

## ARTICLE

# Creating a musical for pre-schoolers in South Africa as pedagogical praxis for a tertiary music education module

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## Abstract

Despite a renewed interest in educational practices to develop future music educators in South Africa for a rapidly changing professional landscape, little is known about the meaning students themselves ascribe to these practices towards their own development as music educators. This instrumental case study investigated the learning experiences of second-year BMus students creating a musical for pre-schoolers. Data were collected through interviews, observations and reflective journals. Six themes emerged through a thematic analysis of student experiences, namely interaction, preparation, skills development, stagecraft, performance and enjoyment. A conceptual model that explains the production of a musical as a pedagogical praxis connects these themes with existing literature on three teaching and learning approaches that framed the study, namely authentic arts-based pedagogy, project-based learning and community of practice.

**Keywords:** music education; musical; pedagogical praxis

## Introduction

The rationale of this instrumental case study was to explore how the learning experiences of second-year BMus students producing a musical for pre-schoolers relate to three existing educational approaches when creating a musical for pre-schoolers. Six themes emerged from the data analysis, namely interaction, preparation, skills development, stagecraft, performance and enjoyment. These themes were manually compared to the literature framework of three educational approaches relevant to the current teaching and learning practices in this existing music education module, namely authentic arts-based pedagogy, project-based learning and community of practice.

As a music education lecturer, I was the musical director of the musicals and responsible for the data collection and analysis. In this article, I explain how creating a musical for pre-schoolers is a pedagogical praxis for a tertiary music education module by juxtaposing the themes generated from the student experiences to the three educational approaches.

Some music education programmes are dominated by theoretical course work (Regelski, 2014), while other programmes are dominated by traditional performance-dominant pedagogy (Peters, 2014). Ogden, DeLuca and Searle (2010) assert the need for a more authentic pedagogy in music education that integrates theory in more practical contexts bearing “real-world” implications. Future music educators should develop their expertise in designing and facilitating creative activities and pedagogies by realising a pedagogical praxis (Sirotová, 2016).

Pedagogical praxis as a form of experience-based and professional learning could enable music education students to develop their professional and personal competencies in cooperation with lecturers in the realistic conditions of higher education institutions. Pedagogical praxis plays an important role in the pre-gradual preparation of teachers (Sirotová, 2016). It creates a base for developing their own teaching style and skills for studying the quality and efficiency of their own pedagogical activity through the process of self-knowledge, self-evaluation and self-reflection. Pedagogical praxis creates space for verifying the theoretical knowledge, methods and procedures directly in the conditions of the music student's practical performance in real conditions of an educational process (Sirotová, 2016).

### *Community of practice*

Participation in a musical theatre production could foster positive social and personal development through the formation of a community of practice. Assuming that students' social engagements are the fundamental process by which they learn in professional degree programmes, a community of practice is based on sustained mutual relationships and engagement (Bok, 1986).

Research on the enhancement of learning has been shifting from the individual learner to the concept of sociocultural learning in communities of learning, communities of practice or learning cultures (Whitaker, 2016). Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, interest or a passion for something they do and are able to address and learn how to improve their performance with regular interactions (Wenger, 2000; Bok, 1986). Integrating the four components for social participation to be effective results in the notion of community of practice, that includes meaning, practice, community and identity (Wenger, 1998). The framework to identify Communities of practice (Wenger et al., 2002) is linked to Wenger's (1998, 2000) social learning theory emphasising the learning process based on social participation, where participants are involved in a community (belonging) to engage in certain activities (doing), while establishing their identities (becoming) to interpret the world around them (experience).

### *Community (Belonging)*

Community includes interaction, learning together, building relationships, a sense of belonging and mutual commitment. Forming communities of practice provides participants with an environment that combines knowledge and practice, the opportunity to learn through peer relationships (Kapucu et al., 2010) and practitioners in the community (Kapucu, 2012) and is subject to various changes over time (Wenger, 1998). The role of the lecturer as facilitative leader is to foster collaboration that leads to learning. Engagement (Kapucu, 2012), imagination and alignment are the three pillars of belonging for individuals in relation to their environment (Wenger, 2000). Communities of practice are based on sustained mutual relationships and mutual engagement.

