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Unpacking the *habitus*: Exploring a music teacher’s values, beliefs and practices

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Abstract
There is substantial evidence in the literature to support the claim that teachers’ values and beliefs have a powerful effect on their teaching practice, and that these shape students’ experiences of music learning. However, little attention has been paid to the forces by which these values and beliefs are shaped, and, more importantly, how more positive teacher dispositions may be cultivated and developed through teacher education. Drawing on methodological devices of narrative inquiry, and Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* as an interpretive tool, this paper describes a case study of one music teacher’s values and beliefs and how these were shaped by personal experiences, and social and institutional forces. Specifically, the paper considers the ways in which this teacher’s values and beliefs were reshaped over the course of the research process.

Keywords
Bourdieu, music teacher education, music teachers’ values and beliefs, narrative inquiry, secondary music education

Introduction
There is substantial evidence in the literature to support the claim that teachers’ values and beliefs have a powerful effect on their teaching practice, and that these shape
students’ experiences of music learning. As Mateiro and Westvall (2013) identify, our own values and beliefs serve as a lens for approaching music teaching and learning. Froehlich (2007) agrees, claiming that teachers’ practices are shaped by large-scale cultural, social and political forces. Hargreaves, Purves, Welch, and Marshall (2007) suggest that their music teachers’ identities “inevitably determine how they project their own implicit views of the nature of music in the school” (p. 667). The impact of music teachers’ personal values and beliefs about music, education and schooling on student learning is explored in this paper.

This paper describes a case study of one music teacher who experienced a moment of realisation about the way his own values and beliefs, and those of the music department in which he worked, had subconsciously shaped his teaching practice. Using Bourdieu’s logic of practice as an interpretive lens, this paper argues that the values of the fields of music and education (doxa) shape music teachers’ values, beliefs and dispositions (the habitus) that, in turn, contribute to the preservation and reproduction of the doxa. In the narrative presented in this paper, the teacher’s immersion within the school context, with its narrowly defined view of music education that was reinforced and perpetuated by a common commitment of those around him, had prevented him from seeing the ways in which his practice had negatively affected some of his students, prohibiting him from imagining other possibilities for music education.

**Background**

It is well documented within the literature that many Western classroom music teachers hold values that are inherited from the tradition of Western art music (Bouij, 2004; Bowman, 2007; Hargreaves, et al., 2007; Regelski, 1997; Ross, 1995).
Hargreaves et al. (2007) suggest that teacher candidates with a background in Western art music may have little knowledge of other styles and that this is inappropriate for classroom music teaching. For example, music teachers are often accused of designing musical experiences that are disconnected from students’ out-of-school musical worlds (Allsup, 2003), of prioritising musical ends over educational ones (Regelski, 2012), and of prioritising their own musical specialities (usually Western art music) over the preferences and interests of their students (Mills, 1996; Ross, 1995). In order to alleviate these problems, there have been substantial pushes to ensure that preservice music teachers have knowledge of musics and pedagogical practices that extend beyond the Western art-music canon, including musics and perspectives of non-Western cultures (Bradley, 2006, 2007; Koza, 2001), and popular musics and informal learning practices (Green, 2002, 2008; Jaffurs, 2004; Westerlund, 2006).

However, little attention has been paid to the forces by which these values and beliefs are shaped, and the implications of values and beliefs remaining tacitly held. Mateiro and Westvall (2013) claim music teachers’ knowledge “is influenced by the cultural contexts from which it springs and the social contexts in which it is displayed, internalized and enacted” (p. 157). Richardson (1996) notes that formal knowledge about any subject area impacts on the beliefs teachers hold about teaching and learning. Like other specialist teachers, music teachers have most often engaged with the formal knowledge of their subject area for a number of years prior to or concurrently with their teacher-education program, and thus hold strong beliefs about what comprise valuable knowledge and skills in their subject area. As Gates (2009) suggests, historical traditions of music education practice are useful for providing grounding for novice teachers; however, if they do not respond to the ever-changing
classroom environment, they create friction in the interactions between teacher and student. Bowman (2009) agrees, identifying the importance of reflective and responsive practice in ensuring that music teachers are conscious of the ends and purposes of their teaching practice.

