ARTICLE

They Drop Beats, Not Bombs: Music and Dance in Youth Peace-Building

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Introduction

This article focuses on how young people can use music and dance for peace-building. It utilises the framework of positive peace so it is concerned with much more than the absence of war or direct violence.[1] Positive peace is a peace with justice, including gender justice. It involves an assurance of fair 'social, economic and political arrangements'[2] and the preservation of human rights.[3] Peace-building from this perspective seeks 'to prevent, reduce, transform, and help people recover from violence in all forms, even structural violence that has not yet led to massive civil unrest'.[4] As Elisabeth Porter suggests, it requires a broad process of

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[1] David Barash (ed), *Approaches to Peace: A Reader in Peace Studies* (2000) 129.

[2] Mahatma Gandhi cited in Stuart Rees, *Passion for Peace: Exercising Power Creatively* (2003) 20.

[3] The 14th Dalai Lama, Nobel Lecture (Oslo, 11 December 1989).

[4] Alliance for Peacebuilding, 'What Is Peacebuilding?' at < www.allianceforpeacebuilding.org>.

creating a societal environment to promote 'peace through development and aid, human rights education, and the restoration of community life'.[5]

To accomplish such goals 'it is necessary to understand the culture in which people are embedded'; positive peace can be 'conceptualized as working in a bottom-up rather than a top-down fashion … to ultimately change general cultural norms about dealing with violence'.[6] While UN peace-building is generally focused on formal processes such as implementing peace agreements and staging high-level interventions, the organisation has recognised that these are not all that will be required for achieving sustainable positive peace. This is evidenced by the UN General Assembly's goal of creating a culture of peace, as per their 1998 adoption of Resolution 52/13.

The focus of this study is on the role young people might play in advancing positive peace. To date, little attention has been paid in the literature to peace-building and youth,[7] although involving youth in peace-building reflects key UN goals, including prioritising young people in peace processes and viewing them as budding citizens and subjects of rights instead of as victims and causes of concern.[8] Yet, by defining peace-building in formal terms, the UN neglects a range of important peace-building activities, including those most likely to be undertaken by youth,[9] who cannot always access formal modes of participation. In this context it is interesting to consider how an activity widely undertaken by young people — music and dance — might also be engaged with peace-building.

But why music, and why now? Over the last few decades, there has been a significant growth and globalisation of the music industry. Consequently, there is now a wider variety of music accessible to more people than at any time in the history

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[5] 'Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building' (2003) 15(3) *Global Change, Peace and Security* 245, 255–6.

[6] Jennifer Dé Bryant and Charles Stoner, 'Special Needs, Special Measures: Working with Homeless and Poor Youth' in Linda Rennie Forcey and Ian Murray Harris (eds), *Peacebuilding for Adolescents: Strategies for Educators and Community Leaders* (1999) 268.

[7] Tristan Anne Borer et al, 'Caught between Child Rights and Security: Youth and Postwar Reconstruction' in Tristan Anne Borer et al (eds), *Peacebuilding after Peace Accords: The Challenges of Violence, Truth and Youth* (2006) 48.

[8] Kumar cited in Siobhan McEvoy-Levy, 'Youth as Social and Political Agents: Issues in Post-Settlement Peace Building' in *Kroc Institute Occasional Paper Number 21* (2001) 27–8.

[9] Porter, above n 5, 256.

of the world.[10] However, despite scholars suggesting that music occupies 'a central place in the adolescent social system',[11] there has been little investigation in the academic literature of the particular impact of this trend on young people, who are major consumers of music.

