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'Wild' music-making: an investigation into the experiences of children (aged 7–10) when music-making in a woodland

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ABSTRACT

Music-making has long been associated with ways of knowing that enable enhanced experiences of reality. This study explores children's (aged 7–10 years) experiences of music-making outdoors in a nature reserve and the potential for aesthetic ways of knowing affecting their musical experiences and sense of relationship with the more-than-human world. Three schools took part and groups of children were randomly selected from each school to undertake semi-structured interviews. Analysis of the transcribed interviews showed that children's music-making afforded them artistic or aesthetic ways of knowing giving them an enhanced experience of the natural world, themselves and their music making.

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Introduction

Music is recognised as being 'far more important' than a 'leisure time pursuit' (Regelski 2011, 43). Indeed, Levitin (2008, 3) states that music is 'a core element of our identity as a species'. Regelski (2011, 59) concurs stating that 'music is a primary source of sociality – of all kinds – and, thus, is a key contribution to the health and well-being of society'. In grounding music as an innately human phenomenon, it has also been theorised as a language, suggesting music can be 'true to the life of feeling in a way that language cannot' (Langer 1978, 243). If music is indeed an innate, human activity (Blacking 1974; Levitin 2008), with a communicative or expressive ability, then it would seem reasonable to suppose that as a subject in education it deserves to be taken seriously. Despite this, Aróstegui (2016) warns that music education is globally in decline as fewer students are choosing to study music when they are given a choice. Lamont and Maton (2010) suggest that pupils choose not to study music because they view it as an elite option, accessible only to those who have a talent for music. This perspective is perhaps being perpetuated by the way music is framed in mainstream education (Daubney, Spruce, and Annetts 2019). There are claims that schools generally tend to focus on performance and do not give children enough opportunities to make up their own music (Green 2017; Kaschub 2024; Wright 2010). This is supported by Paynter (2000, 25), who argues that children have an 'underlying universal sensitivity to music' and that composing and performing should be 'the true basis of music education'. In addition, Csikszentmihalyi (2002) states that subsequently in music education 'too much emphasis is placed on how they (children) perform, and too little on what they *experience*' (Csikszentmihalyi 2002, 112).

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This study sought to investigate such experiences by examining children's (aged 7–10) music-making in a nature reserve, focusing on their own perceptions of their *experience*. This is a departure from the *status quo* in mainstream education and, to a degree, educational research, as espistemologically-grounded concerns over the evaluation and assessment of pupils' acquisitions of knowledge, and the development and performance of skills are increasingly prioritised (Wright 2010) over the ontological dimensions of curriculum and pedagogy, such as the aesthetic and autotelic (Csikszentmihalyi 2002; Eisner 2003, 2004) dimensions of teaching and learning.

Despite a range of research that has explored how arts based interventions impact on children's wellbeing and 'nature connectedness' (Moula, Palmer, and Walshe 2022), there have been relatively few investigations into the experiences of children when music-making in natural environments. Arbuthnott and Sutter (2019) explored whether 'songwriting retreats' would increase 'nature-connectedness'. Quantitative surveys were undertaken by a group of 14–15 year olds after they had worked with songwriting, adult mentors and co-created songs in natural environments. The results of the surveys suggest that the teenagers' nature connection and 'negative moods' had improved after their songwriting experiences in natural environments (Arbuthnott and Sutter 2019). Adams and Beauchamp (2021) investigated primary teachers' perspectives of how natural environments impacted on children's music-making and how children's music-making in natural environments allows for optimal experiences or what might be called, 'spiritual moments' (Adams and Beauchamp 2019). However, there is a lack of research concerned with how primary children's music-making in natural environments affects their experiences and understandings of the more-than-human world.

Why are new perspectives needed?