**Bourdieu’s work as a theoretical lens**

This discussion of music teachers’ values and beliefs highlights the importance of understanding how values, beliefs and dispositions are enacted in practice and how they are developed in social and cultural contexts. Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus* and *doxa* provide an avenue for understanding these phenomena. In this research, Bourdieu’s *thinking tools* were used as an interpretive lens for illuminating how music teachers’ (agents) actions are shaped by the values and expectation of the *fields* in which they work. Bourdieu (1977) describes the *habitus* as “an acquired system of generative schemes objectively adjusted to the particular conditions in which it is constituted” (p. 95). In simpler terms, the *habitus* is a system of “acquired, socially constituted dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 13) that are learned through our upbringing and through our participation in particular *fields*, the social spaces in which interactions, transactions and events take place (Thomson, 2008). Bourdieu frequently uses sport or ‘the game’ as a metaphor for field, although he cautions that “a field is not the product of a deliberate act of creation, and [unlike a game] it follows rules or better, regularities, that are not explicit and codified” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). Continuing with the metaphor of a game, Bourdieu describes the habitus as the embodiment of ‘a feel for the game’. When the habitus is closely attuned to the field, the agent is able to carry out the infinite number of acts that the game (the field) requires, which are unpredictable but limited in range. A productive
habitus allows for generation and improvisation of actions in unknown contexts based on what is known, and is likely to produce increased levels of symbolic capital, which in turn is likely to produce opportunities to create economic capital.

In addition to the concept of *habitus*, the notion of *doxa* is highly pertinent to any discussion about beliefs and values within a field of practice. If the *habitus* allows agents to carry out the acts required by the game, by the logics of practice of the field in Bourdieu’s terms, the reason that they choose to carry out these acts (and not others) is because of their commitment to the *doxa* of the field. Deer (2008) describes *doxa* as “comprising field-specific sets of beliefs that inform the shared *habitus* of those operating within the field” (p. 125). In essence, *doxa* are the silent and unspoken ‘rules of the game’, and are maintained by agents within the field because other courses of action do not appear as viable alternatives.

Of course, many have identified limitations within Bourdieu’s theories, particularly in the way that they tend not to consider the capacity for resistance or rebellion, and the ways in which individuals and groups have the potential to shape and transcend the social worlds that they inhabit. Apple (1982) suggests that theories of reproduction assume students to be passive participants in the process, ignoring the potential for rebellion and rejection of dominant knowledge and values. Bourdieu describes fields as ‘sites of struggle’ and ‘sites of resistance as well as domination’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) but, as Swartz (1997) identifies, rarely ‘sites of social transformation’.

The concepts of *habitus* and *doxa* are used in this paper as a way of understanding the ways in which pedagogical actions are shaped not only by teachers’ values and beliefs but also by the *doxa* of the field (the school and broader educational landscapes). In fields where the *habitus* of individual members is continually confirmed, and because
entry of fully authorised members (teachers, not students) is restricted to those who already share a similar *habitus*, the *doxa* is readily reproduced.

**Methodology**

The data discussed in this article are drawn from my doctoral study (Dwyer, 2012, in press), which took the form of a narrative inquiry relating to four classroom music teachers. In each narrative, data were generated through two formal semi-structured interviews with the teacher, a period of five days of classroom observations (spread over several weeks), informal conversations with the teacher, as well as formal interviews with the school’s principal and several students.

Narrative inquiry is an epistemological approach to research through which the knowledge of peoples’ lived experience is explored and interrogated. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) suggest that “narrative inquiry comes out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives” (p. 477). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) claim that narrative inquiry is characterised by a shift away from the traditional relationship between the researcher and the researched. Clandinin and Connelly (Clandinin, 2010; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) claim that this is what distinguishes narrative inquiry from other forms of research.

