and informal practices. Included too is the set of values inculcated at all stages of the formative experiences of the respondents.

The term 'cultural capital' has been adapted so as to capture those formal methods and informal practices which have become dominant, whether promoted at a local level by the individual teacher in the idiosyncratic setting or at a national level by the agencies of the educational system. It has enabled too, an explanation for why, where the respondent has a level of autonomy in the school, they are in the position of being able to promote their own view of what counts as music. In some cases, this was not the same view as that promoted at official policy level. The level of success with which they could replace the prescribed practices depended on the level of power or freedom they had in the school.

A third Bourdieuan (1990) term - that of 'habitus' - has also been adapted for use in respect of the analysis of data for the five respondents. The term 'habitus' has been used in the present study to describe the way in which the particular views, values and attitudes to music held by the respondents as important are replicated in the school setting. Seen from a Bourdieuan perspective, practice does not exist in isolation but is informed by a sense of agency. In the present study, this is evidenced in the case of performance where performance has been viewed by the respondents as a means of initiating the pupils into a particular set of cultural practices, considered by each of them to be of value. At the heart of this is the extent to which each respondent may be said to have valued the experiences they have had in their own lives and consider the replication of such experiences in their classroom practice to have the potential to effect a transformation in the lives of the pupils.

By so drawing on the Bourdieuan perspective, it has been possible to include the multi-faceted nature of teacher knowledge, one which includes the commonalities that exist when teachers work within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum, and which also recognises that there are likely to be differences among the teachers, even when working within the same institutional setting. In addition, the adaptation of a Bourdieuan perspective has allowed for the knowledge, values and orientation to practice of all of the respondents to be framed within a social and historical context.



# ***Conclusions and implications***

### ***8.1 Introduction***

In this chapter, the conclusions and implications of the study are presented. In 8.2, an overview of the study is given in which the issues which were considered relevant are revisited. In 8.3, the research questions are restated and the key findings are summarised. In section 8.4, the implications of the study for understanding teacher practice are discussed, whilst the significance of the study for understanding practice in the Irish context is noted in section 8.5. The chapter closes with a summary, in section 8.6, of the main findings of the study, together with the implications for further research on teacher practice and a personal reflection on the research journey.

## **8.2 Overview of study**

### **8.2.1 Focus of the study**

The focus of the study has been on how particular generalist primary teachers conceive music as exemplified in the narratives of the participants, how they make sense of the official music curriculum and how they teach it in the course of their professional practice. One of the significant factors of the present study has been to offer an alternative view to the notion of the curriculum as a body of knowledge and to counter the tendency of presenting the prescribed curriculum as an 'objectives game' (Goodson, 1990, p.299) where the main ingredients of the course of study would be dispassionately defined and then taught in segments. The review of literature on teacher practice (chapter three) highlighted the tendency, in the Irish context, to promote a conception of music, namely as music literacy and vocal music.

### **8.2.2 The literature review**

In the literature review, evidence of an assumption that teachers were a homogenous group sharing a common practice bias was seen across a wide variety of subject areas and in a variety of institutional settings. These included Lantz and Kass (1987) in the area of science and Kyriakides (1997) in the area of music in a closed system. What was noticeable across these studies was the need to investigate what teachers actually do in the classroom, what level of commonality and difference occurs and what is likely to influence these (see section 4.2). As was shown earlier (see 4.3 above), in order to gain access to a teacher perspective, there was a perceived need to make explicit the relationship between an espoused theory of action and the theory-in-use.

As defined by Argyris, (1999, p.131), an espoused theory of action can be found from interview or questionnaire.

‘Ask people in an interview or questionnaire to articulate the rules they use to govern their actions and they will give you what I call their “espoused theory of action”’.

He noted that what people say may not always be the same as what they do, and that observation of people’s behaviour tended to give a different view.

‘When you observe people’s behaviour and try to come up with rules that would make sense of it, you discover a very different theory of action – what I call the individual’s theory-in-use’”(ibid).

The importance of making this relationship explicit was noted in studies where observation of teacher practice was used as a research method and where conclusions were drawn about the teachers’ theories of action or their implicit theories without including the perspective of the teacher being observed, or including their theory-in-use. It has been suggested that such studies have tended to lead to a dependence on describing an espoused theory with little connection to the theory-in-use (as discussed in 4.3 above).

Yet, as this study has shown, when a theory is espoused at a macro level, there can be tensions or conflicts experienced by practitioners in respect of the espoused theory (as discussed in Kyriakides, (1997); Andrews and Hatch, (1999); Lerman, (1990); Teachout, (1997); Brändström, 1999)). Little has been done in the field of research in the Irish context to probe these or to investigate the origin of such difficulties. Similarly, in research which takes the espoused theory of the practitioners into account, such as those studies on practice which described knowledge as multi-faceted, (such as Brickhouse, (1990); Gudmundsdottir, (1990); Clandinin and Connelly, (1995); Mant and Summers, (1993); Butt and Raymond, 1987)), little attention has been given to investigating the constraints in isolation, or to examining the impact that they are likely to have on teacher practice.

It has been shown that, in respect of the Irish primary system, research on music education has tended to rely on observation (Department of Education, 1983), with little account of the particular perspective of the practitioner, and on methods which have focused on an espoused theory (INTO, 1976) and with no account of the theory-in-use.

The present study has, therefore, set out to provide a more relatively complete picture and understanding of contemporary music teaching in an Irish primary school context, drawing on particular cases. It has aimed to present an alternative to those studies on teacher practice which have been based on implementation literature and on assumptions of homogeneity and which have tended to assume an objective regularity. The present study has aimed to present an alternative view, one which is based at a micro level where the teacher voice may be heard.

### ***8.2.3 Gaining access to the teacher's perspective***

Arising from the literature review, it was considered important to investigate the relationship between an espoused theory and a theory-in-use (as explained in 4.3 and 8.2.2), so that the multiple realities of teaching could be investigated. In order to gain access to these potential multiple realities, the investigation focused on individual practitioners working in idiosyncratic settings. This was achieved by a focus on each teacher's perspectives about what actually goes on in their classrooms and by making the teacher's perspectives explicit.

In addition, it was noted that studies which looked at the relationship between an espoused theory and the theory-in-use (such as Brickhouse, (1990); Gudmundsdottir, (1990); Clandinin and Connelly, (1995); Mant and Summers, (1993); Butt and Raymond, (1987)), needed to include the context, both the context in which the study has taken place – the educational milieu - and the context in which the teachers' knowledge has been formed – the biographical context. In so doing, this study has drawn on the documentary analysis (as presented in chapter two) to suggest that the selection and organisation of knowledge has been framed within a particular historical context. The stories of the respondents have been situated in an historical context, which has framed the formative experiences of these teachers, both in-school and out-of-school within the parameters of the cultural setting within which they work.

#### **8.2.4 Collection and organisation of data**

In adopting a qualitative approach, the study focused in particular on the meanings that teachers gave to their practice, or on what Hammersley (1999, p.2) described as 'exploring the perspectives of the people involved rather than rushing to judgments about them and what they are doing'. Consequently, the present study has built on previous research in teacher knowledge which is characterised by gaining access from the teacher's perspective, having as its starting point the illumination of teachers' perspectives of their classroom practice. This has included both interview and teacher reflection. To this end, the data gathered from the interviews and observations have been drawn together in the form of a story which was given to each respondent for clarification and verification. Each story has thus acted as an interpretative account of the individual teacher's perspective where the interview and observation data have been used to gain access to their implicit theories.

The stories were formed with three main objectives, namely to provide a summary of the interview and observation data; to offer an account of each of the five informants which would include an orientation to practice (Elbaz, 1983), as well as an account of the formative experiences of each respondent. This was used to facilitate discussion on commonalities and differences in teacher practice, with particular reference to a comparison of curriculum emphasis at an inter-informant level. By focusing on the teachers' perspectives, it was possible 'to see connections between the practice of teaching and the virtues and knowledge proper to it; the institutions of education and their traditions; and stories of individual teachers through which we see their knowledge enacted' (Elbaz, 1991, p.3).

Each interpretative account has been viewed as a valid account of practice where causal relationships could be made and where (as noted in 5.5.4 above) prior events have been assumed to have a connection with later events (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p.191). In addition, each account has allowed access to the idiosyncratic dimension inherent in teacher practice, where it is argued that the teacher's personal values are used to shape the practice (as discussed in 3.3.2 and 4.2 above).

### **8.3 The research questions**

As outlined in chapter five, in the case of each respondent, two research questions were posed:

**What is the nature of their professional activity in music?**

**What contributes to their individual orientation to practice?**

It was explained that both questions have been framed within the parameters of a perceived centralised system and where there is a prescribed curriculum. The centralisation and prescription have occurred both formally (as with the current legislative approach) and also informally as part of a wider historical cultural bias. In recognising that each teacher works within such parameters, the first question:

**What is the nature of their professional activity in music?**

set out to establish, in the case of each respondent, a description of their practice. The data have indicated that the respondents are – to a greater or lesser extent - engaged with a form of transmission of the curriculum, with due regard to the expectations held at a macro level. This is most noticeable in respect of their particular attention to music as music literacy and performance.