There has also been limited analysis of the relationship between youth, music and politics. Some authors have discussed the role of music in new social movements,[12] but there has been almost no research investigating the ways that disenfranchised groups, including young people, might use music to challenge or confirm existing arrangements of power. According to Michel Foucault, modern power is deployed by a number of means including via the production of 'normal' social identities, such as male and female; it will also be deployed via discourses about culture and political community. This includes the ways 'we make connections, the network of meanings and values, and of friendship and interests, that hold us together … the ways we tell each other our stories, how we create our sense of ourselves, how we remember who we are, how we imagine what we want to become'.[13] However, music also has a non-discursive capacity: to engage human emotion, including mass emotion. It can 'rouse people and inspire action', but it can also be used 'to call men and women to war'.[14]

In this paper I am interested to explore whether and how youth participation in musical activities might contribute to the advancement of positive peace. What follows is a report on a research project conducted with one youth peace-building group in a major Australian metropolitan area that uses music and dance as a central part of its program. This includes hip-hop workshops in break dance, crump dance, singing and rapping/MC-ing. My project involved participant observation of the program, which included participating in group games and activities, observing skills sessions and crew meetings, assisting with cleaning, food preparation, and other necessary tasks, and interacting regularly with participants and leaders. It also

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[10] Anthony Storr, *Music and the Mind* (1992) 110.

[11] Cited in Peter G Christenson and Donald F Roberts, *It's Not Only Rock and Roll: Popular Music in the Lives of Adolescents* (1998) 56.

[12] Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the 20th Century* (1998).

[13] Arts Queensland, *The Art of Renewal: A Guide to Thinking Culturally about Strengthening Communities* (2006).

[14] Derk Richardson cited in Nancy Love, '"Singing for Our Lives": Women's Music and Democratic Politics' (2002) 17(4) *Hypatia* 71, 84.

encompassed semi-structured interviews with 10 participants and three arts workers involved in the program. The participants ranged in age from 13 to 21 years.

They came from diverse cultural backgrounds, including immigrants from Samoan, Maori, Tongan, Sudanese, Liberian, Fijian and Slovenian backgrounds, as well as young people whose families have lived in Australia for several generations. Participants came from an assortment of socio-economic backgrounds, with parental occupations ranging from factory worker to island resort owner. Both young men and women attended, although a male majority was present throughout the program. The workers were also mostly very young, ranging in age from 18 to 25, and many were former participants in the program.

Several key themes emerged from the participant observations and interviews conducted for this research. Of particular importance were three themes associated with dialogue, identity and space. These are addressed in the next three sections.

Alternative Modes of Engaging in Dialogue

When questioned about what makes music and dance useful tools for peace-building, many of the young people interviewed for this research identified the importance of music and dance in providing alternative modes of expression, which can play a vital role in dealing with conflict. Too often our traditional frameworks for expression are clouded by our deeply ingrained, typically antagonistic responses to conflict, which may continue to lead us down the same tired and frustrating paths that have allowed enduring conflict to worsen in the first place. By offering creative alternatives, music and dance may lead to new and effective mechanisms for resolving or transforming conflict in ways that may not have been seen had we relied on traditional modes alone. This is not only important for the youths directly involved in the music-making; it is also particularly useful for conveying their message in a way that encourages the development of a culture of peace by engaging people 'in the outside world', who, through their role as audience members, may see these artistic endeavours and thus become inspired to contemplation or action themselves. At the same time, interviewees noted that participation in these activities helped them practise and improve their skills in traditional dialogic engagement, leaving them well placed to use all the tools in their now better stocked peace-building toolbox.

These prospects are particularly important for young people, as music and dance are an integral part of youth culture. Moreover, while most youths may not have the training or interest required for engaging in more formal, traditional modes of political peace-building, many young people have years of experience in music-making, so employing such resources is useful in acknowledging and building on the skills young people already have that can be applied to their work as peacemakers. Music and dance can contribute to the cause of peace-building by serving a vital role in offering relevant alternative modes of dialogue and communication, which can also supplement and encourage more traditional ways of exchanging ideas with young people participating in the music-making as well as with people of all ages in the wider public that consume the product as audience members.

The key thing here is that young people reported seeing music and dance as creative, different ways to engage in dialogue. This is in contrast to more traditional, limited definitions of dialogue as speech or purely linguistic exchanges. Examining these experiences suggests a need for a broader understanding of what may be understood as ineffable dialogue.