By coming alongside, over time and in relationship, we are able to name, to show, to talk about, to dwell in the tensionality and to learn from the experiences of dwelling within. (Clandinin, 2010, p. 9)

As Barrett and Stauffer (2009) identify, living alongside participants and drawing upon that experience of living as a source of data is a deeply relational research process, resulting in a co-construction of the research data. Opportunities to revisit the
data—to relive and retell, and to discuss the events in more depth—allow for deeper levels of negotiation and interpretation of the data. This process of negotiation is central to narrative inquiry, casting the participants in a more collaborative role in the research process. Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002) suggest that “collaboration involves negotiating the relationships between the researcher and the participant to lessen the potential gap between the narrative told and the narrative reported” (p. 332). In the narrative presented in this paper, the recursive approach to data generation and the ongoing negotiation of the text resulted in the detection of changes in the teacher’s beliefs about music teaching and his students that would not have been evident in a ‘snapshot’-like research approach.

Using Polkinghorne’s (1995) conceptualisation of narrative analysis, data were analysed by developing or discovering “a plot that displays the linkage among the data elements as parts of an unfolding temporal development culminating in the denouement” (p. 15). As Polkinghorne articulates, narrative analysis is actually more aptly described as a method of synthesis, whereby events and happenings (the data) are constructed into a coherent whole that seeks to illustrate a particular phenomenon or how a particular situation came to be. In the narrative presented in this paper, the development of Sam’s habitus and the relationship between it and the doxa of the field is the focus of the narrative. Events, happenings, interactions and conversations that illustrate this were synthesized into a text that is coherent for the reader, illuminated by the ideas of Bourdieu.

**Why Bourdieu and narrative?**

Following the work of Barone (2000, 2001, 2009), the methodological framework of narrative inquiry was blended with Bourdieu’s theories as a way of placing the
narrative within a larger social context. Barone (2000) describes the critical theorist and the critical storyteller (or narrative inquirer) as “authorial comrades-in-arms” (p. 193), sharing common ground and goals while pursuing them through different modes of discourse. Barone (2000) suggests that narrative (fictional and non-fictional) texts may provide opportunities for readers to engage in a “conspiratorial conversation” (p. 178) and critical analysis (2001). Like Barone, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) posit that “narrative inquirers and Marxist-influenced scholars working in the applied social sciences often share an interest in analyzing the way large institutions dehumanize, anesthetize, and alienate the people living and working within them” (p. 47).

Bourdieu’s work is sympathetic with the methodology of narrative inquiry in a number of ways, specifically in terms of epistemological stance and the role of reflexivity. Bourdieu’s ideas on epistemology align closely with the constructivist stance associated with narrative inquiry, in which the role of the researcher is viewed as a crucial factor in the co-construction of knowledge. Bourdieu rejects the notion of an objective researcher (Bourdieu, 1999), demanding that researchers articulate their value stances, their problem choice and their theoretical and methodological frames. The positivist dream of an epistemological state of perfect innocence papers over the fact that the crucial difference is not between a science that effects a construction and one that does not, but between a science that does this without knowing it and one that, being aware of the work of construction, strives to discover and master as completely as possible the nature of its inevitable acts of construction and the equally inevitable effects those acts produce. (Bourdieu, 1999, p. 608)
In simpler terms, knowledge generated through social research can never be objective, but by acknowledging and attending to the ways in which the researcher’s presence contributes to and affects the construction of the knowledge.

Within this epistemological position, the reflexivity of the researcher becomes a crucial aspect of the research process. Drawing upon the work of Bourdieu, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) stress the significance of articulating the researcher positionality, claiming, “reflexivity demands transparent articulation of researcher positionality and the significance of this to data collection and analysis” (p. 48). Bourdieu (2009) takes this idea further, describing importance of “reflex reflexivity” (p. 608), the researcher’s ability to perceive, monitor and respond, in the moment, to the distortions brought about by the social relationship.

With these ideas in mind, in this study, Bourdieu’s ideas are interwoven with the principles of narrative inquiry to create an approach to research that integrates theory, epistemology, method and methodology.