There is an increasing chorus of voices calling for a radical shift towards educational practices that can confront the planetary catastophes resulting from western-centric understandings of, and actions towards, the natural world (Bonnett 2020; Morse et al. 2021; Quay 2021). The contention is that there is a dire need to rethink our relationships with the 'more-than-human' world (Abram 1997), and that such reconsiderations require conceptualisations of, and approaches to, education that are fundamentally distinct from the pedagogies and hierarchies propagated in mainstream schooling (Beauchamp, Adams, and Smith 2022). These perspectives, or 'wild pedagogies' (Morse, Jickling, and Quay 2018), involve speaking *with* and listening *to* the more-than-human world, rather than perceiving nature as a resource (Blenkinsop and Piersol 2013) for exploitation that is separate from and inferior to humans. It is proposed that such pedagogical shifts can enable new orientations toward, and forms of, heightened attentiveness. This attentiveness is essential for humans to experience the more-than-human world as something deeply entwined with human beings and becomings (Barad 2007; Quennerstedt and Quennerstedt 2013). Indeed, such experiences may, in turn, enhance our perceptions of reality and what it means to engage in our ontological vocation of becoming more fully human (Freire 2005; Morse et al. 2021). It is argued that children who develop a strong sense of connection with the natural world are more likely to be motivated to protect it as they grow older (Mackay and Schmitt 2019). Therefore, experiences of interrelationship hold immediate, existential significance, particularly in addressing the nature and climate crises we face today.

Literature review

Children naturally express 'musical utterances' from a young age, be it on the playground, at home, or playing in the park, meaning they can express themselves through music-making if they are given the freedom and encouragement to be creative with sound (Campbell 2010, 98). Historically, Coleman (1939) argued that every child has a 'need of music' (3) so their creative musical expression may give voice to what cannot be expressed through words alone. Eisner (2005) also criticised the

prioritisation of rational, logical of knowing in westernised, mainstream schooling over what he called, 'aesthetic modes of knowing' (97). Echoing Langer (1978), Eisner emphasised the way artistic or aesthetic ways of knowing both draw from and contribute to 'the life of feeling' so that we may make sense of ourselves and the world beyond the understandings of logical, rational ways of knowing. Dewey similarly explained the arts allow us to be 'carried out beyond ourselves to find ourselves' (Dewey 2005, 202). He argued artistic practice 'is an intrinsic quality of activity' (Dewey 2005, 223). As such, the significance of music-making is that it has the power to introduce us 'into a world beyond this world which is nevertheless the *deeper reality* of the world in which we live in our ordinary experiences' (Dewey 2005, 202).

Artistic experience

Dewey (2005) offers a concept of artistic, or aesthetic, experience that provides an elegant and robust theoretical framework that extends beyond traditional notions of art and beauty. These perspectives deeply resonate with investigations of children's music-making in natural environments because, according to Dewey, the value of an artistic, or aesthetic, experience is in the dynamic nature of the experience itself and not through the objects produced from that experience. Dewey (2005) describes an aesthetic experience as evolving through our doings and undergoings that facilitate an integration of our senses, emotions and intellect (including imagination) into a cohesive, meaningful whole that fundamentally alters our perception of, and engagement with, the world.

This transformation of perception occurs through active participation and reflection 'where reality and being are 'reconstructed' and 'consciousness becomes fresh and alive' (Dewey 2005, 56). Perception in aesthetic experience is described as a dynamic interaction that harmonises sensory, emotional, and intellectual elements. Through imagination, our perception can extend beyond the immediate to engage with the world in a deeper, more integrated and holistic understanding of being and becoming human (Dewey 2005; Fesmire 2019). The fresh and lively characteristics of our consciousness in an aesthetic experience is a result of a 'complete interpenetration of self and the world of objects and events' (Dewey 2005, 18) that is neither solely an intellectual reckoning nor a purely emotional efflorescence of feelings. Rather, it is a 'heightened vitality' (Dewey 2005) that integrates intellectual, bodily and affective knowing 'together into a single whole' (Dewey 2005, 57).