However, the findings have also shown that, although there is evidence that teachers ‘transmit’ the official curriculum (or at least a version of the official curriculum), there is a transformative aspect to the teaching which is based at a micro level in the classroom. In the cases of these respondents, to be a teacher of music also involved the selection of some teaching methods and the rejection of others. The study has acknowledged that teachers have different orientations (Gudmundsdottir, 1990 p.47) to the subject matter that they teach. It suggests too that their orientation to the subject matter is central when teachers restructure their content knowledge to create pedagogical content knowledge.

This underpinned the second question:

**What contributes to their orientation to practice?**

The findings suggest that the teachers in this study have drawn on a conception of knowledge not just as it is presented in prescribed curriculum documents. As discussed in the literature review (in chapter 3), such a position has been influenced by Shulman's (1986) conception of teacher knowledge, which included subject matter content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge. In addition, it confirmed that there were constraints which had an impact on their practice, identified in the literature as competing perspectives caused by official policy, teacher beliefs and the ethos of the school (summarised in 7.3 in support of the literature). Evidence of tensions in practice were noted in respect of the respondents, as for example the tensions associated with official policy observed in the case of Ray and Patricia, teacher beliefs in the case of Norma and the ethos of the school in the case of Norma and Patricia.

In the literature (*cf* section 3.3) there was a discussion about the influences of beliefs and values held by teachers on their practice (Brickhouse, (1991); Gudmundsdottir, (1990)) and on the relationship between teacher practice and the context of practice (Clandinin and Connelly (1995). In addition, teacher practice has been found to be influenced by formative experiences, as evidenced in research which included a biographical perspective and everyday conceptions of the subject matter (Mant and Summers, (1993); Butt, (1984); Butt and Raymond, (1987); Woods (1987); Goodson, (1992); Goodson and Sikes, (2001) and Kelchtermans, (1993)).

Taken together, these influences have been considered in respect of the present study to contribute to the orientation to practice of each respondent and to offer a means of comparison at inter-informant level. Because the study has been concerned with offering depth and breadth, it was possible to explore these orientations to practice and to investigate any possible causal relationships which could throw light on why the respondents in the study did what they did.

Arising from the analysis of the data, a causal relationship has been established between the formative experiences of the respondents and their orientations to practice. In the case of Fiona and Patricia, for example, there were commonalities regarding their personal backgrounds. Both grew up in an environment where choral music, particularly religious music, was valued. Both had formal music lessons in which music literacy and a high standard of performance practice was nurtured through the exam system.

It is not surprising, therefore, to realise that, in their professional practice, both would value these particular aspects of musical knowledge and inculcate them in the course of their practice. This happened, in spite of the milieu in which the education took place, which, in the case of Norma was a setting which promoted sports and initially resisted the notion of choral activity in a boys' school and, in Fiona's case, was a setting with a tendency towards 'stagey music' rather than choral music in a relatively formal setting. A crucial factor in their success at replacing the existing practices with their own can be identified in terms of the similarity between the values held by these respondents working in the idiosyncratic setting at local level and those espoused at official policy level.

In the case of Ray and Ultan too, there were commonalities in respect of their personal backgrounds. Both grew up in the 'traditional' environment where informal practices were valued and experienced by them in a positive light. Ultan put great value on the songs he picked up from his father and considered them to be part of the mindset of the people in the locality. In addition, as described in the interpretative account (in 6.3 above), he believed in the power of music to touch the soul and took every opportunity to instil this in his own performance, whether at his weekly sessions or when celebrating a victory of the local sports team. Ray's formative experiences in the informal setting were equally powerful and he described music as a 'living tradition'. It is not surprising, therefore, to realise that in their professional practice, both would see the potential of music to tap into this 'living tradition' and would emphasise those informal practices they valued in favour of the formal methods which held little value for them.

The present study has shown not only that there is transmission, but also that there is transformation involved in music. In the cases of the respondents in the study, to be a teacher of music also involved the selection of some teaching methods and the rejection of others. This is exemplified in the practice of Norma and Fiona where the relationship between such transformation and their personal experiences was made explicit, as evidenced in the emphasis they placed on enriching the pupils' lives. Norma believed that the provision of an alternative to the ethos of sports would broaden the horizons of her pupils, just as it had done for her and for her own sons. According to Fiona, music was likely to bring about a change in the mindset of the pupils in the inner city and, over time, might even help to bridge the gap between the existing mindset and the mindset of others - such as those, like herself who grew up in an environment other than that in the inner city - who are more likely to avail of opportunities such as those provided at third level.



So, although each of the respondents was concerned with ‘transmitting’ the official curriculum, with its emphasis on performance and music literacy, the extent to which they also drew on the transformative power of the curriculum was related to their own formative experiences and the values that they ascribed to music in their own lives and the lives of the pupils. Although each of the respondents emphasised performance, in some cases, such as the case of Norma and Fiona, there was an emphasis on an absolutist approach (as outlined in 2.4.3), as exemplified by their reliance on formal methods and the access which was restricted to those who showed ability, while in others (such as in the case of Ultan and Ray), the tendency was towards adopting a relativist approach (as outlined in 2.4.3), such as drawing on those informal practices which would help to demystify aspects of music and which would open up access to all the pupils, regardless of ability. In addition to the transformative aspect of performance, music literacy was identified as a means of gaining access to a world in which the pupils could belong and contribute. A key factor, therefore, in drawing on the official curriculum was that music literacy was seen as a means of transforming children’s lives.

## ***8.4 Implications for research on practice***

### ***8.4.1 Including the objective and the subjective in research on teaching***

A significant feature of the present study has been to consider the Irish teacher as a member of two worlds, one - the institutional setting - within which the selection and organisation of musical knowledge has customarily been presented in a top-down situation; and the other - the idiosyncratic setting - where the teacher is interacting in a particular milieu, drawing on a conception of knowledge which is multi-faceted. In doing this, it has been acknowledged that the respondents are engaged in the establishment of an objective regularity with due regard to the transmission of the contents of a prescribed curriculum. At the same time, it is

acknowledged that, in addition to the establishment of an objective regularity, each of the respondents brings to their practice a set of values, attitudes and beliefs which are unique to them and which have a bearing on their professional activity in the classroom. The limitations of focusing on one or other of these stances in research on teacher practice have been outlined (in 4.4 above). It has been argued that, in studies which have focused on the establishment of an objective regularity, no account is taken of the individual teacher's previous experiences, personal theories and values and no acknowledgement is made of the uniqueness of each environment. In those studies which focused on the subjective realities of individual teachers working within the parameters of a prescribed curriculum, it has been argued that there is a tendency to ignore the ways in which contextual factors might impact on practice, or to minimise the extent to which commonalities may exist in teacher practice among those teachers working within the same educational context.

The application of a Bourdieuan perspective (1990) on the analysis allowed for connections to be made between both stances. It has allowed for an account of differences in teacher practice to be given by paying attention to those values and dispositions gained by the respondents from their cultural history which have tended to stay with them across contexts.

In the cases of the respondents in the present study, there are two contexts which have been taken into consideration, one - the context in which the knowledge is formed - the biographical context, the other - the context in which the knowledge is enacted - the classroom context. Such a stance has underlined the significance of a biographical perspective in research on teacher practice (as espoused in 4.5 above) and has reinforced the importance of including the experiential knowledge of teachers, encouraging them to see themselves as 'originators of knowledge' (Elbaz, 1991) as discussed in 4.4 above.

#### ***8.4.2 Preservice teacher education***

Factors which were shown to have influenced the selection and organisation of the content included the values held by the respondents. As noted by Gudmundsdottir (1990, p.47) in respect of secondary teachers who are subject specialists, this process can be initiated at preservice level:

‘When teachers have forgotten many of the facts they learned in college, they will still remember value-laden impressions. These values shape the development of their pedagogical content knowledge and their interpretation of the texts they teach high school students. The value-laden impressions become their personal curriculum, the most hidden and least studied of all school curricula, yet it is the slice of secondary education that is most likely to remain with the student’.

Although in Gudmundsdottir’s case this applied to secondary school level, the study has shown it has equal relevance for preservice teacher education at primary school level. There is evidence in the present study that, even within a generalist primary school context, ‘value laden impressions’ are formed which can have a lasting effect. This is particularly evident in respect of the effect that formative experiences have had on the respondents. It has been argued that research on practice has been researcher-biased and based on conceptions of knowledge as understood at a macro level, reinforcing Goodson’s (1990, p.299) notion of ‘curriculum-as-prescription’, which describes the ‘mystique that expertise and control reside within central governments, educational bureaucracies or the university community’.