Engaging through these alternative modes also enables these young people to 'explain' themselves with confidence, as this is a mode of dialogue that is not predicated on typical notions of intelligence. There is a de-emphasis on the rationalistic, academic modes of intelligence and a shift to the kind of emotional intelligence that these young people, whatever their formal training or lack thereof, know they possess and can deploy well. While they may often feel they do not have the words to say what they want in order to be understood, they are able to creatively convey their message through these alternative means in a way that is effective and equally, if not more, descriptive. To that end, some reported the following:

> Like through your music you express a story, so … as well through dances you can express it and they pick up the story and understand what you're telling them … if you're telling them your story then they'll understand it.

> [L]ike it's better, better than talking … you feel … more comfortable. Like a lot of people have different talents and stuff and … It's a different way of creating dialogue … [L]ike for me I've had this fear of like public speaking … I sing it, it's much more, easier and you can just embrace the music and just be in that moment and … just express yourself freely.

One particularly relevant aspect of this deployment of unconventional forms of dialogue when looking at prospects for peace-building is that it can serve as an

alternative mode of dispute resolution through offering non-violent means for addressing conflict. This may be especially important for young people like those attending the project, who live in some of the most violent communities in their region. For example, one young woman pointed out how dance and music could provide alternatives to getting into a physical altercation:

> Uh, for dance you can just express your anger in your body and for singing you can express your anger in writing a song or writing a rap.

Some of the young people involved in the crumping program expressed how their participation in this dance style in particular had equipped them with alternative ways of responding to conflict:

> Like, um, when they get in my face, I like crump ... until they like the relationship is of respect, respect you and not fight or something.

> [I]t's been good for me 'cause like ... and for others 'cause ... crumping's like replacing fight, so yeah, that's why I like it 'cause it just replaces the bad stuff.

> I guess the crumping does help [because] I remember once the boys just saying yeah that they used to fight, but now they just solve their problems by crumping ... Battle each other ... But you don't actually have to fight, yeah.

The last comment above, from a crumping instructor, points to the need for considerations of gender that will be discussed in my broader thesis and require serious attention in the field of youth peace-building. It seems that while typical hegemonic norms of masculinity may be 'proven' through skill in battle, young men involved in the crumping project have decided to enter a new battle arena, one where their skills are proved through dance-offs rather than through bloody boxing matches. While in other arenas boys may gain respect through being the best fighter, here they do so by being dancers with amazing command of technical skills, which facilitates building better relationships based on this respect. This is particularly interesting, because rather than respect accorded on the basis of physical strength, it is understood in this case to be attainable through means that may be more inclusive for certain groups of young people, including smaller girls and boys. However, it should be noted that while this may be a prospect, in this case it has not been a reality yet, as no girls took part in the crumping stream of the workshops. Interviews revealed that several were interested in doing so, but did not feel the group was open to them as

young women. This issue clearly must be addressed if such projects are to be truly inclusive and pursue positive peace that includes gender justice.

While acknowledging the importance of music and dance as alternative modes of expression, the crew leader also noted the importance of more traditional modes of dialogue at times, and stated that the leaders had tried to facilitate this. In fact, several young people indicated that participation in the project had actually helped them develop their verbal skills and ability to engage in spoken dialogue. One participant mentioned benefits from the opportunity in the workshops for practising English, which was a second language for many participants, and two arts workers reported learning about 'talking things out' before resorting to violence.

Such comments suggest that through engaging in this project associated with alternative modes of dialogue, participants also actually gained skills at communicating their feelings and ideas through talking. Indeed, when asked 'Do you feel being involved in this project will make it easier for you to be formally involved in peace-building in the future?' all interviewees responded that it would. In response to queries of how this would facilitate their involvement, some pointed directly to the skills they had learned that would enable them to talk to others more easily:

> Yeah it's helped me a lot 'cause I've been able to talk to people and to dance together.

> Yeah, it's helped me, helped me with group work, um, and socially, talking to other people.

> Um, yeah, I would say yes to that because it, it helps me to have more confidence to be able to talk to others and get along with others and understand, ah, how people think so I don't have to be so uncomfortable around other people and same with them around me.

Interestingly, when asked how the workshops may have prepared them for future involvement in peace-building, the only participants who mentioned improved talking abilities were young white males born in Australia. While I cannot extrapolate some major point from this, it does point to the need for further study on young people's understandings of what peace-building is or should be.