As an aesthetic experience is dependent upon the qualities of that experience and not the object produced, Dewey argued that these kinds of experiences are available to everyone – not just artists or those trained in the arts. The transformation of perception involved in an aesthetic experience is predicated upon imagination, as it enables 'varied materials of sense quality, emotion, and meaning' to be synthesised into a 'union that marks a 'new birth in the world' (Dewey 2005, 279). Ultimately, Dewey (2005) argues that art isn't nature – it is nature *transformed* through our ability to renew the 'old and familiar' (278) by imagination and through experience.

Art, as a heightened form of communication and human expression, is a fundamental component of human life, and by extension, education – since Dewey's understanding of education encompasses the full spectrum of human experience. For Dewey, education is an active, continual process of growth and renewal wrought through an individual's engagement, or perhaps more accurately, integration, with their environment (Dewey 1916), and it is through this dynamic, transactional relationship that education transcends the boundaries of the classroom and becomes integral to the everyday goings-on of life itself (Dewey 1938). Therefore, by integrating cognitive, emotional, and sensory elements, aesthetic experiences are deeply educative experiences that help cultivate an individual's orientation to self-and-world that is both personally fulfilling and socially meaningful (Dewey 2005; Fesmire 2019).

These understandings are fundamental to Dewey's understanding of nature and aesthetic experience, as he felt both phenomena could generate 'a refreshed attitude toward the circumstances and

exigencies of ordinary experience' (Dewey 2005, 145). In other words, imagination – enacted through the 'doing' and 'undergoing' of experience, transforms our multi-sensory perception of self-and-world, a process through which familiar things are made anew and forms of human communication and interaction are enlivened and enhanced. As such, in Dewey's philosophy, aesthetic experience is a central component of education (i.e. life) as it involves the unification of emotional, intellectual (including imagination), bodily and relational knowings that disrupt and transform ordinary perspectives developed through unthinking habit and routine into new opportunities and avenues for growth.

An aesthetic, educative experience therefore entails unified emotional, intellectual, bodily, and imaginative knowings that have the potential to disrupt ordinary perspectives and provide new or/and renewed understandings that are normally hidden by the dominant culture in schools (Dewey 2005).

Re-wilding education

Jickling et al. (2018a) similarly call for exploring ways of knowing that contrast with those demanded by the dominant discourse of mainstream schooling and argue alternative understandings and experiences of the more-than-human world are needed as current models demanded by consumerist societies are causing unsustainable human-earth relationships and climate catastrophes. They propose a 're-wilding of education' through 'wild pedagogies' whereby educational institutions not only recognise the agency of the more-than-human world, but engage with this agency and are willing to learn from nature as a co-teacher (Jickling et al. 2018a). Fundamentally, they contend that 'changing relationships with Earth and its other beings will require learning through active engagement *with* the natural world' (Jickling et al. 2018a, 3). This is possible, they argue, because words and their conceptual underpinnings are fluid rather than static, as their meanings vary depending on how and when they are used. As such, 'part of the wild pedagogies project is to re-negotiate how we think about wilderness' (Jickling, Blenkinsop, and Morse 2018b, 25). Rather than perceiving wilderness as 'a place of wild beasts', instead, it can be experienced as 'a *self-willed land*' (Jickling, Blenkinsop, and Morse 2018b, 26). Such an approach shares sensibilities with Freire's contention that the ability to name the world is a distinctly human activity that reflects our capacity for critical consciousness (conscientização).

> To exist, humanly, is to name the world, to change it. Once named, the world in its turn reappears to the namers as a problem and requires of them a new naming. Human beings are not built in silence but in word, in work, in action-reflection. (Freire 2005, 88)

Therefore, to name the world is to engage in the act of becoming fully human – it is an act of self-expression, agency, and liberation. The capacity to 'name the world' is developed through dialogue, and as music can be understood as language or a way of making meaning, and in consideration of the aims of this research, children's music-making in nature becomes a dialogue with each other and the more-than-human world. These encounters can lead to greater subjective understandings of how to overcome the 'limiting situations' (Freire 2005, 49) produced through objective, contradictory narrations of the relationship between humans and the natural world.