In such a situation, there has been little or no opportunity for teachers on the ground to have an input into the manner in which the knowledge that they hold might be represented. According to Goodson, (op cit), in the absence of an alternative, the agencies of curriculum-as-prescription are seen to be ‘in control’ and the schools are seen to be ‘delivering’. He argued that in this way, curriculum prescriptions set certain parameters - with transgression and occasional transcendence permissible as long as the rhetoric of prescription and management is not challenged. In respect of the effects of contemporary changes in curriculum policy proposed at an official policy level on music education at primary level, such as that currently being experienced in the Irish context, the importance of challenging such rhetoric has become increasingly more pertinent.

The argument at the heart of the present study - in respect of the five respondents - is that a top-down prescription is inadequate to describe what teachers actually think and do. It has been demonstrated that they also acted idiosyncratically, guided by their own biographical experiences in and of music. As such, the inclusion of the perspectives of those teachers working on the ground can serve to provide a relatively more complete picture of practice.

## **8.5 The Irish context**

The study has provided evidence of a curriculum history in the Irish context and as such can be regarded as a 'usable past for music educators' (Cox, 2002. p.142). From the documentary analysis, it was seen that practices prescribed at official policy level continued to be perpetuated in official curriculum documents in spite of evidence that such practices were found by the practitioners to be difficult. The findings of the present study reveal the extent to which a tradition of music literacy and performance has persisted in the Irish primary school context to the present day for all the participants. It has been seen that, historically in the Irish context two aspects were predominant. These are identified as vocal music, both sacred and secular, and music within an oral Irish tradition.

As observed in the literature review, previous investigations which were based largely on implementation literature have tended to treat the factors which influence teacher practice in isolation, such as official policy (Kyriakides, 1997), teacher beliefs about a subject matter (such as in science (Lakin and Wellington, 1994), mathematics (Andrews and Hatch, 1999, Lerman, 1990) and music (Teachout, 1997, Brändström, 1999)) and ethos of the school (Yen-Fun Ng and Morris, 1998). The present study has shown how investigations such as those cited above can offer an interpretation for the commonality and differences that exist in teacher practice among teachers working within the parameters of a centralised system and working with the same prescribed curriculum.

The significance of applying a Bourdieuan (1990) perspective to the analysis lies primarily in the way in which knowledge – in this instance, the knowledge held by the five respondents - is seen to include the way they understand the world, their beliefs and values, and is not defined solely according to the parameters of a prescribed curriculum. A Bourdieuan perspective has allowed for the fact that knowledge is always constructed through the 'habitus', rather than being passively recorded. From a Bourdieuan perspective, the analysis has indicated that practice does not occur in isolation (as implicit in the studies of teaching in the abstract without due regard to the multiple realities), but is always informed by a sense of agency. Bourdieu's (1990) concept of 'habitus' can provide a way of integrating the personal, the professional and the societal influences on teacher practice.

In addition, as the study has shown, the respondents in this study have replicated or replaced aspects of their 'habitus', in the sense that those values, attitudes and beliefs acquired by them throughout their lives and held by them as important are seen to have an impact on their professional activity in music. They tended to focus on replicating in their professional practice those formative experiences - both formal and informal - which they experienced as positive. Where the formative experiences have been in one genre to the exclusion of another, the likelihood is that the knowledge that teachers draw on is largely that with which they are familiar.

In the present study, it is argued that teachers tend to replicate aspects of the 'habitus' from which they have come. It offers an explanation for the extent to which there are similarities between Ultan and Ray that are not simply related to the extent to which they succeed in transmitting the prescribed curriculum.

For Ultan and Ray, the similarities in their formative experiences are significant and act as a powerful contributory factor to their orientation to practice. Both emphasise the notion of music education as a human practice (Elliott, 1995, p.39) and as a means of belonging, of 'becoming an insider' (Swanwick, 1994, p. 88) rather than remaining as an outsider (Becker, 1963).

It has been shown that teachers come with a range of experiences, both in-school and out-of-school, acquired both formally and informally. Such a breadth and variety of experiences can be used to good effect in the classroom context. Performance practice has two aspects, one which is based on informal practices such as the approach taken by Ray and Ultan and which leans on the oral transmission of songs and dance tunes, while the other is on the formal and on a method of transmission which is notation-based, and evidenced in the approach taken by Fiona, Norma and Patricia. The dominance of the latter in official curricula has been evidenced and yet it can be seen how the selection and organisation of music has been influenced by the former in the idiosyncratic setting of an individual teacher's classroom.

In summary, it may be stated that, even within a centralised system and using a prescribed curriculum, the teachers in this study have constructed and interpreted their practice in different ways (which is the point I made above at the end of 8.4). Factors which contribute to the differences include alienation from and allegiance to their experiences of music in their own lives. As indicated in the literature review, the relationship between teachers and

the subject of music as outlined in official documents has, historically, been at times uncomfortable, with reports of teacher dissatisfaction with aspects of practice.

Similar findings are reported in the present study which offers an explanation for the level of dissatisfaction which the respondents express regarding their practice. This can be seen in relation to Ray who 'has nothing to do with the curriculum whatsoever'. On further examination, it is clear that Ray's dissatisfaction lies in the prescriptive nature of the curriculum and its perceived lack of relevance. Indeed, he succeeds in creating a vibrant musical life in the class, as evidenced by the enthusiasm and progress shown by each of the pupils.

Similarly, with regard to Fiona and Ray, both are interested in initiating the children into a particular musical world and entry to this world requires a certain amount of discipline and preparation. The extent to which the pupils are committed to achieving what has been set out for them, is evidenced by the fact that they have become totally immersed in the process and have acquired the habits which identified them as 'insiders' (Swanwick, 1994), or as members of the particular musical world. In Fiona's case, this is evidenced most notably where the pupils themselves are helping Fiona to identify errors in pronunciation and are encouraging each other to try 'saying it posh' as opposed to 'saying it common'. In Ray's case, the children are taking on the habits of the musician, 'always tipping away... relaxed... no inhibitions', namely the habits which, according to Ray, are a defining characteristic of performance practice in the 'real world' of the traditional music sessions.

By drawing on the Bourdieuan (1990) notion of cultural field, an explanation can be found for why, even though contemporary practice in other countries involved creativity movement, no evidence of this can be found in the Irish context. This is notable in the reports of practice, cited in chapter 2 above, where music literacy and song singing (learned by rote) are dominant. In this regard, the study has shown that, in the context of music education, the teachers tended to view the classroom not as a place for imparting skills *per se*, but as a place which belonged to the 'local' and the 'big big world'. This was exemplified by the emphasis Patricia placed on preparing her pupils to contribute as tolerant and valuable members of society, as opposed to spend their time 'sitting on the sidelines'.

In addition, it is a place where the teacher's particular set of formative experiences may be replicated, such as in the case of Ray who wanted to give the pupils a flavour of music as 'a living tradition' or Ultan who wanted the pupils to capture the spiritual sense of music. In

their cases, the replication of formative experiences tended not to be accompanied by a replacement of existing practices. On the other hand, in some cases, such as those of Norma and Fiona, replicating the formative experiences led to replacement of existing practices in the educational setting, such as replacing 'four hymn syndrome' with multi-part choral singing in the case of Norma and replacing 'stagey stuff' with 'music in a classical vein' in the case of Fiona.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

### **8.6.1 The research**

The study has concluded that, even within a strongly centralised system such as is the case in Ireland and a prescribed curriculum such as that pertaining in the Irish primary school context, the teachers in this study have constructed and interpreted their practice in different ways. These differences can be defined in terms of the respondents' understanding of what counts as music; and also the importance of the values they attribute to music in their own lives and to the lives of their pupils. It has been noted that the study is not about teachers in isolation from the society in which they work. Rather, it is concluded that, drawing from Bourdieu (1990), practice is always informed by a sense of agency (the ability to understand and control one's own actions), but that the possibilities of agency must be understood and contextualised in terms of its relation to the objective structures of a culture.

At the heart of this is the relationship between the agents at local level and those at national level. Where the respondents had a degree of autonomy – as for example in the cases of all but Patricia – they also had the ability to control their activity at local level. This level of autonomy tended to increase the level of satisfaction in respect of their attitude to their professional practice. Where there was intervention from 'outside' sources, namely from the inspectors, the degree of autonomy tended to be compromised and dissatisfaction ensued.

This was particularly evident when, as recorded in the interpretative account of Ray (in 6.2 above) the inspectors made suggestions which were out of step with the practice at local level, as enacted in the idiosyncratic setting. In the case of Patricia, the ‘outside’ sources included the recorder teacher who was engaged to work with a number of classes, among them Patricia’s class. Evidence that this sometimes caused a level of dissatisfaction is recorded in her discussion about having to give help to the pupils who found it difficult to keep up.

These responses are not without precedent in the broader context of research on practice in the Irish primary school setting. Similar dissatisfaction was recorded (as for example in 2.6 above) in respect of those activities promoted at official policy level – as for example composing in the classroom – which are outside their experience (formal and informal).