Meanwhile, interviewees suggested that music and dance can be used to bring together previously segregated communities. As discussed later, many of the young people came along because they wanted to take part in music and dance workshops, and through doing so they came to interact with and know young people

from groups they had previously seen in a negative light and thus avoided. In this way, hip-hop, which plays a key role in youth culture, can be seen as bringing these young people together, and the workshop activities thus may be understood as opportunities for dialogue based on respect of difference as well as an alternative conception of commonality. Likewise, youth respondents regularly mentioned the special capacity of music and dance for engaging a broader audience than workshop participants alone, partly based on a reported understanding of music and dance as a universal language. Indeed, interviewees expressed that music and dance are modes of communication that can be expressed and understood even across traditional linguistic barriers. Moreover, interviewees mentioned the usefulness of music and dance due to the lack of a fixed set of rules based on linguistics, culture or religion. From these understandings, these young people see music and dance as a mode of cross-cultural discourse that provides the kind of meaningful engagement required to build more peaceful societies.

> I think the dancing and singing is the best way to show to the world what's your message … It's easier to do than if you talk with somebody. If you talk with somebody that doesn't, I don't know, doesn't respect you or something, he won't listen, but if you getting crazy and start dancing and singing he will start listening … It just, it just, music and dance just got something inside it that like bring you there … it's … trying to get your message across … it doesn't matter what religion … No matter what you are, how you do, whatever, you can do dance and singing.

> [M]usic and dance are ways to express yourself without having anyone trying to, you know, 'that's wrong' or 'you can't say that' or 'you can't dance like that'. It's just your own free will to do whatever in everything … Yeah I think there's a lot that music and dance has to offer to engage the, the general people that aren't involved in the … project. Um, I think that, um, everyone has that creative side of them and that they, yeah, everyone can connect with music and dance.

> I find that it's easy because people love music … I mean if you kind of measure that with just running a peace-building workshop without music, I'm not sure if the general public would be actually interested in … like if you're gonna create a 10-page document … from the peace-building workshop … weighing that with our product, like our video clip … more likely to be drawn to the music.

This perceived ability to use music and dance to engage the outside world does not end at the last workshop for the program. When asked whether they would continue to use the skills they had gained at the workshops to make peace, the youths involved offered several responses indicating that they would show the artistic skills they had gained, use their improved speech abilities to talk about what they had learned, promote the growth of the project by inviting others along, and use the knowledge of peace practice they had gained to try to spread peace in a wider context. At the same time, concerns emerge about the inclusiveness of such work for girls and other groups of young people who may not feel welcome in the space. In short, music and dance in this case were seen as a drawcard to effectively engage in a new and creative form of dialogue and as a sustainable way to grow this sort of engagement more broadly. However, enacting these prospects in a sustainable way will require serious critical engagement in the pursuit of positive peace.

Shifting Identities, Becoming Peacemakers

The second key theme identified in the interviews was identity. It appears that participation in music and dance activities offers opportunities for (re)producing and revising identities, both of individuals and groups, and of self and others. Participants in this project reported seeing themselves as more confident, peaceful, open, communicative, engaged, and able to see and seize opportunities. At the same time they told of seeing others in a new light that often contrasted with previously held negative stereotypes based on race, culture and gender. These challenges to previous understandings are important, but further inquiry is needed on how these new understandings are upheld over time. Finally, the youths often expressed a desire to be seen differently, and reported that seeing a difference in the way they were viewed by others had a large impact on their self-identities.

When asked the question 'How, if at all, has being part of [the project] changed the way you see yourself?' nearly all respondents indicated that participation had changed the way they see themselves in some way. While responses were varied, several key sub-themes emerged, with young people reporting they felt more peaceful, confident, aware of their own capabilities and, in one case, healed. In these ways, participation in music and dance challenged these young people's preconceived identities and broadened their understandings to expose them to new identities. Two

youth participants and one arts worker were exceptions, stating that no change had occurred to them, but all the other interviewees indicated awareness that it had.

Interviewees said they could see themselves as more peaceful and less prone to violence since taking part in the project. This is undoubtedly important for peace-building prospects.