Through this theoretical framing, wild places become places where the will or agency of the more-than-human world is recognised (Jickling, Blenkinsop, and Morse 2018b) and the 'freedom to flourish' (Jickling, Blenkinsop, and Morse 2018b, 27) becomes a shared quality between all Earthly beings. Therefore, perceiving wildness as 'self-will' allows for a significant pedagogical imperative so that we recognise 'the will within ourselves, each other, our communities (inclusive of the more-than-human) and the places we inhabit' (Morse, Jickling, and Quay 2018, 245). For teachers, this involves enabling children to 'attend to the wildness of places in a much deeper way than merely their own physical comfort' (Morse, Jickling, and Quay 2018, 246) or how happy they may feel. Instead, children should be afforded opportunities to experience and appreciate the self-willed

agency and wonder of other-than-human beings, and in doing so experience their shared life force and sense of interrelationship with the more-than-human world.

Metaphysical imagination

Such perspectives resonate with those who argue artistic ways of knowing can reveal alternatives to the dominant discourse and an enhanced understanding of the more-than-human world, as they allow us to think and *feel* through the Anthropocene (Davis and Turpin 2015). Davis and Turpin (2015) argue that the Anthropocene is an aesthetic event as human severance from the natural world diminishes and toxifies our sensory experiences, yet also anaesthetizes us against an awareness of this diminishment. They suggest artistic engagement in natural environments can ameliorate this predicament by becoming 'the vehicle of *aesthesis*' (Davis and Turpin 2015, 3). Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdottir (2015) similarly claim we need artistic approaches in education as 'an antidote to technocratic alienation' as they enable us 'to sense our relations to the other' (114). Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdottir (2015) assert 'art can open our senses to a reality of nature that we commonly oversee' (112). They use Hepburn's (1996) term 'the metaphysical imagination' to evoke the way the more-than-human world can allow one to experience an expanded perspective (Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdottir 2015). The metaphysical imagination describes the way engagement with the more-than-human creates an aesthetic experience that points towards 'some bigger force that we lack the words or concepts to describe' (Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdottir 2015, 110). Hepburn (1996) explains that the metaphysical imagination affords an experience of 'nature as it really is' (192). It is an experience that normally may be 'concealed from us' (Hepburn 1996, 191) in familiar natural environments. Hepburn (1996) describes how the mystery and beauty of the natural world can, however, suddenly arouse the metaphysical imagination so one experiences a sense of 'oneness with nature' (198) that speaks of a 'transcendent Source' (191). At these times there is a feeling of 'infinity' that denies technology's threat to 'dominate nature' (Hepburn 1996, 193). Hepburn (1996) differentiates these powerful aesthetic engagements from aesthetic reactions produced by a landscape painting for example, because such artworks do not reveal 'actual nature' (193). However,Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdottir (2015) contend that powerful aesthetic experiences can be cultivated in educational, artistic contexts outdoors that sensorially engage us with both the wonder of, and our interrelationship with, the more-than-human world. They argue artistic engagement that involves embodied experiences in natural environments 'deepens our sense of our connectedness with the non-human world' (Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdottir 2015, 116). As such, artistic experiences can 'mediate an understanding of the human being and its relationship to its environment in ways that the sciences and the humanities have not yet been able to do effectively enough' (Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdottir 2015, 114). Here we can draw links with Dewey's (2005) 'aesthetic experience' as discussed above. Through artistic knowings children can experience 'the *deeper reality* of the world' (Dewey 2005, 202) in which they live. Such aesthetic engagement can provide meaningful interactions, harmonising sensory, emotional, and intellectual elements so that 'consciousness becomes fresh and alive' (Dewey 2005, 56). Thus, music-making in natural environments could potentially express beyond rational, logical epistemics and 'allow us to sense our relations to the other' (Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdottir 2015, 114), revealing our inherent interrelationships and, therefore, challenging our perceived separations from the more-than-human world (Davis and Turpin 2015). These are existential realisations both in terms of realising the existential threat of the Anthropocene and in realising the existential truths the dominant culture's reality normally manages to conceal.