### *Practice/doing (Engaging)*

Knowledge relates to competence in socially valued enterprises, while practice relates to shared resources, frameworks and perspectives to sustain mutual engagement. Practice is socially defined, domain-specific and a basis for action and communication built on common approaches and shared standards. Problem-solving, performance and accountability are integral to practice (Wenger et al., 2002). As Csikszentmihalyi (2014, p.130) argues, a key challenge for education is attending to problems with student engagement, the "affective, emotional, motivational," that occurs when students are both passionately and successfully involved in a task of high quality (Munns, 2007; Gardiner, 2017).

*Identity (Becoming)*

Identity refers to how learning changes ways of being and creates personal histories within the context of communities. John (2014) observed how a cast taking part in a musical theatre production overcame identity conflicts through musical practices, forming a cohesive community that ultimately provided the participants with meaningful life experiences. Participation in a musical theatre production could foster positive social and personal development through the formation of a community of practice. Identity reveals “how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities” (Wenger, 1998, p.5).

*Meaning/experience (Interpreting the world)*

Communities of practice act as a catalyst for students to internalise the knowledge they are exposed to and allow them to reach different interpretations of the same knowledge, while meaning is a way to talk about humans’ ability to change and experience life and the world in a meaningful way as a by-product of learning (Wenger, 1998). Situating a project in a real-life context brings both immediacy and authenticity to students’ learning and strengthens their involvement in a Community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

*Project-based learning*

Project-based learning is central to the curriculum, organised around questions that lead students to encounter the central concepts or principles of a discipline, focused on a constructive investigation that involves inquiry and knowledge building, student-driven, and authentic, by posing real-world problems that people care about (Thomas, 2000).

Project-based learning refers to the theory and practice of utilising real-world work assignments on time-limited projects to achieve mandated performance objectives and collective learning (Smith & Dodds, 1997). Designing an educational project should be guided by principles and ideas that move away from traditional educational views of learning as knowledge transmission, towards learning as an approach entailing engagement and active involvement in creative and collaborative processes leading to knowledge construction (Stavrou, 2012). Teaching for creativity involves asking open-ended questions; working in groups on collaborative projects, using imagination to explore possibilities; making connections between different ways of seeing and exploring the possible ambiguities and tensions between them (Robinson, 2001).

Project-based learning is an authentic instructional model in which students plan, implement and evaluate projects with real-world applications beyond the classroom, emphasising interdisciplinary, long-term, student-centred and student-directed learning activities (Hanney, 2018; Blank, 1997; Dickinson et al., 1998 and Harwell, 1997). Through project-based learning, students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period to investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging and complex question, problem or challenge. Project-based learning is related to students’ everyday lives and future job descriptions and entails more authentic learning, more meaningful content and assessments directly connected to learning. It is also based on constant student involvement, improved learning and the development of life skills, while providing opportunities for students to use technology. Project-based learning makes teaching and learning more enjoyable and rewarding, connects students to the community and the real world, builds success skills, promotes educational equity and produces a tangible product to share with an intended audience (Dickinson et al., 1998; Katz & Chard, 1989; Martin & Baker, 2000; Thomas, 1998). Tobias, Campbell and Greco (2015) base project-based learning on real-life problems that capture students’ interest, provoke critical thinking and develop skills as they engage in and complete complex undertakings that result in a realistic product, event or presentation to an audience.

Four attributes of well-designed and well-taught projects are student-centeredness, teacher facilitation, collaborative interaction and inquiry, and disciplinary expertise

(Tobias et al., 2015). Hanney (2018) describes the use of projects as a primary means of structuring learning experiences to mirror professional practice. Project-based learning invites assessment *for* learning in addition to assessment *of* learning (Scott, 2012), encouraging formative assessment to support learning. This means providing ongoing feedback and including self-assessment as well as peer and teacher-led assessment throughout projects. Including projects in teaching demonstrates the value of providing students with opportunities to think critically, engage with music imaginatively and approach the world with curiosity (Tobias et al., 2015).

### **Authentic arts-based pedagogy**

Ogden et al. (2010) generated an authentic arts-based learning framework. They integrated theories of authentic and arts-based learning as a foundation to engage teacher candidates into teacher education programmes that invite a pedagogical shift. This pedagogical shift facilitates purposeful learning and establishes strong relationships.

Authentic learning aligns student learning experiences with the world for which they are being prepared. Real-life applications of knowledge are promoted that encompass several key features to provide a foundation for a pedagogical framework. The first feature is an activity that involves real-world problems mimics the work of professionals, targeted towards a real audience beyond the classroom (Rule, 2006; Renzulli, Gentry & Reis, 2004). Other features include open-ended inquiry, thinking skills and reflection, engaging in social learning in a community of learners and empowering students to direct their own learning in meaningful situations (Rule, 2006).