> Ah, it's changed a lot … I used to be sort of like, I'm not saying mental, I'm saying mental but more like aggro … But now I'm more like just calmed down a bit.

> Yeah man … 'Cause I just as I say I used to get into a lot of trouble and then I be like chasing that person or … And I always come here and I now not do anything, just be friends with them. Like at school crumping and that.

Respondents also noted an increased self-confidence. This can be important to building peace by encouraging increased participation by youth, particularly those who belong to other marginalised groups. Likewise, some young people reported their work in this project had helped them become aware of their own capabilities. Such a change may aid them in engaging in peace-building work across difference more frequently in the future.

> Like I'm, like I said, I've got more confidence and that, like things are better now, like I'm not so shamed. Like if you'd've talked to me before this … I wouldn't've been talking. Like I'd be too scared.

> Yeah, it did. I guess it just all comes down to self, self-confidence and that … Back then I really had, I didn't really have that much confidence … But now you know just it's kinda … like, you know they don't matter, you know, it's just like kinda like a thing for self-help, make yourself beyond that.

> It's made me aware that I'm able to do more than I thought I could actually to start off with. At first I didn't know half the people here and now I get along with almost everyone here. And when I started here I barely could do a thing, and now I'm doing things I haven't done before.

Finally, healing is also often considered an important aspect of peace-building, and one young woman's explanation of her journey of personal healing through music and dance was particularly touching and inspiring. While she previously lacked self-respect, which led her to self-harm, by participating in dance programs she had gained a sense of worth, seen herself anew, and discontinued these harmful practices:

> I respect myself more … I used to not respect myself … I used to cut myself. 'Cause I wasn't respect myself. I used to, I don't know, close myself in and never talk with nobody, that was probably the problem … But now … I think it was stupid … Now I just respect myself and others. It's true … Umm, umm, every single day when I'm here actually I'm getting new and new and new confidence, every single day.

All of these shifts in self-identity can play an important role in peace-building work by youth. At the same time, when asked, interviewees also reported that interacting with people from different backgrounds had changed their views in a variety of ways. Through their work in music and dance, participants had come to reject previously held stereotypes and xenophobic understandings and transform their own cultural strictures. This rejection of hegemonic attitudes offered prospects for greater moves towards understanding and equality, and a forum was created for engagement with strangers. Two major themes emerged: (1) the new selves they had created were able to create new visions of others and engage with them as such, and (2) these new identities they assigned to others were in contrast to previously held negative stereotypes. The statements below illustrate these points.

> Yeah it changed heaps … 'Cause I've never had like say African friends or like white friends. So it's, for me it's like you gotta keep with your own background. But coming here it's like you can just be whoever you wanna be. Like you can be friends with this person, you can be friends with them. It doesn't matter what other people say.

> Um, well, as I said before, I had stereotypes, that's all gone, and I just look at everyone else just like how I look at myself. So you know just like normal person, no one's higher than, no one's above no one, just chill, lay back, have a chat with them.

> Yeah. Definitely. Like Africans they're just people now, they're normal. I'm not scared of them anymore … They're just other people.

Notably, the three white males I interviewed all reported that their involvement had not changed the way they see others. These boys were all involved in the break-dancing group, which was made up entirely of white youths, so they did not regularly interact with young people from other cultural groups in the same way as participants in the other streams. It is also interesting that girls and young people of colour reported awareness of and critical engagement with their own stereotypes, but the white boys denied any such experience. Again, this is not a broad enough study to extrapolate a grand argument from this, but it does draw attention to the need to look

at understandings across racial and cultural differences when researching youth peace-building.

Additionally, interviewees noted that their self-images were greatly impacted by the views of others. For one thing, many were aware that young people are often viewed negatively by society, and they wished to change this impression. Others provided narratives of how their self-confidence levels were raised through having people believe in them; and from there, youths expressed a sense of pride in changing the ways others viewed them.