**A story of Sam Hall at Chiswick College**

Chiswick College is a Prep–12 (approximately 5–17 years) school for girls, situated in a leafy suburb, not far from the centre of a large Australian city. The school is well established with a good reputation, and is especially noted for its music program. With the Kodály philosophy as its underpinning, Chiswick College has a long history of classroom music education. There is a sense of a ‘united front’ across the music program at the College; there is a work program for Prep to Year 12 that outlines the content that is expected to be covered in each year, focusing on the development of musical knowledge through singing in solfā. While teachers have the opportunity to

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1 All names are pseudonyms
be flexible and responsive within the framework of ‘the program’, the history of the program positions musical knowledge and pedagogy as somewhat fixed, as something that transcends the teacher and students. For the purposes of this paper, the music department at Chiswick College is described as a sub-field of music education, because it has a specific doxa that is narrower than that of the broader field of music education.

Meet Sam Hall

Sam is 25 years old and is in his third year of teaching at Chiswick College. Sam was recruited as a graduate for his position because of the close alignment between the school’s methodological approach and his preservice training at University. I ask Sam to tell me about his experiences as a music student.

While I was at school, my piano teacher was an ex-policeman who didn’t really play the piano that well, but preferred teaching to the work of a policeman. My experience of music in school mostly comprised participating in ensembles and musicals and offered me a far more rich and rewarding experience to that which was offered in my individual piano lessons. It gave me an opportunity to perform with others, and to be offered an introduction to a variety of different styles of music.

When I think back to my classroom music experience I see that most of what we did was to prepare for upcoming assessment. For example, if the class had a composition due our lessons would be spent composing for that particular task. If we had an exam soon our lessons would be spent analysing the pieces in the upcoming exam. Rehearsals for upcoming performances were also a large part of lesson time: I remember playing the piano a lot, picking up guitars and
playing the drums. One thing I now find interesting is that we only learned solfa briefly, when practising for melodic dictation exams.

Bourdieu’s theory suggests that early experiences have the most substantial impact on the development of the *habitus*, an idea supported in the teacher education literature. However, for Sam, it was his experiences of music learning at University that had a more significant impact on his values and beliefs about music education.

My own growth as a musician rapidly increased when solfa was introduced to me later in life, at university. In comparison to how I learnt at school, I can see that there was a lack of structure and almost a complete lack of group singing, which I now view (only in retrospect) as a serious downfall.

I can see that Sam didn’t think much of his own music education; that he feels that he missed out on valuable learning experiences that would have benefited him, both in classroom music and in his instrumental learning. In a later conversation, I ask Sam whether he agrees with my observation.

Yes, absolutely. What I naturally had as a student was creativity and ‘musicality’, which was encouraged by my teachers, but not nurtured or developed into real musical knowledge and skills. Therefore, my creativity and musicality could only develop as far as my limited technical ability would allow. I ensure now that my students work hard to develop strong technical abilities, which will enhance and strengthen their creative expression.

The way Sam teaches music now is vastly different from the way he was taught, a phenomenon that some suggest is unusual for teachers (Richardson, 1996, 2003). I ask him what he believes is the most important aspect of his classroom teaching.

Performing, singing, being a part of music making every lesson. I really want my students to be able to develop the confidence to just sing in front of one
another. The program here at this school is excellent at addressing that because we do it every lesson. Also, I believe it is important to develop theoretical musical knowledge, which the students learn here through a performance-based program.

What I want is to give the students the skills to continue making music after they finish school. I would hate to think that the students that go on to study medicine or study to become a vet or become a chef, don’t continue to love and to seek out musical experiences. I believe that it is much more difficult for them to do that if they perceive it to be difficult or unachievable.

**Year 10 Music: ‘About as diverse as you get here’**

As Sam and I walk to his classroom after morning tea, he describes the Year 10 class that I am about to meet for the first time; the very diverse class that he has referred to several times in our interviews and conversations.