### **8.6.2 Implications for further research**

This study has outlined the importance of performance and music literacy in official curriculum documents in the Irish primary school setting, and the findings have indicated that, while the respondents are involved in *transmitting* aspects of performance and music literacy in their practice, they are also involved in *transforming* aspects of performance and music literacy. It has succeeded too, in providing an alternative to the research in which there is a tendency to assume homogeneity in practice. By so doing, it has provided a framework for research on teaching within which the commonality and difference in teacher practice can be examined. Using the same framework, further studies may be undertaken within other national settings with similar parameters: a centralised system and a prescribed curriculum.

It was not the intention to focus on music literacy and performance to the exclusion of other modes of engagement in music. Given the history of music education in Ireland’s primary school system, it is not surprising to find that the respondents tended to emphasise music literacy and performance in their practice. In the Irish context, because of the proposed changes in emphasis in the official curriculum, most notably the tripartite mode of composing, performing and listening/responding, similar studies can be undertaken to reveal the extent to which commonality and difference exists in respect of the two modes of composing and listening/responding.



Although the study has been conducted in a primary setting, there is potential to develop it to find the relationship between orientation to practice and formative experiences across secondary and tertiary levels. Given that primary teaching is the beginning of institutional education, it is reasonable to assume that a profile can be built and be mapped.

As has been suggested in the literature review (*cf* chapter two), the difficulties have been documented at primary level and generally by those not directly engaged with the teachers on the ground. Because of the dearth of attention given to the teacher's voice, there is arguably a bias - in the Irish context at least - towards those voices which call for music education at primary school to be evaluated in terms of its success as a preparation for secondary and tertiary level, and not as an opportunity for learning to occur in its own right.

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# **APPENDICES**

## ***Appendix 1***

Stakelum, M. (2004). A song to sweeten Ireland's wrong: music education and the Celtic Revival. In B. Taylor Fitzsimon & J. Murphy, J. The Irish revival reappraised. (pp.71-82). Dublin: Four Courts Press.

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## ***Appendix 2***

The place of the author in the work: reflection on own experiences and position in relation to principal issues covered.

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## ***APPENDIX 1***

# A song to sweeten Ireland's wrong: music education and the Celtic Revival

MARY STAKELUM

When there was talk amongst the people that the Government was going to found schools to teach them under their own rule, he understood instantly that treachery and evil were going to be practised against them and he advised the people not to touch them at all.<sup>1</sup>

At varying levels and in various guises, three traditions of musical life were reflected in the National system of education from its inception in Ireland in 1831. Put simply, these were music of the Western art tradition, Anglo-Irish music and music in the oral Irish tradition.<sup>2</sup> The purpose in this essay is twofold – to explore the extent to which policy and comment on music in school navigated through these currents; and to show how the Gaelic League was a reflection of the growing tide in one direction.

Set up in the early part of the nineteenth century, the National system of education was established during a period when Britain promoted administrative efficiency, economic growth and the physical and educational welfare of the Irish population. Within this context, the National system of education's role was to reform the poor of Ireland by providing a non-denominational education that emphasized numeracy and literacy.<sup>3</sup> It has been argued elsewhere that the aim of this was to serve the expanding administrative needs of the imperial British state rather than the improvement of the local agrarian economy.<sup>4</sup> The

1 Douglas Hyde, *Songs ascribed to Raftery* (Shannon: Irish UP, 1973) p. 21. The introduction of the national system of education to Ireland was in the hands of the National Board. Membership of the Board was comprised of commissioners. For an account of the members, see Donald Akenson, *The Irish education experiment: the national system of education in the nineteenth century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), pp 124–7. Davis described those on the Board as 'dry, ungenial men, ignorant of our history, in love with English literature and character, imperialists to the core' in 'Popular education' in Thomas Davis, *Essays and poems with a centenary memoir 1845–1945* (Dublin: Gill, 1945), p. 79. See also Thomas Durcan, *History of Irish education from 1800 with special reference to manual instruction* (Bala, North Wales: Dragon, 1972). 2 For a comment on earlier documentary evidence for music education practices in Ireland, see Fergal McGrath, *Education in ancient and medieval Ireland* (Dublin: Special Publications, 1979), pp 224–33. 3 For a survey of the background, see Gearoid O Tuathaigh, *Ireland before the Famine, 1798–1848* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), pp 97–108. 4 See John Hutchinson, *The dynamics of cultural nationalism, The Gaelic League and the creation of the Irish nation state* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1987), p. 264; and Oliver MacDonagh, 'The economy and society 1830–1845', in W.E.



agency for this educational implementation was the Board of National Education. In the case of music, the Commissioners sent representatives to Battersea College in London to study the method of instruction in use in the English system of education.<sup>5</sup> The Wilhem-Hullah method arose from the adaptation by John Hullah of the 'method of instruction in vocal music invented and applied by M. Wilhem of Paris introduced by the Government into all the schools, of whatever description, in France.'<sup>6</sup>

The importation of the Wilhem-Hullah method unaltered had implications for the flavour of music education in Ireland. Insofar as the method centred on the development of music literacy, music education became equated with a skills-based practice, with an emphasis on vocal music. In supporting the Wilhem-Hullah method, the British Committee of Council on Education would have read the account by Hullah of the effects of singing:

One of the chief means of diffusing through the people national sentiments is afforded by songs which ... preserve for the peasant the traditions of his country's triumphs, and inspire him with confidence in her greatness and strength ... The national legends, frequently embodied in songs are the peasant's chief source of that national feeling which other ranks derive from a more extensive acquaintance with history.<sup>7</sup>

The case for the presence of music in school was strengthened by the view that:

if vocal music were generally taught in the National schools, the songs learned would supercede those that the humbler classes now generally sing, which are for the most part vicious trash, hawked about by itinerant ballad singers: in times of political excitement often seditious and frequently obscene and demoralizing.<sup>8</sup>

Traditionally, in Ireland, the hedge school master had contributed to this corpus of ballads, on themes described by Crofton Croker as treasonable, amatory and laudatory,<sup>9</sup> and those songs served a function 'both as an expression of the singers' and listeners' feelings or opinions but also a form of propaganda'.<sup>10</sup>

Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland, Ireland under the Union*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), pp 232-41. <sup>5</sup> For an account of the Battersea institution, see Bernarr Rainbow, *Music in educational thought and practice, a survey from 800 B.C.* (Aberystwyth: Boethius, 1989), pp 185-97; and, Bernarr Rainbow, *The land without music* (London: Novello, 1967). <sup>6</sup> 'Prefatory Minute of the Committee of Council on Education (i) Singing School for Schoolmasters in Exeter-Hall', in John Hullah, *Wilhem's method of teaching singing, adapted to English use* (London: Parker, 1841), p. i. <sup>7</sup> John Hullah, *Wilhem's method*, p. 4. <sup>8</sup> Stated by Inspector Newell in: *Twentieth Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland* (1853), p. 113. <sup>9</sup> Thomas Crofton Croker, *Researches in the south of Ireland* (London, 1824), p. 329. See also Graves et al. (eds), *Thomas Davis, Selections from his prose and poetry* (Dublin: Talbot, n.d.), pp 209-31. <sup>10</sup> Georges-Denis Zimmermann, *Songs of Irish rebellion. Political street ballads and rebel songs, 1780-1900* (Dublin: Allen

In adapting the method to the English system, Hullah had been careful that:

the spirit of the method should be preserved but that, while this was effected, it should acquire a national character ... and [observed that] this has been attempted by the introduction of many of the best specimens of those old English melodies which deserve to be restored to popular use.<sup>11</sup>

Because the National system was founded on the desire to ensure literacy, the oral transmission of songs was overshadowed by the cultivation of songs, which were notated. This, coupled with the absence in the syllabus of tunes from the 'great heritage in the national music which had every excellence and every variety',<sup>12</sup> resulted in the principles and practices of music education becoming less reflective of the lives of the people. Music education became more a monument to the ideals of the reforming state. Furthermore, Hullah outlined the process by which he combined words and music:

in order that the restoration of this national music may be facilitated, words have been adapted to it, intended to associate it with the customs of the people, and with healthy, moral and religious sentiments, which may be intelligible and congenial to the minds of the children who are to sing them.<sup>13</sup>

When importing this system to Ireland, it is evident that the National Board overlooked this practice of underlining the national character. While the Hullah manual contained songs which arguably were suited to the national character of England, the content and sentiment were less relevant to the Irish setting, as exemplified by the inclusion in the manual of Hullah's setting of 'The English Child'.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to prescribing the syllabus, the National Board introduced a training scheme and while this served to improve the standard of teaching, by now perceived to be 'inferior in point of competency' by the Commissioners,<sup>15</sup> it also