These perspectives about artistic ways of knowing (Davis and Turpin 2015; Dewey 2005; Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdottir 2015) reverberate strongly with the philosophy and purpose of wild pedagogies as they have the potential to allow the experiencer to reimagine and enact 'alternative relationships' with the more-than-human world (Jickling et al. 2018a, 2). Blenkinsop, Morse, and Jickling (2022) argue the status quo in education in industrialised societies prioritises ways of knowing

that result in ways of being that cause a toxic relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. They contend that 'a desire for control often plays out in our educational institutions in ways that make things measurable, routine, universal, and that work to delineate ways of being' (Blenkinsop, Morse, and Jickling 2022, 38). Instead educators should be alert to the learning opportunities arising from 'being present to the more-than-human world' (Blenkinsop, Morse, and Jickling 2022, 39) in order to enact 'different ways of being in the world' through 'active engagement *with* the natural world' (Jickling et al. 2018a, 2). Blenkinsop, Morse, and Jickling (2022) therefore call for more 'relational engagements' (39) with and within the natural world. They hope that wild pedagogies can provide possibilities for teachers and children to become better 'allies of, for, with, and in the more-than-human world' (Blenkinsop, Morse, and Jickling 2022, 49). But it is argued to do so, teachers and children must be able to recognise and learn from the self-willed agency of non-human others and experience their relational kinship with the more-than-human (Blenkinsop, Morse, and Jickling 2022; Jickling et al. 2018a, 2018b).

Methods

Participants

Schools were chosen in a purposive sample due to their close proximity to the nature reserve. However, the aim was not to prove or disprove any general laws or patterns. In empirical terms, the research was only aiming to represent the children involved in the research, whose view 'have integrity in their own right' (Thomas 2017, 134). Three schools were selected for the research as shown in Table 1.

Ethics

Ethical approval was sought from the university ethics committee (CSESP20212236) before beginning research, but was also 'more than the linear application of specific rules' (Punch and Oancea 2014, 75), and ethical decisions are continually made throughout the research process (Groundwater-Smith, Bottrell, and Dockett 2014). This meant adopting a reflexive research process that involved 'a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation' (Guillemin and Gillam 2004, 275). Individual informed consent was gained from the children using age-appropriate forms, as well as their parents and the school.

Procedure

The research aimed to provide children (aged 7–10) with opportunities for making music in outdoor natural locations and ask the children what they were doing with their music-making? All the children ($n = 146$) that took part were given the same task, to make music in the local woodland using the same resources (drums, didgeridoos, wooden flutes, vocal sounds, body percussion and movement). It was important that the instruments were relatively easy to play, so there was no prior musical experience or practice required for the children to be able to make sounds using the instruments. This allowed the group music-making to be an inclusive activity. There were also no expectations put on the children concerning the aesthetic quality of their music-making. The aim was to

Table 1. Details of sample and settings.

	School 1 (S1R1)	School 2 (S2R1)	School 3 (S3R1)
Sample size	57	60	30
Number of pupils interviewed	12	12	8
Age (years)	8–9 years old	7–8 years old	8–9 years old
Location	Woodland at SSI site	Woodland at SSI site	Woodland at SSI site.

ensure that the children felt confident about making their own music and did not feel that they needed any prior musical experience or to have any recognised musical ability. In order to avoid the possible constraints imposed by the activities being led by the class teacher, and hence imposing subconscious compliance with expected school norms of behaviour and music-making in the curriculum, one of the researchers (an experienced music facilitator with children at this age) set the task, but did not interfere once the children began composing their music.

The research timetable in each school followed the following procedure:

> Day 1 – The children created and performed music in groups in the outdoor natural locations. Teachers accompanied but did not take part instead observed.
>
> Day 2 – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a random sample of the children in order to gain data about their experiences. Teachers were also interviewed about their perspectives, but their views are not reported here.