There are two Indigenous scholarship students in the class, one who started at Chiswick College at the start of this year, and one who came in at the end of last year. There are two other new students: Mary, who arrived from Papua New Guinea at the start of this year, and Jess, who came from another school, who is quite musical, but hasn’t done theory before.

I am interested to see how Sam works with students with such disparate levels of knowledge and experience. When I ask how he approaches the lessons, he says, “My lesson plan varies depending on who is here (some students are frequently missing to
attend ESL classes— if the new ones are here it’s revision, if they’re not, we might go on.”

Today the majority of the students are in attendance and the lesson begins in typical fashion; singing, in solfa, as a class. The difference between the students’ level of experience is obvious immediately. Around two thirds of the students participate confidently, while the others are hesitant. Sam encourages everyone to sing out, avoiding singling out particular students. The lesson moves on seamlessly from singing to writing out the same song in staff notation. Sam tours the class as the students do this, offering assistance to students who need it. After seeing that a few of the students have completed the task quickly, he asks all students to pause for a moment while he explains the extension task; all students then continue working at their own pace. The students are expected to work individually, and they don’t really interact with each other unless they are talking quietly because they are finished. Several students are reluctant to continue with the task without Sam watching over them and talking them through what to do. Sam states that he finds this frustrating: “These students all really struggle to keep up. I’ve offered them extra tutorials at lunchtimes, but they haven’t taken me up on it.”

‘Music for all’ is the underlying stated philosophy of the program at Chiswick College, and certainly, no student is stopped from enrolling in classroom music because of a lack of prior experience. However, watching this class, it is clear that not all students are going to be successful. The students who have been studying music at Chiswick in previous years have developed a discourse of insider knowledge; language, knowledge and skills that newer members of the class community do not

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2 At Chiswick College, students who do not have English as their first language participate in ESL (English as a Second Language) support program that takes place during the school day, in addition to or in lieu of the regular curriculum, depending on the level of support required.
have access to. Singing in solfa and writing on the staff are skills that are valued in this classroom: being able to do those things well is a source of capital, leading to a more valued position within the field (class). The reasons behind these things being valued (and not others) are unquestioned. They are a rule of the game; their importance to music learning is part of the doxa of this field.

A few days later, I observe another lesson with the same class. As we walk to the classroom, Sam advises me that this lesson will be a bit of a break from the normal routine – it is the students’ last lesson of the term and there will be several students missing because of a choral workshop. The lesson begins with quite a long chat session while they wait for other students to arrive. As Sam mentions to me, “I feel like I need to build a bit more of a relationship with some of them.” I notice that this type of relaxed conversation also seems to be developing the relationship between the students: some of the newer students seem visibly more relaxed as they talk with their peers.

This discussion gradually dies down as it is accepted that no other students will arrive. Sam introduces the task for today; Year Ten Music Trivia. Sam has prepared a series of questions and tasks for the students to complete, in teams that he has chosen. Sam has deliberately chosen heterogeneous groups for the students to work in, pairing weaker students with stronger. I ask Sam why he chose to have the students work in these groups: “Basically, because some of the students in that class wouldn’t have been able to answer a single question.”

Sam explains the only rule of the game: that the group members have to work together and each person has to contribute. The group that is seated nearest to me is the one that I have the opportunity to observe closely. One of the group’s members, Rebecca, a student who has been at Chiswick College since Prep, is currently the top
student in this class. She is fiercely competitive and takes a natural leadership role within the group, discussing the questions (and her answers) with the two weaker members of the group, Jess and Mary. I see Rebecca begin to take on a peer-teaching role. One of the tasks is to write one of their known songs in staff notation. Rather than complete this herself, a task that she could complete quickly and accurately, she guides Mary while she writes out the song, carefully looking over her shoulder, prompting Mary with questions when she is about to go wrong. Rebecca’s verbal explanations are clear and concise; she frequently sings the relevant part of the song to help Mary make the connection between sound and symbol, in much the same way that Sam does in his lessons. After 10 years of music lessons at Chiswick College, Rebecca is adept at utilizing the same pedagogical techniques as her teachers. Her habitus is closely aligned with the *doxa* of the field, and her commitment to the rules is unwavering. With Rebecca’s assistance, Mary completes the task successfully and wins the points for her team. (None of the students seem to mind that there is no prize – winning seems to be reward enough.) High fives are exchanged and Mary’s smile lights up the room. I wonder if this is the first time she has experienced any success in this music classroom. Mary’s position in the field changes due to this success, as she accumulates capital and receives social reward from her teacher and peers for it.