Respondents had a sense of teenagers being belittled in society, rejected this as indicative of their character, and sought to counter these views through their actions in this peace-building project. Through this work, they wanted to redefine the stereotypes they felt had been universally applied to their age group by various older people in positions of power seeking to focus on what is 'wrong' with young people and manage these supposedly obvious problems through disciplining them to fit into accepted adult patterns of behaviour. Indeed, these young people saw their modes of engagement in creating peace as relevant, valuable and effective, whether adults see them as mature or not.

> Uh, well, for me it was, for me it was like an opportunity to get out there and show them what I had. And what I wanna become. And show them that it's not just crime that kids do, kids can also be good you know, like sometimes they're just always saying, ah, teenagers are just like, just bad, but there's other sides to us.

> If people can see that teenagers can start off as complete strangers and in the end become good mates I guess it can show that if teenagers can do it why can't adults.

Interviewees also reported gaining inspiration through the confidence of others. One important element in looking at these reports is that leaders in this case are peers rather than adult leaders who assert a hierarchical position of dominance. This work is for youth by youth, which gives these young people a level of ownership of the project. Likewise, they report seeing themselves and other young people as important and thus value each other's opinions, as expressed in the following excerpts:

> Uh, well, it allows people to get along, to be able to help each other and basically show each other what we can do. It does bring people closer

together because they can basically show each other and impress each other on what they can do.

Yeah, like, um, before I perform … there's always someone that I talk to … you know, somebody at [the project] … will be like, 'What do you mean, brother? Go up and kill it!' … Then I'm like, 'Oh yeah.' You know, I just get all amped up and shit like, you know, I'm gonna do it, I'm gonna do it. It's always like I just have this reassurance and it's really reassurance for some reason. And now I'm just kinda trying to give that to myself, you know what I mean … you have self-confidence but also you need someone to amp you up … Like a help-you-up thing.

Likewise, several interviewees also reported a sense of pride in successfully changing the negative images other people held of them:

Yeah, uh, yeah like I guess, I guess, it's both, because they look at me like a different person. Because I guess before I had like a chip on my shoulder type thing, you know … I mean … I was an arsehole back then. But then I was just like changed a lot and I also tell about, you know, tell people about that and I'm like, man, I'm changed … But I've just changed so much when I came here and I think people noticed that a lot. They're like, 'Whoa, you've changed, man! Like coming here done changed your ego.'

Yeah … It, uh, it will help me by showing other people that I have the courage to take care of the group and stuff like that.

Yeah ... taught me not to be so ashamed, like to be more out there now … And like I'm doing that now and everyone's saying like, 'Oh, you're different, you're better now … You're not so hiding, you're not hiding anymore.'

Identity is undoubtedly a key issue in peace-building. What is interesting here is that it seems clear from this study that music can play a major role in advancing identity shifts for young people, both of themselves and of others. This may be related to the centrality of music in youth culture, but in any case these responses suggest the need for further study on this important topic.

Making Space for Building Peace?

Finally, the third key topic identified from the interviews was space. It appears that the physical location where workshops and performances are held became a site for creating a different kind of space, one where imagined prospects for more peaceful

communities could become a dream and a reality. Indeed, providing such a physical location may be the first step towards creating those non-material spaces that are also needed. At the same time, comments from participants themselves confirmed this suggestion. Indeed, interviewees' responses indicated that the physical location where workshops and performances are held became a site for creating a different kind of space, one where imagined prospects for more peaceful communities could become a dream and a reality. Further study is thus needed on an important question in this context: how do you 'make space' in more areas of life, that is, outside this one material space?

At the basic level, workshops involving peace-building through music and dance require a material space where participants can freely engage in these activities. After all, such projects require some physical place that allows room for bodily movement and, more importantly, freedom to produce 'noise' that would not necessarily be allowed in many public spaces. There is also an importance in the material aspect of having a substantive place in which these young people feel they have the room to come together in ways that would not necessarily be seen as possible in the wider community. In this way, the location, through its role in making space to create common ground, is important, not only as a necessity for engaging in art forms that require room to develop, but also for its theoretical ability to become a new sort of space that can be expanded to allow notions of wider inclusivity in surrounding places. It also provides a centre participants can return to and one from which they can reach out to those in the surrounding areas.