Arts-based learning “prescribes no specific procedure to produce an arts-based project, but identifies a genre within which there are a variety of approaches” (Barone & Eisner, 2006, p.98) and invites openness, engagement and willingness to take risks. Arts-based inquiry as a form of teaching and learning involves the intertwined processes of creating, performing and appreciating that are inherent within creative learning and activity (Smith-Autard, 2002).

Authentic arts-based pedagogy works within the framework of music education (Loughran, 1997), suggesting three dimensions for the design of preservice pedagogy: relationships; purpose (engaging students in meaning-making and connecting experiences (Ellsworth, 2005, p.16)) and modelling ways to create conditions that promotes meaning-making for students (Tom, 1997).

### **Creating a musical for pre-schoolers**

Annually, second-year music education students produce a musical of approximately 45 minutes for a pre-school audience. These students are from different musical, cultural and/or ethnic backgrounds and have different levels of expertise in the other performing art forms, with limited knowledge on musical theatre. Students are assessed on creating (planning and scriptwriting), staging and performing the musical. Initially, students select a potential idea for the script and develop that idea as a student writing team in collaboration with the lecturer. Potential musical numbers are selected, and students are responsible to write at least one original song suitable for pre-schoolers with a simple, catchy melody, repetition, a relevant imaginative subject matter that encourages expression of feelings, moves by step or have small skips between the notes (Moomaw, 1997).

Students develop potential ideas for the libretto and music in collaboration with the lecturer and are responsible to organise and execute all aspects of technical theatre, acting/staging, sound, lights, choreography and musical ensemble, culminating in four morning performances in the last week of the semester. Annually, approximately 1,000 pre-schoolers, their teachers, peers, friends, family and community guests attend these shows over two days, consisting of two performances per morning.

The main research question that guided this study was: How do the learning experiences of music education students relate to three existing educational approaches when creating a musical for pre-schoolers?

## Research approach

I followed a qualitative, instrumental case study research design to “provide insight into an issue” (Stake, 2000, p.437) through “an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.37), making “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context” (Yin, 2014, p.16). Through this qualitative approach, I explored a bounded system over a time span of seven years. Data collection involved multiple sources of information from each student group to report a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2013, 97).

Data were collected through field notes of rehearsals, planning meetings during contact sessions, small and large group discussions, individual and group responses and collaborative conversations while preparing and performing the musical and reflective journaling guided by a structured set of questions after the last performance. Examples of questions for reflection were as follows:

- What were the positive and negative aspects of the musical production for children?
- How did you experience the interaction with your fellow students as well as the group work that took place?
- How prepared were the student performers? How well did they know their lines? What can you tell me about their movements, gestures and facial expressions?
- In what ways were the movements, gestures and facial expressions appropriate to the work or not?
- Discuss the interaction with the children audience, as well as the reactions of the children.
- How did you experience the sound production from the performers?
- In what ways did the props enhance/diminish the performance?
- What did you learn regarding your own development as a musician, an actor, a music educator, a human being?
- What would you do differently and what improvements would you make regarding the preparation, practice and performance of the production?

The cast members’ participation in this study was entirely voluntary. A total of 45 students participated in six musicals in 2012 (7), 2013 (8), 2015 (6), 2016 (6), 2017 (8), 2018 (10) and gave written informed consent for their field notes and reflective journals to be used. There were no potential risks to these student participants, as formative and summative assessment occurred before they had to submit their reflective journals and their marks could not be affected. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty Humanities (Arts) Ethics Committee and the NWU-RERC with ethics number NWU 00765 18 A7. Please refer to Table 1 below outlining the research participants. All the participants were South African citizens, except Lisa who came from Namibia.

Data were analysed simultaneously with data collection, due to the volume of material that needed to be processed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative data analysis was preceded by the organisation of the data through Atlas.ti 7, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (QAQDAS). Data collected from the participants were categorised, coded and analysed for emerging themes (Friese, 2012). Thereafter, the themes that were generated from the data analysis were manually compared to the three educational approaches to find similarities and differences.