While I observe this powerful example of peer mentoring, I recall Sam’s earlier comments to me that Mary is one of the students he has been encouraging to come and see him for extra help but she hasn’t done so thus far. I wonder if Mary would be more inclined to work with another student. I ask Sam about this.

I had offered all of the new students this year the opportunity to participate in a peer-mentoring program that the school offers. Sadly, while some of the existing students in the class were quite enthusiastic, the new students weren’t. I
wonder if they were too shy and self-conscious in their early days at the College to agree to it.

This lesson is markedly different from all of the other lessons I have observed Sam teach. For the first time, I have seen students sharing their knowledge with each other, allowing stronger students in the class to take the role of expert.

Later, I discuss this lesson with Sam at length.

I think one of the wonderful things about being at the top end of understanding, as in being somebody that understands things well, and grasps things quickly . . . is that you can practise and consolidate that even more by teaching it to people who don’t understand. For me as a teacher I’ve had so many moments where I’ve finally understood things just because I had to break it down and explain it to somebody who didn’t understand and, similarly, the students in the class who think they already know it can have the opportunity to practise and to share and hopefully consolidate those understandings for themselves by explaining it to the students in the class who don’t really understand what’s going on, or have less understanding. In turn, for the students with less understanding, they have the opportunity to learn from their peers, which I think is pretty special. While I try to explain concepts clearly, I do forget that the musical language I use is quite sophisticated as a result of the way that I’ve been taught and the words that now come out of my mouth. Students in the class who don’t understand sometimes just don’t get it but they don’t put their hand up and say they don’t get it because they’re in what they think is a classroom full of people who do get it. In that sense, when they’re in a smaller group too, they’ll feel more comfortable tapping another person on the shoulder and saying, “Hey, look, there’s only two others of you here so I can ask this. I’m not going to ask in
front of the class because that’s too embarrassing, but what does this mean and can you explain it to me?”

About six months after this observation, I ask Sam about how this class is going.

The class has changed significantly. Both of the Indigenous students have left the class, as has Jess, who had come from another school at the start of the year. Jess didn’t like that she was – I don’t want to say forced – but regularly encouraged to sing. That made her feel very uncomfortable, despite doing very well at it and I continued to praise her for the efforts that she was making. I thought that I’d tried to make her comfortable but that is a process that can take some time, and in the end I respect that she didn’t want to join in. At her old school Jess’s experience in music had been similar to my own: to pick up a guitar and learn to play chords in the classroom and she had loved that in the past and I just don’t do that in my classroom. I think there’s room for it, and I would like to make room for it because to be honest, that was a large part of my own musical education and here I am. It often involved just working things out for yourself. I believe that there is merit in this, but first I wish to impart knowledge and skills that students can then go away and practise, improvise with and consolidate.

I ask Sam why he hasn’t made room for this type of learning in the past.

I fear that those experiences aren’t what students ‘need’ in the classroom. I suppose I have a very focused and specific idea about how a music classroom should be, based on my own [teaching] experience and my training. It doesn’t fit in with the ‘perfect model’ I have in my mind and so I am reluctant to try it.

At this point in time, a few months after I visited Chiswick College, Sam’s ideas remain firmly in place. He has a clear idea of what music education should be, one
that is strongly supported by the field and others within it. His habitus and the doxa of his workplace are closely aligned, making it easy for him to maintain his pedagogical stance, despite the fact that it is becoming obvious that what he is doing is not in the best interests of some of the students in this class.