Figgis; repr. Dublin: Four Courts, 2002), p. 12. <sup>11</sup> Ibid. <sup>12</sup> Graves et al. (eds) *Thomas Davis*, p. 228. <sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. ii. <sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp 33–4. Described in the manual as a song which contained 'no interval greater than a fourth, nor any note shorter than a crotchet,' the value of the melody as a pedagogical aid clearly outweighed any consideration of the effect the sentiment expressed in the text might have in the Irish setting. The text is reads: 'I thank the goodness and the grace/ That on my birth have smiled/ And made me in these Christian days/ A happy English child./ I was not born as thousands are/ Where God was never known:/ And taught to pray a useless prayer/ To blocks of wood and stone./ My God, I thank Thee who hast planned/ A better lot for me/ And place me in this happy land/ Where I may hear of Thee.' <sup>15</sup> As evidenced in the exchange between the Revd Carlile, a Scottish presbyterian minister (resident commissioner, 3 Mar. 1837) and the lord president. Responding to the question as to the quality and calibre of the teachers in Ireland posed by the lord president as follows: 'What is your opinion of the teachers in respect of their competency and moral character?', Carlile states: 'I

ensured that the teaching community would become controlled and exclusive. It ensured too that those ballads and songs, which were widely circulated on broadsheets, were discouraged.<sup>16</sup> In the past, the hedge school master occupied a prominent position in the parish. He was next to the landlord and the priest, and his level of knowledge afforded him legitimacy in the community. His popularity ensured his continuance in employment. Under the new centralized system, however, his position was less certain and was contingent upon satisfying the requirements of the Board.<sup>17</sup>

In a framework such as this, knowledge is seen as external to teachers (at least initially) and becomes embodied in textbook and syllabus. Teachers become more readily interchangeable, members of a homogenous community, sharing a common practice bias. In the context of music in the National system, the content from the outset elevated the status of notated music and so defined music as product-led, where the process of music-making was secondary.<sup>18</sup> The teacher may be seen as conduit of an 'alien' culture to a group of people thought ready to assimilate it and appreciate it, namely the pupils. Inspector Keenan recognized that Hullah's manual 'contains tunes that are not of a class which recommends themselves to the ears of Irish children. They are tunes that were prepared entirely for English schools and in the whole book there is not a single Irish air.'<sup>19</sup> It

think upon the whole their moral character is respectable: in point of competency many of them are very inferior. We have had no opportunity yet of training teachers: we have been obliged to take the masters already to be found in the Country, trained or not trained, and they are upon the whole a very inferior class of teachers. This arises I believe, chiefly from their extreme poverty.' *Report from the select committee (of the House of Commons) on foundation schools and education in Ireland*, Part 1. Minutes of Evidence taken before the Committee, p. 19. <sup>16</sup> See Maura Murphy, 'The ballad singer and the role of the seditious ballad in nineteenth-century Ireland: Dublin Castle's View', *Ulster Folklife*, 25 (1979), pp 79–102. <sup>17</sup> The system of training began with the establishment of the Board of National Education. After some three months a certificate of competence were issued to those teachers who had mastered the skills necessary to implement the prescribed syllabus. Initially criticized, the initiation process became more elaborately organized as the century progressed. See Dowling, *A history of Ireland: A study in conflicting loyalties*, pp 116–27. <sup>18</sup> That music literacy was to become the basis for music education was endorsed by the Powis Commission (1868–70) in John Coolahan, *Irish education, history and structure* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration 1981), pp 24–30. The system whereby the role and practice of the teacher was constrained by national prescription was supported by the Payment by Results scheme, introduced by Robert Lowe in Britain some decades earlier. For a comprehensive account of how it impacted upon education in Ireland, see Durcan, *History of Irish education*, pp 42–3. A revised program was introduced in 1899. It came about from the Belmore Commission. See Coolahan, *Irish education*, p. 34; and Aine Hyland and Kenneth Milne, *Irish educational documents, a selection of extracts from documents relating to the history of Irish education from the earliest times to 1922*, vol. 1 (Dublin: Church of Ireland, 1987), pp 142–8. In the revised program, the status of music literacy was reaffirmed, and the role of vocal music endorsed by the Commissioners who held that it had a 'cheering effect' in schools. See Appendix to Sixty-seventh Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland (1900), p. 76; and Appendix 11 in Durcan, *History of Irish education*, pp 247–9, for 'Programme in singing for the national schools' in 1900. <sup>19</sup> *Royal*

was felt too, under this policy that the technical aspects of music were accorded more attention than the aesthetic and artistic: 'The introduction of Hullah's system into the country brought into use a series of melodies, constructed with no idea as to melodic excellence but to illustrate the intervals, sharps, flats scales, marks of expression etc. to be met with in music.'<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, the policy of importing songs did nothing to cultivate the relationship between popular and learned cultures. As Zimmermann notes, in the case of the oral tradition, the song becomes 'more than a text and a melody which can be recorded or printed, examined and criticised'.<sup>21</sup> By the end of the century, policy and practice were out of step with each other. While the policy had succeeded in mirroring 'what is prescribed in the programmes of elementary schools throughout the whole civilised world',<sup>22</sup> the practice of music in schools in Ireland was cause for concern. It was practically an unknown art, especially 'in remote areas that were outside the towns',<sup>23</sup> with singing taught 'only in one school in every seven, and this in a country which has some of the best Celtic melodies in the world'.<sup>24</sup>

That the Irish language had suffered a similar fate under the national system was lamented by Hyde. Believing the National Board to be responsible for the decline in the language, he stated:

This board, evidently activated by a false sense of imperialism, and by an overmasterly desire to centralize and being itself appointed by government chiefly from a class of Irishmen who have been steadily hostile to the natives, and being perfectly ignorant of the language and literature of the Irish from the first with unvarying pertinacity the great aim of utterly exterminating this fine Aryan language.<sup>25</sup>

With the emphasis by the Celtic Revival on regeneration, music in education came to be perceived as a prime source for linking the past with future nationalistic aspirations.<sup>26</sup> In so doing, music both reflected and defined the notion of

*commission of inquiry, primary education, Ireland*, vol. III (1870), p. 88. Patrick Keenan was appointed as resident commissioner in 1871 and was a keen advocate of the system of Payment by Results. <sup>20</sup> Appendix to *Twenty-second report of the commissioners of national education in Ireland* (1855), p. 73. <sup>21</sup> Zimmermann in *Songs of Irish rebellion*, p. 12. <sup>22</sup> Reported by Inspector Goodman in: *Sixty-eighth report of the commissioners of national education in Ireland* (1901), p. 147. <sup>23</sup> *Seventy-first report of the commissioners of national education in Ireland* (1904) p. 4. <sup>24</sup> Graham Balfour, *Educational systems in Great Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1898), p. xxix. <sup>25</sup> Douglas Hyde, *A literary history of Ireland from earliest times to the present day* (London: Ernst Benn, new edition 1967, originally published 1899), p. 630. Other critics of the previous system of education included Pearse who held that 'had the education of the country been sane and national for the last hundred years, there would never have been a necessity for the language movement' in 'The Education Question' *An Claidheamh Soluis* 13.8 (1904), p. 6. <sup>26</sup> This point is developed in Marie McCarthy, 'Music education and the quest for cultural identity in Ireland, 1831-1989' (unpublished PhD, 1990), p. 212.

polarization and revival.<sup>27</sup> For its part, the Gaelic League 'was not opposed to the appreciation of the music of the great masters ... but it insists upon our national treasures getting the due attention that would be paid to them were they possessed by any other nation of the world'.<sup>28</sup> There was a perception that music in the oral tradition did not receive the attention it merited, as implied in this contemporary account of two music traditions, side by side in a locality:

the one performed in a school hall festooned with evergreens and the walls bedecked with tissue paper of various colours ... with a platform ... erected at one end and thereon ... a polished mahogany piano, the other in an obscure smoky hovel, ... with a woman of seventy Nellie Dhubh, sitting on a stool by the little turf fire that is just kindling into flame.<sup>29</sup>

In the same account, the reporter describes that the difference in the repertoire was also considerable:

In the first, the performance included two songs by Moore, being respectable and arranged for the piano, in English words of course. The remainder of the songs are English sentimental ditties, dreamy love songs with a roaring English sea song in praise of Jack Tar thrown in. The second performer speaks a barbarous patois of broken English, at which her neighbours jeer. But she also speaks Irish, and speaks it well and fluently. And she sings too, or did sing, before her voice became so thin and trebly. She can still give [the reporter] some faint idea of the exquisite old Irish airs that were the common property of the countryside sixty years ago.