**Table 1.** Research Participants

Year	Pseudonym	Gender	Age
2012	May	Female	20
Mandrog	Rita	Female	20
	Nika	Female	20
	Lisa	Female	20
	Noel	Male	20
	Nora	Female	20
	Kina	Female	20
2013	Lebo	Male	23
Kirts!	Pule	Female	20
	Wayne	Male	22
	Vida	Female	19
	Viglia	Female	25
	Venty	Male	26
	Will	Male	20
	Steve	Male	25
2015	Jake	Male	21
Sarel Sourworm	Angel	Female	20
	Zane	Male	20
	Terra	Male	20
	Blanche	Male	23
	Vino	Male	20
2016	Chrissy	Female	19
Musiekte	Tiny	Female	21
	Nebe	Female	20
	Chade	Female	20
	Tahl	Male	21
	Debbie	Female	20
2017	Stacey	Female	22
plons	Mary	Female	21
	Clooney	Female	20
	Matt	Male	20
	Landie	Female	20
	Vera	Female	19
	Kimmy	Female	19
	Nat	Female	24

*(Continued)*

Table 1. (Continued)

Year	Pseudonym	Gender	Age
2018	Lena	Female	19
Dr Dissonant	Vera	Female	20
	Amy	Female	19
	Zea	Female	21
	Roan	Male	21
	Van	Male	20
	Jaco	Male	20
	Len	Male	20
	Benita	Female	20
	Stacey	Female	23

Data saturation occurred when no new categories, information or knowledge were found (Merriam, 2009).

## Findings and discussion

Six central themes emerged from the analysis of participant responses, representing core aspects of engaging in a musical theatre production as based on the participants' descriptions of their experiences: preparation, interaction, skills development, stagecraft, performance and enjoyment. After a thorough review of the literature about existing teaching and learning strategies relevant to these themes, a conceptual model was generated that illustrates creating a musical as pedagogical praxis by relating the interaction between community of practice, authentic arts-based pedagogy and project-based learning to the six themes that emerged through the data analysis.

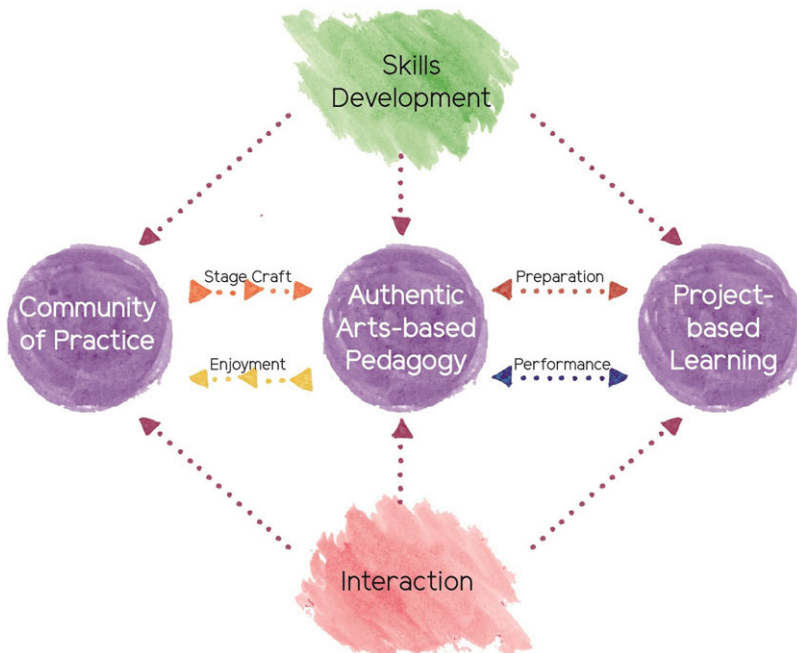
To explain a musical as pedagogical praxis as illustrated in Figure 1, the interaction between communities of practice, authentic arts-based pedagogy and project-based learning will be discussed through relating them with the six themes that emerged through the data analysis and the practical implications thereof. Direct quotations from the student participants emphasise the relevance of the six themes, as well as the similarities to the educational approaches.

### Preparation

Rehearsals were wacky practice and performance times (just a little) (Vera), perfect and fun (Roan). Despite the necessity of adequate preparation, Nat felt that the best moments were improvised.