He continues,

I’d spent the whole of first semester encouraging Jess to stay with it, and she was achieving quite well, sitting on a B, which is a high achievement for somebody who’s come into Year 10 music with the inability to read staff notation. I mean, there are many positives: she left [the subject] knowing how to read the treble clef which she didn’t know how to do when she came in. She left with an understanding of how rhythm works and she hadn’t in the past. And then there’s Mary, from Papua New Guinea. I think Mary is an example of a student who is quite capable but has absolutely no confidence in music whatsoever and I think had, in that quiz lesson alone, a few ‘light bulb moments’, where she finally made connections that she just didn’t get before and there are so many of those connections for her to make before she reaches the same level as the rest of the class. She came back after the holidays to see me and in the first lesson said to me, “Ok, Mr Hall. I’m finally starting to understand this, I need to see you on Friday afternoons for half an hour after school because I really wanna improve.” And I think that lesson was sort of a light at the end of the tunnel moment for her and she thought, “Oh, ok. I can get there.”

As described earlier, this particular lesson was a turning point for Mary: the beginning of her induction into the field. The glimpse of success set her on a path to accumulating the capital that would improve her position within the field.
“And has she come to see you?” I ask, recalling our earlier conversations about Mary’s reluctance to ask for help.

Yes, she has on a number of occasions. She’s improving: oh my goodness, the composition that she just handed in was spectacular. She admitted to having help but she sought that help herself, which might have been because she’d had the experience in the classroom [the lesson described above] that left her feeling confident enough to ask other people to help. I don’t know for sure, but it’s possible.

This help that she sought was from her classmates, something that I can’t picture the Mary I had seen earlier in the year doing. Some months later, Sam emails me with an update regarding Mary’s progress.

There is a lovely story here. Mary achieved an A- grade at the end of the year – combining her rapidly improving theoretical knowledge, her strong natural singing abilities and her successful composition task. She also joined the school choir! At the end of the year her mother wrote me an email thanking me for supporting her daughter, ‘so far away in another country’ and shared her happiness at seeing her daughter enjoying and achieving well in music. It was a rewarding email to receive.

Mary and Jess are both students who like music and have some experience in music learning, although in a very different context. From the time they joined this music class at Chiswick College in Year Ten they have been encouraged to ‘get with the program’ – gently pushed into becoming a part of the culture of learning in this way by participating in these ways of music making. Immediate success is not mandatory or expected, but immediate participation is. The pressure to conform, to “love the inevitable” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 77) is immense yet unstated.
In the year following the observation period, Sam took leave without pay from Chiswick College to travel and work overseas. As we reviewed the interim research texts via email, he made these comments in reference to his story about Jess’s departure from his music class.

I read this and I think to myself: where is the consideration for her simply enjoying herself in the classroom? Where have I tried to make an effort for her to have a little of what she was used to in my classroom? While I was encouraging and sympathetic to her concerns I didn’t change the way I taught: that seems like a failure to offer her an opportunity that could have flourished. This is the first time Sam’s commitment to the doxa of the subfield has wavered. Sam’s capacity to reflect upon his practice seems to have been limited by constraints of his habitus and the requirement that he adhere to the doxa, playing by the rules of the game. His departure from the College allowed him space to think differently, to see pathways that weren’t visible in the past. His habitus had made a small but important shift, and Sam began to recognise the influence that it had had on his past practice.

I ask Sam to think about how he would answer the questions he poses. He says he’ll keep thinking and get back to me. I remain in contact with him, but he doesn’t have the answers before this manuscript is submitted. Sam’s journey isn’t bound by my research deadlines.

**Discussion**

The story described in this paper brings to light a number of issues for music teacher education. First, the narrative demonstrates how teachers’ values, beliefs and assumptions about what ‘good’ music education is, what it should achieve and whom
it is for are enacted through their practice. We saw the effect of Sam’s habitus in the way he described his practice and his students, particularly those who were new to the class (the field) and had less of the valued capitals at their disposal. The students learned that there were only two options: they needed to ‘play the game’, as Mary chose to do, or leave, like Jess. In another music classroom, with another music teacher, there may have been a wider variety of pathways for these students, or they may have been different but equally narrow. In any case, the doxa of the field and habitus of the teacher have a pervasive influence.