Data collection and analysis

Following the music-making, semi-structured interviews generated qualitative data with the aim of getting a view on 'the child's world and meanings to get the child's perspective from the inside out' (Greig, Taylor, and MacKay 2007, 54). This involved a 'bottom-up', rather than a 'top-down', procedure, as instead of having a theory to deduce, the interviews generated data in order to examine 'potential patterns amongst the data produced' (Greig, Taylor, and MacKay 2007, 50). This was, therefore, a grounded approach that began by collecting and analysing the data (Charmaz 2017), with no preconceived themes or codes (Morse et al. 2009).

A random sample of children (total $n = 32$ – see Table 1) were chosen from each school and interviewed in groups of four about their experiences of their music-making. The aim was not to discover an objective reality, 'but an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question' (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, 2).

Thematic analysis

For this study we felt it was important that the analysis maintained an open-mindedness, or 'inductiveness', that was grounded in the data in order to allow for the research to closely align with the children's perspectives. However, we recognise that our analysis was not 'pure induction', but rather inductive 'in the sense of analysis 'grounded in' the data' as we could not enter 'a theoretical vacuum' when undertaking the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2021, 331).

The research was situated within a qualitative paradigm and as such the coding of the data was 'open and organic, with no use of any coding framework' (Braun and Clarke 2021, 334). Coding is not a straightforward linear process. It could be described as messy, or complex, with the added complexity that it involves 'judgement calls', and this subjectivity involves 'our personalities, our predispositions, our quirks' (Sipe and Ghiso 2004, 482–483). Others also highlight how coding can involve 'fuzzy boundaries' (Tesch 2013, 135), or 'fuzzy sets' (Bazeley 2013, 351), because its interpretive nature means that categories sometimes overlap, and alternative coding could produce alternative boundaries. The result is that:

> Coding requires that you wear your researcher's analytic lens. But how you perceive and interpret what is happening in the data depends on what type of filter covers that lens and from which angle you view the phenomenon. (Saldana 2015, 7)

In other words, coding was an interpretive, iterative process that went between coding the data, and included reading potentially corresponding literature and potentially re-coding the data as a result of subsequent reading of the literature.

Findings and discussion

A thematic analysis of the data gained from the children's responses to the interviews generated a number of common themes. All the children interviewed stated that their music-making outdoors in the natural environment had afforded them enhanced experiences of their music making, the natural world, and themselves. Drawing from literature discussed above in the literature review, we analyse how the children's experiences relate to 'aesthetic knowings'. Analysis of the data showed that there were three repeating themes involved in the children's aesthetic knowings:

- becoming one with the more-than-human;
- experiencing the natural world as having self-willed agency; and
- the metaphysical imagination.

In addition, the children consistently reported the view that these experiences had enhanced their music making. Each theme is discussed below. However, it is important to state that these themes were not expressed as being separate by the children. Instead, the analysis of their responses during the interviews shows they were interrelated. We analyse how the themes can be understood as all being part of the aesthetic experiences of the children.

Becoming one with the more-than-human

Analysis of the data from the interviews showed that the children felt their music making had made them not only feel more aware of the natural world, but also part of the natural, or 'more-than-human' (Abram 1997) world. For example, School 3 (S3), Group 1 (G1), Pupil 4 (P4) said, 'When I was doing the music … I felt like I was becoming part of the forest'. Similarly, S1 G2 P4 said: 'I felt like I was part of the woods'. These ideas were also echoed by S2 G2 P4: 'It made me feel I was part of it. Part of the music, part of the trees, part of everything … the forest and the river'. These responses support Johannesdóttir & Thorgeirsdóttir's (2015) claim that artistic engagement in natural environments can deepen 'our sense of our connectedness with the non-human world' (116). Similarly, they resonate with Dewey's (2005) concept of aesthetic knowings where there is an experience of unity with one's environment and this 'whole is then felt as an expansion of ourselves' (203). Just as Dewey described an aesthetic experience as being a 'delightful perception' (2005, 19), the children also consistently described the sense of becoming part of the more-than-human world in positive terms. As S2 G1 P2 explained: 'It felt really nice and free because … I was a seagull flying in the sky'.