### *As authentic arts-based pedagogy*

Mostly, participants felt sufficiently prepared after researching characteristics of a pre-school audience and promoting real-life applications of knowledge (Renzulli et al., 2004; Rule, 2006). Despite real-world problems such as initial struggles, insecurities and worries (Renzulli et al., 2004; Rule, 2006), student participants such as Viglia were prepared and relieved when they knew their lines and components that were well-rehearsed worked out well during the shows. Equal contributions positively energised them through engagement (Barone & Eisner, 2006). Matt described the libretto, music and musical arrangements as excellent and appropriate for children.



**Figure 1.** Creating a musical for preschoolers in South Africa as pedagogical praxis for a tertiary music education module.

Ellsworth (2005) explains that engagement gives participants an active state of purpose. The movements that accompanied the songs, dialogue, facial expressions and mannerisms were mostly clear, efficient and well-rehearsed and appropriately internalised (Steve), mimicking the world of professionals and targeted towards and shared with a real audience beyond the classroom (Katz & Chard, 1989; Dickinson et al., 1998; Thomas, 1998; Martin & Baker, 2000; Renzulli et al., 2004; Rule, 2006).

#### *As project-based learning*

Attributes of well-designed and well-taught projects in project-based learning are collaborative interaction and inquiry (Tobias et al., 2015) through productive, valuable rehearsals despite a limited period to produce an interactive, visually stimulating musical. Student participants regularly communicated to organise rehearsals. Difficulties to attend rehearsals limited the productiveness thereof, but Viglia suggested that fixed rehearsal times on students' timetables to avoid clashes could improve productivity, as tensions due to student participants' other academic responsibilities could limit their enthusiasm. As project-based learning is student-driven, students take responsibility to make their own choices, design and manage their work (Thomas, 2000). A lack of available practice or rehearsal venues posed challenges; therefore, planning for real-world engagement helps situate learning in a socio-musical and cultural context, and helps students see themselves as potential participants in and contributors to a range of different musical practices (Tobias et al., 2015). Participants developed their characterisation and costumes through collaborative interaction (Tobias et al., 2015). Project-based learning invites assessment for learning (Scott, 2012); therefore, the student participants suggested allocating more time to performance aspects such as characterisation and the refinement of mannerisms (Stacey), well-rehearsed cues to memorise the script (Len), limiting changes directly preceding a performance that could influence well-memorised lines (Lebo) and adhering to the deadline



for memorising small parts of dialogue at a time rather than reading through the entire script at every rehearsal (Venty).

### **Interaction**

Kimmy explained that their existing relationships drew them closer because of the extra time they spent with each other. Relations were mostly good but certain individuals were somewhat prickly (Kimmy). Students got to know the person behind the person (Jaco) and on the whole enjoyed getting to know each other better on other levels (e.g. emotionally) (Mary), while new friendships were initiated and current friendships were strengthened (Viglia). The musical taught student participants how to cooperate in a group and how to interact positively with other students, almost as if a personal change towards each other took place, improving collaboration as a team (Tahl).

### *As community of practice*

Students' participation helped to develop their own identity within the contexts of the musical, their university careers and their community. Social configurations among the cast members and the impact of the musical on the general community situated each student's participation through interaction (community and belonging), allowing student participants to develop their individual and collective abilities to value and find meaning in the lives of individuals, groups and in the world (Wenger, 1998), often through experience and enjoyment. Communities of practice share a passion for what they do and learn how to improve through regular interactions (Wenger, 2000). Students helped each other to memorise the dialogue (Vino) (enhancing positive social learning (Rule, 2006)), collaborated in the costume and décor design (Matt) and found solutions when problems arose, being Communities of practice through having similar interests aiming to improve performance with regular interaction (Bok, 1986). Jake learnt to be more comfortable in his personal space on stage, emphasising a subconscious process of learning through participation to substantiate and legitimise individual actions (Bok, 1986).

### *As project-based learning*

Collaborative interactions (Tobias et al., 2015) between the participants such as making décor were dynamic and fun (Clooney) and ensured greater chances of success. The musical enhanced group cooperation and taught student participants how to interact positively with others, as described by Lisa a personal change towards each other took place, improving team collaboration. Examples of real-life challenges were unequal contributions from students, students breaking the décor, not attending rehearsals, unproductivity, short-tempered and bossy students (Len). Nevertheless, these challenges promoted educational equity and developed life skills.

### *As authentic arts-based pedagogy*

Students chose to direct their own learning in meaningful situations that promoted teamwork (Rule, 2006). They had fun during rehearsals and there was always time to laugh, play and be serious about the routine of running through [their] lines (Terra). Tiny found it wonderful to work with each other to make the production successful.