Indeed, the young people participating and facilitating express the desire to grow the project as much as possible, including taking it to an international level with more participants and more artistic creation. Through their musical productions, could the young people here be reflecting the sound of the 'hood, but also creating it in a new and positive way? One of the arts workers recalled her time as a participant, expressing how it was important for young people to have this space to just be:

> I was drawn to this space because, um, just as a teenager, you know, you go through firsts and pressure and all that kind of stuff and you just wanna kinda find a space where you can kind of vent out … when I first came to the workshops I felt like, wow, you know, what's this all about? I came to realise that it's, you know, there's just a space where you can just vent out … share your stories, um, do what you want.

Another young arts worker pointed out how the space may also serve as a physical refuge for young people living in violence-ridden communities:

> [The project is] held … where there tends to be … a lot of violence around in that community, so you just, having that safe space within that community for kids to come and hang out and just do whatever, and like yeah, they can, you know, go out into the community and not be afraid.

While the material space is important, it is not more important than what is occurring there. Instead, it is an integral enabling factor. The response one participant provided about whether the program had made him feel empowered lends itself well to the notion that there is a larger importance to the site beyond merely serving as a place to do music and dance. It is a place where something much more is occurring:

> After school all of my friends are going home and I won't going, I'm coming to [the project] and they walking and I saying for [the project] and they, like, 'Why you going there?' They don't really know what happen here, they think I'm just coming to crump at this. But it's not what's happening, you know?

The crew leader explained how her experiences had taught her something similar:

> When I first came to the workshops I thought it was just about music, but … when I kind of mingled with … a lot of the diverse cultures that were there … like building an understanding of why I was there … I came to realise that it was, like, us coming to the space was about coming, coming there, finding a safe space, um, where we can safely meet and just create positive change through music.

Many of the interviewees reported a desire to have a permanent site for the program. This is likely based on their desire for a space for coming together, as public spaces are becoming less accessible to young people,[15] and the creation of this different kind of place means not only can young people come and hang out, but they can also interact with youths from other cultural backgrounds in a way that would pose more difficulties for them at certain other venues. This is important for peace-building, as positive peace is not just about people leaving each other alone, as in negative peace, but rather actually being able to come together and share in one place. In fact, in one arts worker's description of peace, her first key point was that peace is

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[15] Anita Harris, *Future Girl* (2004).

'people coming together and getting along … in one space'. She reported that over time her understanding had expanded to see this potential for building peace as the key purpose of the space and the programs. Several respondents expressed a shared vision in this regard, explaining how the site was a different kind of space for young people to come together, not just physically in the same space, but also to have significant interaction with one another:

> Ah, like, well it's, it's not like other places where you just go and you don't really know anybody there like the kids and everyone. It's like yeah it just has the activities I want.

> Yeah … 'Cause you can't just like talk to people from the same country like, you gotta know someone else here, you know? ... Talk to them, know them, really befriend them. That's how we make friends and peace here.

Part of the importance of this physical space as a place for youths to meet across difference relates to the identity issues I addressed earlier — young people report feeling this place becomes a different kind of space, one where they can become something different themselves:

> coming here it's like you can just be whoever you wanna be. Like you can be friends with this person, you can be friends with them. It doesn't matter what other people say … It's just, we're just a family and that's what matters the most.

With this explanation, the girl expressing it gives a glimpse of the complex inter-relationship between the previously discussed themes of dialogue and identity with the concept of space. While social conformity and related exclusions may be reinforced through typical discourse or dialogue, this space where music and dance are utilised as modes of communication offers room to change. Moreover, having this space where young people are supported and encouraged rather than chastised and judged is important, as creating this kind of safe space may actually make room for the shifts in identity previously discussed. As two young men explained:

> Here it's a lot better 'cause you don't get in trouble, you get to be different.

> It was pretty hard for me … where any school I started I'd just fight … So like it was really hard, it was just the school sees you a different way and it's just kinda you're not welcome here anymore type of thing … So then you have to move.

On the whole, in a variety of ways space emerges as an important concept when looking at these young people's experiences of peace-building through music and dance. It has the material aspect of giving them a safe place to just 'be', it provides opportunities for creation and transformation through serving as a new and unfamiliar locale, and it holds the potential to be expanded materially and conceptually.