The children consistently reported that their music making had enabled them to feel part of the natural world and/or that they had imagined being a specific part of the woodland, and these experiences had in turn helped their music making. For example, S3 G1 P3 said: 'You feel like you're the animal and you're … doing what the animal's doing … it helps you link into your music as well because then you can think more about what the animal does'. Similarly, S2 G1 P2 said: 'it was really fun … And it made the music much better'. This is exemplified also in this response from one of the children who described how their music making had involved them imagining they were a tree. S1 G3 P2:

> They can, like, grow anywhere. And then that gives them the opportunity to, to like, like, be different and to, like, grow differently, and, and like, make different sounds … And they are actually playing with you. So it's better because I think they give you more confidence and show you, really shows you, your music can go anywhere.

Experiencing the natural world as having self-willed agency

Analysis of the children's responses showed that the children felt their music-making outdoors in the woodland had also involved them experiencing the agency of the more-than-human world in ways

that they would not normally experience. For example, S3 G1 P2 said: 'you think what they're (the animals in the woods) gonna do next. And you just don't do that normally'. Similarly, S3 G1 P3 said: 'It gives you an idea of how it acts, how it lives, how it does its life, and it can … it helps you because then you can take it in and make your music like the animal'.

The children consistently reported that experiencing the agency of the natural world helped with their creativity as it expanded their imaginations. This often involved feeling that the animals or the trees were communicating with them and that this enhanced their music making. This was explained by S1 G2 P3 who said: 'It sounds like the birds are talking to you. It's like you feel the birds are talking to you and like making up its song along the way … and the birds are like making the rhythm catch together better'. This was echoed by S1 G3 P4 who said: 'It sort of felt like we kept thinking of more ideas after we played our music and the trees were telling us that (what to play)'. Similarly, S2 G2 P3 said: 'Because when you just stop with with the music, it isn't like there's no sound … the birds and the trees actually come in'.

Again, the children's responses also resonate with Dewey's descriptions of aesthetic experiences as the children's reality appears to have been reconstructed by their music making so they are able to enter 'into new relationships' (2005, 56) with the more-than-human world. As a result of their music making, the children were able to experience the natural environment as being 'a *self-willed land*' (Jickling, Blenkinsop, and Morse 2018b, 26). The children's responses chime with the conceptualisations of 'wild pedagogies' as they entailed 'rethinking' their 'relationships' with and 'within the world' (Morse, Jickling, and Quay 2018, 242). In addition, analysis of the children's responses showed they felt they were learning from the more-than-human world during their music making. In other words, the more-than-human had been perceived as a co-teacher and there was a 'de-centring' of the 'taken-for-granted human voice' and a 're-centring' of more-than-human voices (Jickling et al. 2018a, 81). As S1 G3 P3 explained, 'You listen to the wind, shhh, swaying and all the wind … and you … helps you make more music'. This is echoed also by S3 G1 P3 who said:

> When you're in this lovely environment, it kind of gives you a sense of how the animals feel. And you can take that in you and use it to make music like the animal, make yourself feel like you have parts of the animal.

The metaphysical imagination

The children consistently reported that their music making had combined with their imaginations and that this had enabled them to perceive the natural world in a new way. In other words, their music making was a way of knowing that allowed for an augmented experience of the more-than-human world. For example, S2 G3 P3 said, 'It made me feel like the forest is growing even bigger when we're doing the music, and like more birds are coming and stuff'. S1 G1 P2 similarly said, 'Like the music … just took me to another world, like being in the land of nature'. There was a general consensus in the data that the children's music making had combined with their imaginations and caused them to experience the more-than-human world in new ways, and that these experiences were wholly positive. However, some of the children from each school said that trying to put these experiences into words was difficult. For example, S3 G2 P4 said it was difficult to describe how they were feeling, but:

> I felt like really like my imagination was getting bigger and I just like started going into my own world. And all the wind was like blowing across the branches and it was a sunny day and all the sun was shining on the leaves.