### **Skill development**

Acting skills, musical skills, music education skills and personal skills were nurtured through creating the musical. Although the approach differs from producing a musical for adults, it involved an equal amount of fun (Vida). Matt felt as if he was back at school for drama, enjoying every moment. Although it was more difficult to create a musical than what they initially thought

(Landie), most students enjoyed the process. They also had the opportunity to try new things. Lebo said that they did not plan for the children to scream during the show, and a lot of wordplay had to be cut and improvised, especially with older pre-schoolers. As long as everything that happened was in tune with the context, it worked, although it is difficult to stay in character when children do and say funny things (Amy). Student participants emphasised the importance of always being aware of the audience and other actors on stage. Holding a straight face during a funny scene was a challenge for Pule. May, Rita and Kina mentioned how they faded away especially in the first performance because they were stressed, but the consecutive shows were walks in the park (Rita).

Nika pointed out that the music performed by the instrumentalists was fitting for the children, and they (as well as the students) enjoyed it. Students learned how to portray musical elements in a way that children can understand them, that movements and music go hand in hand (Lisa) and how to move more and dance when making music. Even though singing was not as easy as it looks for Benita, she explained how she has learnt to be less afraid of singing on her own and realised she can actually do it. Stacey remarked that being able to know how to convey emotions through dialogue is good for musicality purposes and Vera realised that everything does not always have to be on pitch, as pre-schoolers are a very forgiving audience.

Some students struggled to get others to participate, and Noel had cold shivers when thinking about [doing the same with] young children. Van would use the same approach in his classroom, but more refined.

The majority of students enjoyed being part of the musical, as it was very educational. They learnt more about their peers, themselves and their abilities, while developing self-confidence. Because Chade was out of her comfort zone, she did more than she normally would, such as dancing on a stage in front of a live child audience, revealing how learning changes who we are. Wayne learnt that he is an amazing person, and Len would like to make a difference in the lives of individuals.

#### *As authentic arts-based pedagogy*

Students learnt that children experience the world differently from adults. Musical concepts were established by making connections with the pre-schoolers' everyday lives. To "play while learning" through modelling ways create conditions for an environment that promotes meaning-making (Tom, 1997). Students used familiar concepts as a point of reference to teach new songs, engaging learners in meaning-making and connecting past and present experiences (Ellsworth, 2005). Students accumulated business skills by organising fundraisers promoting real-life applications of knowledge aligning student learning experiences (Renzulli et al., 2004; Rule, 2006) to prepare them for future career opportunities.

Chrissy learnt how to create a musical by fostering her acting skills promoting real-life knowledge applications beyond the classroom (Renzulli, et al., 2004; Rule, 2006)

Engaging in the arts promotes vitality and connectedness by engaging emotions in learning (Eisner, 2002a, 2002b)). Nat explained how student actors *became* their characters and some were more comfortable being in stage costumes than being themselves. Blanche realised how deep he could go into character. Students could engage their emotions in learning through authentic arts-based pedagogy (Eisner, 2002a, 2002b).

Creating a musical developed students' stage personalities and acting skills. Chade's love for theatre was reawakened through the production, while some students could see themselves working in this field in the future, positioning them towards previously unknown ways of thinking and being in the world (Ellsworth, 2005). Students realised that there are many more career opportunities after studying music: Angel said that one does not have to specialise in *teaching* to make a difference through music. They aligned their learning experiences with the world for which they are being prepared, promoting real-life applications of knowledge in front of a

real audience (Renzulli et al., 2004). Nebe learnt that when you look and feel good on stage, you usually look stupid, and when you look and feel stupid, you generally look good to the audience. Many student participants learnt they can sing on their own, as they were empowered by choice to direct their own learning in meaningful situations (Rule, 2006).

Students learned how to portray musical elements in a way that pre-schoolers could understand them and how to move more when making music – traditional conventions of early childhood music education – working within a framework of music education (Loughran, 1997) to design a preservice pedagogy; namely relationships, purpose and modelling.

#### *As project-based learning*

Real-life problems captured student interest, provoked critical thinking and developed skills as students engaged in and completed complex undertakings that typically resulted in their presentation to an audience (Tobias et al., 2015).