He outlines the difficulties facing the collector of songs in the oral tradition:

She has the songs yet – the words I mean. I have time to write down three of them and I find them exquisite Irish poetry, the most tuneful

<sup>27</sup> Harry White draws on the paradigm of cultural polarization to explain the particular case of the history of music thus; '[f]irstly it identifies the function of music in Ascendancy thought as a dislocated articulation of two cultures: secondly it explains the fundamental preoccupation with music as a resource in the development of Irish political consciousness: thirdly it confronts the advancement of the native musical repertory as a symbol of renascent Irish civilisation' in Harry White, *The keeper's recital: music and cultural history in Ireland, 1770–1970* (Cork UP, 1998), p. 6. <sup>28</sup> Denis Moonan, 'The spirit of the Gaelic League'. *Gaelic League pamphlets*, no. 33 (Dublin: Gaelic League, n.d), p. 7. <sup>29</sup> Reported by P.T. Mac G. in 'Derryflat and Derryard', *An Claidheamh Soluis* 3.2 (1900), p. 744. The extent to which this account is distilled in a nationalism both cultural and political can be seen by placing it in the context outlined in D.G. Boyce, *Nineteenth century Ireland: the search for stability* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1990), pp 154–84.

songs in the world. And yet the elite of the district who patronised the English songs and were satisfied, consider her little better than a barbarian. A few short years and she will pass away and even this feeble reminder of what they have lost shall no longer disturb the generation of the National schools, and the piano and the English songs. Even the Gaelic League, active as its members are, cannot secure all the treasures of this sort of writing, and there are very few to write the music.<sup>30</sup>

The Gaelic League saw the connection between preserving the customs and practices of the locality and the celebration of national character. This concern to stem the tide of loss was shared by Hyde who recognized the urgency of preserving or reviving the status of music, noting that 'if Ireland loses her music she loses what is, after her Gaelic language and literature, her most valuable and most characteristic possession. And she is rapidly losing it.'<sup>31</sup> The difficulty was that access to it was denied to those without Irish. '[A]ll these traditions are so inextricably bound up with the tongue in which they are preserved.'<sup>32</sup> Hyde's hope was that the Gaelic League would bring about:

... the revival of our Irish music hand in hand with the revival of Irish ideas and Celtic modes of thought so that the people may be brought to love the purity of Siubhail Siubhail or the fun of the Moddereen Ruadh in preference to 'Get your Hair cut' or Over the Garden Wall' or even if it is not asking too much, of 'Ta-ra-ra boom-de-ay'.<sup>33</sup>

In addressing the wealth of songs and stories in every locality, he advocated that 'whoever will take the pains to examine them will find them remarkable for a generosity of sentiment and an absence of vulgarity, which have done much to leave their impress upon the character of our nation'.<sup>34</sup> In effect, he called for a review of the practice of propagating those songs introduced by the National Board which served as a reminder of imported ideals. In a move to bring about the revival of 'our Irish music', the Gaelic League supported a culture of performance, in the form of two festivals, the Feis Ceoil and the Oireachtas.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. Compare these circumstances with those encountered by Petrie in 'George Petrie as a musician and amongst his friends' in A.P. Graves, *Irish literary and musical studies* (New York: Books for Libraries, 1914) pp 232–3. <sup>31</sup> Douglas Hyde, 'The necessity for de-anglicising Ireland', in Breandán Ó Conaire (ed.), *Language, lore and lyrics* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press) p. 167. <sup>32</sup> Douglas Hyde, 'The unpublished songs of Ireland' in Ó Conaire (ed.), *Language, lore and lyrics*, p. 72. <sup>33</sup> Douglas Hyde, 'The necessity for de-anglicising Ireland', p. 168. <sup>34</sup> For an account of Hyde's definition of songs, see his 'Gaelic folk songs', in Ó Conaire (ed.) *Language, lore and lyrics*, pp 104–21. <sup>35</sup> These festivals were modelled on the Welsh Eisteddfod. See Marie McCarthy, 'Music education', pp 190–1. The Feis Ceoil aimed to promote the study and cultivation of Irish music, to promote the general cultivation of music in Ireland, to hold an annual musical festival or Feis Ceoil and to collect and preserve by publication the

Although both events originated from a fervent commitment to promote Irish music, differences emerged in how they realized their aims. One difference lay in the manner in which the term 'Irish music' was understood and interpreted by each group. For the Feis Ceoil, it referred to 'all music which is characteristically Irish, whether of the remotest antiquity or of today, whether the simplest tune or the elaborate work of the artist, whether Irish from intrinsic peculiarities or from the instrument on which it is meant to be played'.<sup>36</sup> For the Oireachtas, however, it meant 'the old songs sung by the old people in the old way'.<sup>37</sup> When it came to choosing pieces for inclusion in its syllabus, the differences became obvious. In defining its role in two ways, namely 'to preserve and often to restore to its medieval purity our own incomparable old music ... while at the same time fostering a modern school of Irish music',<sup>38</sup> the Feis Ceoil made no distinction between high art and national art. Since there was a dearth of this variety of music available that was of a sufficiently high standard and the notion of having 'our exquisite folk music harmonized and blared out on orchestras'<sup>39</sup> was resisted, the Feis Ceoil Committee took to the practice of setting pieces from abroad. Criticism was levelled at this policy of offering prizes in musical styles 'rather more representative of Florence or the Fatherland than of Ireland'.<sup>40</sup> Edward Martyn defended the policy. He argued that allegiance to the process and the product in music involved attending to the art of making music as well as to the act of preserving it: '[O]ur musicians ... will never be able to compose choral and orchestral music if they are not made familiar with the world's masterworks of unaccompanied choir singing and orchestral symphony. For before people can create an art they must know what art is.'<sup>41</sup> This sentiment was echoed by George O'Neill, who lamented the fact that there were no composers to write music that was both high art and national art. O'Neill asserted that: 'Irish musicians ... are not such fools as to trouble about writing music (Irish music anyhow) for orchestra. Why? Because there are in Ireland no orchestras.'<sup>42</sup> In contending that it was necessary to move away from

old airs of Ireland (as stated by the editor in 'The Feis Ceoil', *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 27.4 (1899), p. 166); while the Oireachtas acted as the nucleus around which the language movement with all its phases and developments collected itself and included among its aims the maintenance of their social traditions; the folktale, the folksong, the old traditional style of singing, the fine old dances, the harper, the piper – all those elements which go to make up the cultured social life of Irish speaking Ireland', as noted by the editor in 'The Oireachtas: Work for the Branches', *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 24.2 (1900) p. 792. <sup>36</sup> George O'Neill, 'The work of the Feis Ceoil Association: A history and an appeal', in *Irish Ecclesiastical Record*, 4th series, 8 (June–Sept. 1900), p. 347. <sup>37</sup> As noted by the editor in 'The Oireachtas', *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 3.3 (1900), p. 808. <sup>38</sup> Attributed to Edward Martyn in 'The Feis Ceoil', *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 27.5 (1899) p. 166. <sup>39</sup> Stated by Edward Martyn in 'The Feis Ceoil', *An Claidheamh Soluis* 4.5 (1901) p. 123. <sup>40</sup> Edward Martyn, 'The Feis Ceoil', *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 27.5 (1899), p. 166. <sup>41</sup> Stated by Edward Martyn in 'The Feis Ceoil', *An Claidheamh Soluis* 4.5 (1901), p. 123. <sup>42</sup> George O'Neill, 'The work of the Feis Ceoil', *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 25.5 (1901), p. 170. For

the existing repertoire and develop the new, he argued that it should be possible to be both a member of Conradh and an inheritor of the art treasures of the human race:

We should still remain (many of us) musicians, capable of being delighted and elevated by the creations of a Beethoven, a Brahms or a Gounod, and of fifty others, to whose works we find nothing analogous in our own country. Do you tell us we must shut our ears to these? You might just as reasonably insist upon our shutting our eyes to Raphael and Titian, and bid us throw into the fire Homer, Dante and Shakespeare.<sup>43</sup>

The Oireachtas Committee made no such compromise and insisted on the exclusive use of Irish language songs, directing that all set pieces in the singing competitions be Irish language songs. There were few publications of songs in the Irish language, and in an effort to make them available, the committee organized the publication in *An Claidheamh Soluis* of 'Irish songs with music in Tonic Sol-fa notation'.<sup>44</sup> Although it was an effort by the committee to preserve 'the old songs sung by the old people in the old way',<sup>45</sup> their project inevitably became embroiled in the problem and found itself the object of criticism. In those songs published by *An Claidheamh Soluis*, the emphasis was on the language, and words were put to melodies adapted from tunes of old collections. The emphasis on the written word, while lending itself to songs in the Irish language, meant a concomitant lack of attention to other aspects of music. Furthermore, the shortcomings inherent in the practice of committing songs in the oral tradition to notation were known to the Gaelic League: 'We recognise the value of the tonic sol-fa system, and encourage it as a means of popularizing Irish music, but the last thing in the world we desire is to see the tonic sol-fa system, or any other system, interfering with the traditional style of singing common throughout the Irish-speaking parts of Ireland.'<sup>46</sup> Since the traditional style of singing relied for its authenticity on the style and interpretation of the individual singer, subtleties and nuances were not likely to be captured in notated versions, nor were they easily replicated in schools. Cultural national-

a more optimistic account, see Aloys Fleischmann, 'Music and society, 1850-1921' in W.E. Vaughan (ed.), *A new history of Ireland*, pp 517-18. 43 Ibid. 44 As reported by the editor in: 'Irish songs and music', *An Claidheamh Soluis*, 30.12 (1899), p. 664. Publication began with 'Baanchnuic Eireann O' and 'Is trua gan peata an mhaoir agam', being the songs prescribed respectively for boys' and girls' choral singing at the Leinster Feis. The songs were arranged by Brendan Rogers and presented in tonic sol-fa, characteristic of the Curwen method, as opposed to staff notation introduced in the Hullah manual earlier. Coldrey describes how the Christian Brothers appear to have supported the feiseanna right from their inception in the late 1890s in: Barry Coldrey, *Faith and fatherland: the Christian Brothers and development of Irish nationalism, 1838-1921* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), pp 189-207. 45 See note 37 above. 46 Ibid.