Second, the very close alignment between Sam’s habitus and the doxa of the sub-field contributed to the stability of Sam’s habitus, and a continual process of reproduction of the status quo. Sam’s commitment to the doxa was so strong that he had not considered the possibility of modifying his practice to accommodate Jess’s (or any of his students’) desires or preferences, and this behaviour was sanctioned by the subfield. The ‘needs’ of students are predetermined by the teachers, both past and present.

A third aspect to consider is the events that transpired that contributed to the increase in Sam’s capacity to reflect upon and evaluate his values and beliefs. During the process of composing, re-composing and editing this research text, Sam began to see his own practice in a different light. One might say he caught his first glimpse of his past failure to see another way of doing things. For Sam, this process of recognition occurred in very specific circumstances. His departure from the subfield (Chiswick College) to the larger field of music education that accepts a wider range of pedagogies and practices opened his eyes to the choices that were invisible before. In addition to this, the prompts Sam received as a participant in this research project were a catalyst for a deeper level of reflection. The moment of realization occurred
almost a year after the event, after several recursive iterations through reviewing and discussing the text. In previous iterations, Sam had defended his pedagogical choices, claiming that he did not think that was what students need in the music classroom. The meta-reflection that Sam undertook as he read the manuscript drafts would likely not have occurred had he not been a participant in the research.

These issues highlight a number of possibilities for music teacher education, and teacher education more broadly. First, the values of music making that school music programs embody, whether tacitly or overtly, communicate strong messages to students about what music learning is, how it is learned and who it is for. I propose that music teacher candidates would benefit from critique of the cultures of music making that are perpetuated in schools, and the ways that these include or exclude, value or devalue students’ experiences and preferences. In addition, teacher candidates need to become aware of how their own values and beliefs (habitus) shape their practice and influence the experiences of the students they teach. By reflecting on cases such as the one presented here, and engaging in a process of recursive reflection (meta-reflection) as a way of interrogating the effects of their own habitus on their teaching practice, there is potential for teacher candidates to illuminate their values, beliefs and practices in ways that facilitate enhanced professional growth. Further, this research illustrates the value of providing opportunities for beginning teachers to engage in meta-reflection and learn from these by engaging in professional dialogue with peers and mentors. As Mills (2012) identifies, teacher candidates who hold views that are not confirmed by the doxa find those dispositions difficult to maintain. More often than not, they are inducted into the collective habitus of the field, and learn to “love the inevitable” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 77), thus contributing to
the cycle of reproduction. Music education that is responsive to students’ needs in an ever-changing world requires ongoing reflection and renewal by educators.

**Conclusion**

The narrative presented in this paper illuminates the way that teachers’ personal values and beliefs are intricately tied to those of the fields in which they work, and that this may create an environment that places limits on their potential to see the range of possibilities for music education. Much is made within educational literature of the importance of reflection for professional growth. I argue that this case illustrates that reflection alone is insufficient, that reflection, and the ability to act upon reflection, may be constrained by the effects of *habitus* and *doxa*. In order for reflection to lead to professional growth and transformation of teaching practice, these factors must be considered, and ways of limiting their influence, thereby opening a space for deeper reflective thought, must be sought.

**References**


**Author Biography**

Dr Rachael Dwyer is a research fellow at the Queensland Conservatorium, Griffith University. She spent a number of years as a music specialist teacher in primary and secondary schools prior to completing her doctoral studies at The University of Queensland. Rachael's doctoral research sought to investigate how music teachers’ values and beliefs about music and music education are enacted in practice and how these beliefs are socially and culturally shaped. Rachael’s research interests include teacher education, assessment in higher education, research pedagogy, critical pedagogy and narrative inquiry.