Students learnt how to create a musical by fostering their acting skills, emotional expression, verbal and non-verbal communication, role play, improvisation, adaptability, not getting distracted, writing an appropriate storyline and producing an interactive production, plausible characterisation, acting upon audience responses and using drama and movement for audience interactions.

During the course of the semester, voice acting skills improved, as instructional methods were student-centred and student-directed (Blank, 1997; Harwell, 1997; Dickinson et al., 1998; Hanney, 2018). The value of providing students with opportunities to think critically, engage with music imaginatively and approach the world with curiosity was emphasised (Tobias et al., 2015).

Creating the musical gave the students new, fresh ideas and perspectives related to careers in music education.

#### *As community of practice*

Participating with other students in the musical developed multilingual reading, speaking, listening and musical skills linked to identity where learning changes ways of being (Wenger, 1998). Tahl especially enjoyed the production process and were able to experience life and the world in meaningful ways (Wenger, 1998).

Jake enjoyed collaborating through ensemble playing (Wenger, 1998), musical improvisation, adaptability and musical interpretation. Harmonisation and memorisation skills improved as well as the realisation of understanding of what you are singing about (Zea) due to an environment that combined knowledge and practice, and the opportunity to learn through relationships with their peers (Kapucu, 2012). Student participants enjoyed musicking together, extending the children's musical knowledge and cultivating their appreciation of music. Engagement occurred when students were both passionately and successfully involved in a task of high quality (Munns, 2007). Practices during the production process provided a way to “sustain mutual engagement in action” (Wenger, 1998, p. 5).

Students learnt how to be considerate of people (belonging) (Wenger, 1998), to captivate and interact with a child audience (collaborative interaction and inquiry as an attribute of well-designed and well-taught projects) (Tobias et al., 2015), the importance of repetition and how to teach music to children, helping student participants to see themselves as potential participants in and contributors to a range of different musical practices (Tobias et al., 2015). Tiny experienced how enthusiastic teaching, open-mindedness and teaching music in a fun and meaningful way promoted cooperation and nurtured learning. A positive attitude and outlook contributed to better motivation and the participation of other students, fostering positive social and personal development (John, 2014).

Participation in a musical production had a positive, often transformative impact on students' personal development through integrating the four components of a Community of practice (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002): Student participants enjoyed being part of the musical (meaning), it was educational (practice), they learnt more about their peers (communities), themselves and their abilities, and developed self-confidence (identity) (Wenger, 1998). Collaboration in a community of practice is primarily about the participants' level of belonging in the community (Wenger, 2000).

Students learnt how to be more comfortable in the company of strangers, practice patience (especially when under pressure), adaptability, the importance of being nice to others and that one does not have to like everyone to work with them, but it is easier when you do (Nora). Students earned valuable experience in organising a production while under pressure. Roan liked how different people developed their individual personalities through characterisation in their everyday lives.

### ***Stagecraft as authentic arts-based pedagogy and community of practice***

Creating a musical with excellence in its execution let student participants engage with shared resources, perspectives and frameworks that fostered mutual engagement with practice. Students put a lot of collaborative effort into the design and production of the set and props, involving the processes of creating, performing and appreciating inherent within creative learning and activity (Smith-Autard, 2002). Aligning student learning experiences with the world for which they are being prepared, student participants had to promote real-life applications of knowledge (Renzulli et al., 2004). They designed the lighting and props to set the scene while enhancing different contexts: creating atmosphere and making the musical more realistic. Colourful scenery stimulated the imagination of the child audience, and students were more involved in their own production (Wenger, 2000). Backstage challenges included props that were noisy to move (Wayne) and scene changes that could have been faster and more effective – real-world problems targeted towards a real audience beyond the classroom (Rule, 2006) that students had to address.

### ***Performance***

Student participants described the pre-school audience as unpredictable (Will), very cute (Jake) and actively enjoyed the performances (Zane). Students learnt to appreciate pre-schoolers' actions, spontaneity and sense of humour. Debbie was especially impressed with the pre-schoolers' singing and dancing skills. The characters interacted with the child audience at appropriate times, although there were some variances in the different audiences – some were very receptive and others were less emotional (Mary). Due to a possible lack of interaction and a younger age group, Matt perceived the children's reactions at one performance as mild, strangely dragging and lacking involvement – they seemed to enjoy the storyline but did not understand everything. In the other performances, the children seemed to have enjoyed the performance and actively participated at the right times (Landie), partly because of the students also being more comfortable and being able to interact naturally with the audience through listening and responding.