During this particular description the pupil used accompanying gentle, swaying movements using her arms as if to show that words were not able to sufficiently describe the experience. Despite this, the children also consistently emphasised that the experience caused them to feel peaceful, calm or happy. These ideas expressed by the children relate to Johannesdóttir & Thorgeirsdóttir's (2015) conceptualisation of how artistic engagements in natural environments can lead to an

experience of the metaphysical imagination. Just as the children explained, this is an expanded perspective that reveals 'some bigger force that we lack the words or concepts to describe' (Jóhannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdottir 2015, 110) yet allows for a sense of 'oneness with nature' (Hepburn 1996, 198). There was also a general consensus that the children's music making had enabled them to experience the woodland in a way that would be less accessible if they were just walking through it. The children explained that their music making had granted them a way of knowing the more-than-human that contrasted with their normal everyday experiences. For example, S3 G2 P2 explained:

> It was different to normal like … most people don't really think about it. Like, they … like think, like it's just part of this world. It *is* part of this world. But I think it's like (when we were playing music) … everywhere you look, there's a tree, there's like loads … there's actually more in this world than people know. So I think that it's really nice to just *think* about it.

These ideas were echoed by S3 G2 P3 who said: 'It made me feel peaceful when I did it and just made me feel like, kind of like out of this world because it wasn't just in *this* world it was in a *different* world'. The children's responses resonate with Hepburn's contention that the metaphysical imagination can provide an authentic experience of the natural world that is normally 'concealed from us' (1996, 191) in familiar natural environments.

Conclusion

Analysis of the data from the children's interviews showed that the children felt their music making in the natural environments had contrasted with their 'normal' anthropocentric classroom and outdoor experiences. From their responses to the interviews, it seems the children perceived their music making as a way of knowing that afforded them an expanded experience of their more-than-human environment. The children's descriptions of their experiences resonate with Dewey's (2005) concept of an aesthetic experience and the conceptualisation of the metaphysical imagination as outlined by Hepburn (1996) and Johannesdóttir & Thorgeirsdóttir (2015) as their music making enabled them to experience a '*deeper reality* of the world' (Dewey 2005, 202). In particular, the experiences involved the children perceiving the natural world as having self-willed agency. In other words, during their music making the children experienced the natural world as being beyond their control and also experienced the natural world as a teacher. These perspectives relate to the concept of wild pedagogies (Jickling et al. 2018) as they encompassed the children experiencing an improved understanding and sense of relationship with the more-than-human world. These findings are of significance as they demonstrate how children can experience music making in natural environments as a way of knowing 'where reality and being are reconstructed' (Dewey 2005, 56) revealing 'a reality of nature that we commonly oversee' (Johannesdóttir and Thorgeirsdóttir 2015, 112). Such insights could be of importance when considering what pedagogical approaches allow for relational engagements with the natural world so that we may remedy harmful human-nature relationships, caused by the dominant westernised culture, and become better 'allies of, for, with, and in the more-than-human world' (Blenkinsop, Morse, and Jickling 2022, 49). In addition, the children's experiences were reported as having a positive impact on their creativity as they enhanced their sense of imagination, and this gave them more ideas for their music making. The findings demonstrate that when children make music in natural environments they can access aesthetic modes of knowing, that can lead to augmented experiences of reality, and these experiences of reality also help with their music making. Therefore, analysis of the data from this study shows the benefits of children making up their own music and the benefits of prioritising and examining what they experience when music making. Future research could explore whether such experiences have longitudinal impact by investigating children's abilities to use and access music as a way of knowing, and subsequent perspectives of the natural world, over a longer period of time.

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