Challenges and Limitations of the Program

As previously indicated, many participants reported feeling positive about the program. However, from my observation and interviews, there were also a number of unresolved challenges and limitations. For one thing, some participants noted problems associated with its finite nature. One young woman's response shows an awareness of the space's enabling function in allowing interactions that do not often take place in the outside community and shows her sadness that this space could not be permanently accessed:

> I also learned that you get, like, you become a family here. And it's hard like when it comes to the end 'cause you don't really see them anymore … But yeah.

Moreover, while the space is important for allowing identity shifts, this is not an easy fix for ensuring the space for identity transformation that enables consistently non-violent responses. As the crew leader notes, challenges remain. While the space may give participants room for seeing themselves differently, this is not a quick fix that can resolve all violent conflict in the community, or even for the young people involved in the project. As she noted, a couple of the participants missed the final performance for the workshops series because they had got in a fight in the neighbourhood and been arrested. She recalled that when she asked one of the young men involved what happened, he replied:

> It's so different, um, when you're not at, in your, when you're not at the space. Um, I'm a different person when I'm in this space, but when I leave it's so hard for me to try and contain myself or just, um, be that person that I am in this space.

Realising this, the crew leader noted that the young arts workers directing the project are working to find new ways to address these issues by offering the young people support outside the hours and location of the typical workshops. This

awareness of challenges is a major first step to adapting the program to meet the diverse needs of young people in the community.

Other challenges and limitations are also evident. When asked, all the youth respondents reported that anyone would feel comfortable coming to participate in the space. However, based on participant observation and discussions with the crew members, it is worth noting that more critical engagement may be required for program planners, as those who have continued coming to the workshops may not necessarily be the best placed to explain why some other youths or groups of youths have stopped or never started.

Gender is a particularly relevant aspect for exploration, as noted earlier in this article. Researchers on youth peace-building need to critically engage with programs to ask whether young women are being included and how they are being served. As Shelley Anderson says, researchers need to be asking urgent questions about how peace movements might propose alternatives for girls, empowering them and listening to them in order 'to work together to create a better world for everyone'.[16]

Moreover, based on observing many interactions in which young male participants made derogatory comments and jokes about others being 'gay', I suggest that practitioners planning peace projects also need to take into account the possible need for sensitivity training around issues of sexuality. The crew leader in this case reported that they had done so in a previous project run by the company, because two young women who openly identified as lesbians were participating, and she overheard some other young people there making insensitive comments. This shows that the issue has been considered before and was met with a response. However, taking this reactive approach of only adopting such initiatives when certain leaders observe exclusive behaviours should be rejected in favour of a more proactive approach to attempting to prevent such exclusions from the beginning.

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[16] Shelley Anderson (ed), *Girls Change the World! International Women's Day for Peace and Disarmament, May 24, 2007* (2007) 2.

Conclusion

Despite these challenges, it is clear that this music and dance program made a significant contribution to the peace-building capacities of the young people involved. Respondents noted the possibilities for deploying music and dance as alternative modes of engaging in dialogue and thus resolving conflict. They also discussed how participation in these artistic forums aided in the construction of new identities for themselves and others; and space emerged as an important factor intricately related to identity and dialogue. While the workshops were limited to certain geographic and temporal boundaries, interviewees reported a strong belief that this space could be expanded throughout their communities and to create other places that enable these sorts of changes. Many reported a desire to increase numbers of participation in the workshops where they are currently held or take them out to other locations in the wider community. Such aspirations reflect these young people's convictions about the ability of the workshops to create lasting, widespread change.

Further analysis obviously should be applied to these issues before presenting last findings, but at present the three key themes of dialogue, identity and space light the way towards further fields of consideration. Conducting this preliminary analysis of research data has been useful in framing plans for further study, as it has shone light on some additional areas for exploration and provided a training ground for this type of data collection. For now, though, this research serves the worthwhile role of offering scholarly attention, however brief, to the work young people are doing as active agents of change for building peace, and in my future research I will seek to contribute to greater understanding and engagement in this field.