### ***As project-based learning***

Tobias et al. (2015) claim that project-based learning could transform music education programmes by offering student-centred learning with long-lasting results such as learning to appreciate pre-schoolers as audience members who actively enjoyed the performances (Vera). Audience interaction contributed to the overall enjoyment of a performance and motivated student participants to learn new ways to communicate with a pre-school audience, as they were connected to

the community and the real world (Katz & Chard, 1989; Dickinson et al., 1998; Thomas, 1998; Martin & Baker, 2000).

#### *As authentic arts-based pedagogy*

Kimmy and a few of her peers had fun involving the audience to help them find certain characters on stage. Portraying an antagonist suitable for a children's production provoked critical thinking. Skills were also developed (Tobias et al., 2015) to adapt the character(s) through connecting the student participants with the community and their real worlds. Challenges of live performances include some pre-schoolers who are hard to work with (Lena), do not always want to be actively involved (Vera) and are difficult to control (Amy). To address these real-world challenges, students applied open-ended inquiry, thinking skills and reflection (Rule, 2006) to find ways to constantly keep the pre-schoolers' attention, adapt the dialogue and speak louder than the children.

#### **Enjoyment**

Students described their experiences as amazing, wonderful, enjoyable, good, exciting, impressive, chaotic, but delightful (Zea) and that it made them aware of what happens on stage around them. The production was responsible for a lot of endorphins (Benita), and students will always remember how much they laughed during the production. For Terra, the story and performance were good and fun. The experience of creating the musical exceeded Nat's expectations and Venty perceived it a privilege to work with children. Students were amused to see how much the children were intrigued by the productions, and how they reacted with enthusiasm and interest.

#### *As community of practice*

Being part of a musical production was a pleasant experience for the majority of the participants, as they experienced life and the world in a meaningful way and a by-product of learning (Wenger, 1998). Len said: "It was a delightful experience to stage a musical that is not too focused on the technical aspects, as the child audience only wanted to be entertained." Student participants enjoyed working with the pre-schoolers as well as with each other, belonging to a community of practice that included interaction, learning together, building relationships and a sense of belonging and mutual commitment (Countryman, 2009). Students appreciated their lecturer as facilitative leader to foster collaboration that ultimately lead to learning (Wenger, 2000).

#### *As authentic arts-based pedagogy*

Students enjoyed the humorous atmosphere and team spirit during the pre-production phase, painting faces, laughing, dancing and singing. Nebe will always remember how much they laughed, how happy the pre-schoolers were (Angel), how much they enjoyed entertaining them (May) and their giggling and enthusiastic comments of admiration (Steve). These aspects highlight how arts engagement promotes vitality and connectedness (Eisner, 2002a, 2002b).

#### **Conclusion and recommendations for future research**

In this study, three educational approaches were juxtaposed to the six themes generated from the data analysis. The conceptual framework (Figure 1) illustrates how the skills for creating a musical as pedagogical praxis in music education could reinforce several areas within music teacher preparation programmes, related to the three educational approaches. Preparing for a musical and performance of a musical are both related to project-based learning and authentic arts-based

pedagogy, while stagecraft relates to authentic arts-based pedagogy and enjoyment directly relates to a community of practice.

I propose that creating a musical for pre-schoolers is a pedagogical praxis for a tertiary music education module. The educational approaches project-based learning, authentic arts-based pedagogy and community of practice should be applied interactively to equip students with musical skills, music educational skills, personal skills and acting skills in a music education module for music teacher training. In this way, music education students will acquire the skills and knowledge that are valued in preparing them to enter sustainable careers (Minors, Burnard, Wiffen, Shihabi & van der Walt, 2017).

Creating a musical for pre-schoolers created a site for authentic engagement, as participants were continually involved in negotiating meaning-making (Seidel, 2002). Engaging music education students in an authentic learning experience provided an opportunity for learning in and through the arts (authentic arts-based pedagogy), as part of a community of practice, to learn the necessary skills to utilise arts-based learning activities in their careers as music teachers (Ogden et al., 2010) through project-based learning. Acquiring these educational competencies is essential to equip music education students with practical skills suitable for a variety of music teaching environments and to heighten their creativity.

Future research could investigate how the model generated from this study could be applied to stage productions as pedagogical praxis in the undergraduate preparation of student teachers in other real-life contexts.

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