ists who sought to compile Irish music for use in schools balanced their collections between Irish language songs and Anglo-Irish ballads and songs. Examples include Goodman's 'The Irish Minstrel'<sup>47</sup> and Breathnach's publications.<sup>48</sup> That this union of written and oral traditions would compromise the music was expressed by Richard Henebry<sup>49</sup> who believed that the collections of music contain outlines and much would be left to the interpretation by the performer. Arguing against the practice of 'filling in' the tune from the score, which was the practice in those collections intended for school use, Henebry stated:

in a more complicated tune, say a reel, I fear that neither I nor anybody else could restore the whole score from the printed skeleton. Because neither the exact phrasing, not the minute accentuation, nor the tonality on which the original phrasing of the tune was constructed, nor its general carriage is there adequately represented.<sup>50</sup>

He was similarly opposed to arrangements of melodies for forces other than those for which they were originally intended. He believed that 'the loss between a phonographic reproduction of one of those melodies and, say, a rendering by a modern violinist or flute player from a skeleton score, such as is used in making our "collections" of printed music, is so great as to constitute a change in identity'.<sup>51</sup> Classes in singing<sup>52</sup> were subjected to the same disdain. When Henebry commented that 'this habit of English has a physical effect on the speaking organs, and destroys the full, soft, and mellow Irish voice so necessary for singing',<sup>53</sup> he may well have been witnessing the effects of the 'common modern teachers in towns ... [where he found that] the colour was completely gone from the voice, and the power glide and the complicated graces so dear to music'.<sup>54</sup> The interest in promoting the language was such that these considerations went largely unheeded in the education policy under the newly formed Irish Free State: 'In the administration of Irish education, it is the intention of the new government to work with all its might for the strengthening of the national fibre by giving the language, history, music and tradition of Ireland their natural place in the life of Irish schools.'<sup>55</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Peter Goodman, *The Irish minstrel: a collection of songs for use in Irish schools* (Dublin: M.H. Gill and Son, 1907). It was sanctioned by the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland and included airs from Petrie, Joyce and Horncastle as well as songs in the Irish language and some of Moore's melodies. Its exclusive focus on Irish songs and airs may be interpreted as a response to the demands of cultural nationalists. <sup>48</sup> Most notably: Padruig Breathnach, *Ceol ar Sinsear* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1913); and Padruig Breathnach, *Songs of the Gaels; a collection of Anglo-Irish songs and ballads* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, 1922). Both collections presented the songs in tonic sol-fa. <sup>49</sup> Henebry was a member of the Irish folk music society and professor of Irish in University College Cork. <sup>50</sup> Richard Henebry, *A handbook of Irish music* (Cork UP, 1908), p. 49. <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>52</sup> Including those organized by the Gaelic League; see Annie Patterson, 'The interpretation of Irish music', *Journal of the Ivernian Society* (Sept. 1901), pp 31-42. <sup>53</sup> Richard Henebry, *A handbook of Irish music*, p. 57. <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>55</sup> From 'Minutes of the pro-

O'Neill's plea to 'make the average Irish man a better musician'<sup>56</sup> was not taken up by the new government, which appeared to be more intent on making the Irish man a better nationalist. Eoin MacNeill, a founding member of the Gaelic League, strengthened this resolve when he asserted that 'the chief function of Irish educational policy is to conserve and develop Irish nationality'.<sup>57</sup>

It can reasonably be concluded then, that the music was given priority not for educational or aesthetic reasons but for nationalistic ones. The zeal with which this was embraced by teachers in the schools led to the proposal that in some schools, singing was to be taught solely through the medium of Irish and all songs were to be in the Irish language.<sup>58</sup> Music in school would become the servant of language, be used as a means to progress the Irish language, and lead to the formulation of a motto such as 'to our language through our music'.<sup>59</sup> To an extent, this legacy has survived in Ireland to the present day where the challenge in contemporary practice is towards recognizing the value of vocal music both as an art form of an intrinsically expressive nature and as an act of expressing the extra-musical.<sup>60</sup>

In summary, the template imported from England set in motion the construction of nationhood. It was a template where the child was seen as being inducted into a standardized culture based on the norms and requirements of the political centre. Arguably, this induction would imply a consequential estrangement from the informal languages, from the dialects, beliefs, and customs of his kindred and locality. In short, it would produce an alienation of the young from the traditions of their parents and locality.<sup>61</sup> In lamenting this 'anglicisation', and suggesting that we are a nation of imitators, lost to the power of native initiative and alive only to secondhand assimilation,<sup>62</sup> Hyde might well have been describing the very foundation of music education in Ireland where

ceedings of the commissioners of national education at their special meeting on Tuesday, the 31st January, 1922'. pp 2-3. Ó Brochain's statement was typical of the strength of feeling with which the sentiments of the Gaelic League were expressed in the newly formed Irish free state. 56 George O'Neill, 'The work of the Feis Ceoil', p. 170. 57 Eoin MacNeill, 'Irish educational policy - II', *Irish Statesman*, 24.10 (1925), p. 200. 58 As expressed at their conference in 1921 by members of the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) in *National programme conference, national programme of primary instruction* (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1922), p. 4. See also T.J. O'Connell, *History of the INTO, 1868-1968* (Dublin, privately printed, n.d.) p. 344. 59 Appearing as a caption in *The teachers' work*, 18 (Nov. 1927), p. 119. 60 See Government of Ireland, *Primary school curriculum, music* (Dublin Stationery Office, 1999), pp 5-6. 61 See Elie Kedourie, *Nationalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1966), pp 98-105. Also, in emphatically censuring the National Board for 'the painful skill with which they have cut from every work in their schools the recognition of the literature, antiquities and state of Ireland', Davis held that their policy of developing literacy meant, in the Irish context that 'the materials and books provided, though models of general information and literary finish, are empty of Irish statistics, history and hopes'; see Thomas Davis, *Essays and poems*, pp 79-80. 62 Douglas Hyde, 'The necessity for de-anglicizing Ireland', in Ó Conaire (ed.), *Language, lore and lyrics*, p. 169.

'a French method of music teaching designed for use in a monitorial system was imported via an English adaptation into Ireland'.<sup>63</sup> Practices introduced under the National system of education served to further the ideals of the reforming state and enjoyed an uneasy relationship with the existing practices. This led to a compromise where aspects of an imported system were grafted onto the traditional landscape. The ideals of the Gaelic League regarding revival of music became concerned less with the problem of losing the national treasures than with the manner in which they would be restored. Until the relationship between music and cultural identity is resolved in the field of education, music in Ireland will continue to struggle. The struggle involves both the advancement of artistic and educative aims and the perception of music as an art form that is at once a process and a product.

<sup>63</sup> Marie McCarthy, 'Music education', p. 82.

## ***APPENDIX 2***

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### ***The place of the author in the work: reflection on own experiences and position in relation to the principal issues covered***

In order to place myself in the work, the following is an account of my own experiences. The account is organised as follows. Firstly, an outline of my formative experiences in music is provided. Details of my professional practice are then given. Thirdly, a reflection on the relationship between my formative experiences and my orientation to practice is presented. The account concludes with a summary of the key features which I consider to be relevant to my position in relation to the principal issues covered in the thesis.

#### ***Formative experiences***

The second eldest of five, I was born in the same town as Ray. I was educated in a convent school, at both primary and secondary levels. In the classroom context, my earliest memories are of enjoyment and include singing along to recordings of 'Oh what a beautiful morning', 'Nellie the Elephant' and 'Que sera, sera' (among others) at about age five. Later on, in the senior classes at primary school, I learned to sing arrangements of Irish language songs in two and three parts. My memory of them was that they were largely dreary, and not much fun to learn. Rehearsals tended to be very tense with an emphasis on accuracy of pitch and pronunciation.

Outside of the classroom context, my experiences in formal instrumental lessons started at an early age, and included learning to play piano from the age of eight and violin from the age of nine. I played in the school string orchestra from about age 11. I took graded exams in piano and violin annually. This continued throughout primary school and secondary school. Classes in choral singing took place weekly and our school took part in choral competitions, most notably those held in Dublin and Cork. Examinations in choral singing - organised by the Department of Education - were held annually. Preparation for these included sight singing and preparing set pieces from a repertoire of arrangements of folksongs from a variety of countries, as well as songs in the Irish language and music from the western classical tradition. We also had experience of singing plainchant music in school. Unlike the experiences described in the accounts of Norma and Fiona, where plainchant competitions were organised by the Church at a diocesan level, my experience of plainchant singing was not connected to competitions. They were relaxed affairs and organised for us by our music teacher in school – a nun who clearly enjoyed sharing her love of music with us.

At second level, in addition to continuing my piano and violin lessons, I took music as a subject for five years. Outside the classroom setting, at an informal level, there were opportunities to take part in musicals and in concerts. In the latter part of my time in secondary school, I accompanied the school choir at exams.

Of the five respondents, only Patricia's method of entry was like mine, in that both of us enrolled for a three-year BEd programme. My preservice teacher education was centred on the 1971 curriculum. In this respect, my experience of music education at preservice level was similar to that described by Patricia, Ultan and Ray. I recognised many of the principles and methods described by them, most notably the emphasis on a graded system of teaching sol-fa, song singing and music literacy.

### ***Professional practice***

I began my teaching career in a school in the greater Dublin area. After the probationary two years I resigned and spent three years in University College Cork, where I pursued a music degree. Because I funded myself throughout the three years of fulltime study, I left college with a B.Mus and some debts to clear. A position as primary teacher became available in my home town which I succeeded in getting. Like Norma and Ray, I spent a number of years

working in my alma mater. Plans to continue my studies were postponed for a few years. While I was employed in the school I contributed both to its musical life and to that of the town, just as the respondents in the study have done. Like Norma, I became involved with the national children's choir. I initiated the national children's choir in the area and got involved as regional accompanist and rehearsal conductor. Other activities included a collaborative venture with a colleague, in which we staged a production with the children of the town. Unlike most ventures which were school based, we wanted to provide an opportunity for the children of the area to meet each other and work together, regardless of which school they attended. As such, it was unique and successful. Like Ray and Ultan I organised musical events for a variety of charity and sports events, for children and for adults. At a local level, also, I contributed to a variety of amateur musical societies as rehearsal pianist, as musical director and conductor, as well as to the diocesan choir as choral director. During this time I continued my professional development. In this respect I shared the view of Norma and Fiona, who were keen to develop their interest in music. Unlike them, however, I pursued my interest on a fulltime basis, breaking my service as teacher to study at the Kodály Institute in Kecskemét (1988/1989), and later undertaking an MA in the Institute of Education, University of London (1992/1993). I then extended my absence from my school to spend a further year working in a primary school in inner city London. In order to fund this further professional development I spent a number of years working during the evenings as cocktail pianist in a hotel in my home town and, during the summer holidays, as resident pianist in a hotel in a seaside resort.

Taking full advantage of the generosity regarding my application to the Board of Management of my school for permission to extend my absence from my teaching position, I returned to Dublin in 1994 and worked as a freelance lecturer in music and in music education. At this time I became involved in choral direction and conducted a children's choir, an adult female choir and a chamber choir. Repertoire included set pieces from choral competitions and rehearsals were held regularly. A highlight of the life of the chamber choir was a concert given in Manchester, UK in 1995.

In terms of professional practice in classroom music education, I obtained some funding to take part in a music project in a designated disadvantaged primary school. During this time, I met a variety of teachers who were very dedicated to providing rich educational experiences for their pupils, even if it meant sharing the class with an outsider. In addition, a small research grant allowed me to carry out a short project on primary teachers and music. This formed the basis of the pilot study for the present study and I submitted a report to the Department of Education and Science in 2002.

At this time my interest in giving voice to the classroom teacher also further developed. In an effort to combine study and teaching, I participated in a pilot scheme in job sharing which arose in an inner city girls' school in Dublin. This allowed me access to a library not available in my home town. I returned to my school in 1999 and worked as a classroom teacher. Not surprisingly, in my absence, there had been many changes, among them a change of Principal. Although I could relate to Patricia's anxiety on returning to her school at the completion of a career break, my experience was positive: I was made to feel very welcome. My return was shortlived, however and lasted only a year. I resigned in 2000 to take up my present position as lecturer in music education.

In this present position my responsibilities lie in preparing generalist teachers for primary teaching, including curriculum implementation. As outlined in the main study, there are changes in emphasis between the curriculum currently being introduced to schools (i.e. the 1999 curriculum) and the 1971 curriculum. For my part, I consider the 1999 curriculum to be similar in thrust to the UK curriculum. In this sense my study of the UK music curriculum has stood me in good stead and I have been familiar with the model of composing, listening and performing for some time.

### ***Relationship between formative experiences and orientation to practice: personal reflections***

As has been shown in the case of the five respondents, formative experiences have had an impact on their conceptions of music. In my case, the influence of my mother on my musical tastes is evident. These may be identified as generally western classical, with an emphasis on formal tuition. My mother's musical background included piano and violin. During my formative years she played violin in the orchestra for the musical society productions which take place annually in the town. In later years she sang in the church choir.

At the same time, I recognise that my experience of music in school was quite selective and restricted to classical music. This is evidenced by the fact that, although a master traditional fiddler used to teach in the school I attended, I did not take part in this musical world. Had Ultan and Ray been in my position, their description of the musical world in the school would more than likely have been different. No doubt they would have relished the idea of being participants in these traditional music groups.



While I did not share the cultural world described by Ray and Ultan, however, I can appreciate it. Like Ray, my father was a keen sportsman with great enthusiasm for traditions such as hurling. Unlike them, however, he was neither a musician nor a teacher. In my case, it was my mother's musical interests which influenced me.

I attended the same preservice college as Norma and Fiona. Unlike them, however, my experience of music education is remembered with little enthusiasm. Whereas my secondary education had been enjoyable and music was given prominence in the school, the same could not be said of my experience of music education at preservice level. Methods were highly prescriptive and I was left with the impression that music education was very complicated with little room for variation. In this regard I could empathise with Patricia's account of her preservice education, although I was not left with the same feeling of inadequacy. Like Ultan and Ray, I found much of the preservice education contrived and tedious. I admit to sharing Ray's view that much of what was transmitted was less relevant to 'living music' and held less interest for me than I would have wished.

In my final year as a music student, and following requests from students, an expert music educator visited the College and presented a week's course in music education. Although her visit was short, this teacher displayed an approach to music education which appealed to me. It seemed logical, not least because attention was given to the development of those skills which would arguably serve a practising musician in good stead. Moreover, it became clear that she had left nothing to chance and ensured that each activity had a level of difficulty which was appropriate to the learners. Having learned that the approach was Kodály-based I researched this method and followed up my interest some two years later. During my time at the Kodály Institute in Hungary I experienced at first hand this approach to music education which I had considered both worthwhile and challenging. This differed from my experience of music education in school and in College. While my music teacher at second level had a great enthusiasm for music and wanted to share this enthusiasm with us, she tended to operate from a position that music is caught, rather than taught. Although I thoroughly enjoyed 'catching music', I also recognised my own need to learn with some tangible evidence of progression. Later, whilst a student of music in college, my expectations were high and I was keen to develop my skills, knowledge and understanding of music. In addition to the courses provided I took private tuition in fugue, counterpoint and aural training. While the teacher in fugue and counterpoint was inspiring, the aural training was less than satisfying and did little to develop my skills in intelligent listening or to enhance my identity as a musician. In contrast, I had a positive experience of the Kodály approach in addressing my needs as a musician. Although it was heavily prescriptive, teaching methods

were used which appeared to have been carefully considered and targets were set which were attainable. My experience of it has given me an understanding of the efforts being made by Norma and Fiona who appear to be trying to adopt a somewhat similar approach to music education.

In London, at the Institute of Education, I had an opportunity to reflect on my experiences of music as teacher and learner, as well as - in a broader sense - the relationship between theory and practice. I also became aware of the multi-faceted nature of musical knowledge, and followed the debate surrounding the introduction of the National Curriculum into schools, a curriculum which promoted a model of composing, listening and performing with respect to music education.

## *Conclusion*

As a teacher educator, I am constantly challenged to strike a balance between fulfilling the requirements of the curriculum and developing each student teacher's own identity and experience as musicians and music educators. Like the respondents in my study I would have undergone an entrance test in music, in which prospective students were expected to demonstrate ability to sing in tune and to sight sing a short piece of tonal music. This practice has been discontinued and it is no longer possible to presume that students have facility in singing or in music literacy.

Working within the parameters of a centralised system I can see at first hand the difficulties involved in implementing a policy which requires large groups of non specialists to be prepared for practice. Where music is just one part of an overloaded curriculum, I can appreciate the tendency for a one-size-fits-all policy to emerge. At the same time, however, I want to have the freedom to interpret the curriculum as I see fit, and, insofar as is practicable, I make every effort to overcome the official policy constraints. I hold very strongly the view that music education should favour an approach which is based on the level of ability of the students, rather than one which focuses on a predetermined set of attainment targets.

