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Intersecting Autoethnographies: Two Academics Reflect on Being Parent-Researchers

Rosemary G. Bennett 086385
Monash University, rosemary.bennett@monash.edu

Peter De Vries Dr
Central Queensland University

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Abstract

This article presents two intersecting autoethnographies generated by two academics working in the same university, who were both parent-researchers. We researched aspects of our own children's lives, primarily in the home focusing on their engagement with dance and music. As autoethnographers we engaged in shared and individual systematic sociological introspection. In this inquiry we employed observation, copious field notes, video and photographic recording to gather longitudinal data about often unpredictable moments of creative arts engagement that occurred in the home setting. Our research provided a unique window into child directed dance and music behaviours which are rarely seen and which offers insights into the creative education process.

Keywords

Autoethnography, Parent-Researchers, Creative Arts, Young Child, Participant Observation

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Intersecting Autoethnographies: Two Academics Reflect on Being Parent-Researchers

Rosemary Bennett

Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

Peter De Vries

Central Queensland University, North Rockhampton, Australia

This article presents two intersecting autoethnographies generated by two academics working in the same university, who were both parent-researchers. We researched aspects of our own children's lives, primarily in the home focusing on their engagement with dance and music. As autoethnographers we engaged in shared and individual systematic sociological introspection. In this inquiry we employed observation, copious field notes, video and photographic recording to gather longitudinal data about often unpredictable moments of creative arts engagement that occurred in the home setting. Our research provided a unique window into child directed dance and music behaviours which are rarely seen and which offers insights into the creative education process. Keywords: Autoethnography, Parent-Researchers, Creative Arts, Young Child, Participant Observation

In this article we present our intersecting autoethnographies that focus on us, Rosemary and Peter, two academics working in the same university, who were parent-researchers. That is, as researchers we focused our research on our respective children. For Rosemary, this was her daughter Georgie, and for Peter this was his son Jack. By parent-researchers we mean that we researched aspects of our own children's lives, primarily in the home. Therefore we were not only parents to our children, but researchers of their development as young children.

Rosemary: As a teacher-educator in the tertiary sector for some years, it was a revelation to me to become a Mother to my own daughter in 2000, and to watch all the child development stages occur before my eyes. I was constantly distracted from the domestic tasks of mothering in the home, by my child's exploration of her own embodied creativity in responding to music through movement and dance. At my university's early childhood conference in 2005, there was an opportunity to present some of these observations and to relate them to my professional roles of researcher and teacher with a strong background in the creative arts. I was also seeking collegial advice concerning the researching of one's own child, and I found a fellow academic presenting on a similar field at this conference. Peter and I then continued the discussion as we compared experiences and shared the type of documentation and analysis of this type of somewhat contentious research over the next years.

Peter: In 2005 I began work at an Australian university in a faculty of education with a strong early childhood and primary education focus, both in teaching and research. The faculty was hosting an early childhood education conference when I began work there and I had been invited to present a paper. I presented a paper about the research I had been doing that focused on my son's musical development in the home. In the audience was Rosemary. We got to talking afterwards and she told me that she too was presenting a paper at the conference that focused on her own daughter's development, albeit with a focus on movement and dance.

Now more than a decade later, we find ourselves still teaching in the tertiary sector. Over the years we have taught together and discussed our research, and invariably ask each

other about Georgie and Jack, both now teenagers. It has been more than five years since we finished as parent-researchers. We have not done research like this since, where there is such a strong intersection between work and family life. However, this initial parent research has formed a strong basis for consequent studies and further research questions.

We are drawn to autoethnography to explore our experiences as parent-researchers because autoethnography connects the personal (our experience as parent-researchers) to the cultural (the academies in which we work and the families which we are part of) (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). That is, autoethnography affords us the opportunity to explore “the social and cultural aspects of the personal” (Hamilton, Smith, & Worthington, 2008, p. 24). There is no one definition of autoethnography or one specific way that autoethnography is done (Delamont, 2009; Doloriert & Sambrook, 2011), but as Ellis (1999) writes of autoethnography we agree that it,

celebrates concrete experience and intimate detail; examines how human experience is endowed with meaning; is concerned with moral, ethical, and political consequences; encourages compassion and empathy; helps us know how to live and cope; features multiple voices and repositions readers and “subjects as coparticipants in dialogue.” (p. 669)

Our aim in writing our intersecting autoethnographies is to generate dialogue and debate (Sparkes, 2002) about our lived experience as parent-researchers. We come to this research believing that writing about our experiences as parent-researchers is not just about and for us, but it is for others (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011), specifically researchers who may be considering parent-research.

We have endeavoured to employ what Ellis and Bochner (2000) refer to as “systematic sociological introspection” (p. 737) whereby we have paid attention to our physical feelings, thoughts and emotions about being parent-researchers, and we have storied these experiences, talking together about our stories and then writing our stories together. We employed emotional recall (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) by revisiting what we documented as parent-researchers. We had the benefit of having documented our responses to what we saw and heard and felt as parent-researchers when we were parent-researchers, but we also now have the benefit of hindsight, allowing us to revisit these experiences when we are not so emotionally invested in what we were doing as parent-researchers (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). We acknowledge that our memories of being parent-researchers can be distorted, and along with the mediation of language this means that our stories (narratives) are “about the past and not the past itself” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 745).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) talk of narrative inquiry as a form of author-inspired case study where the story of each researcher helps us to make sense of our experiences. Narrative also allows us to situate ourselves in a variety of places and spaces that both stimulate and inform each case in question. Recognition of our past, present and future within the narrative situates the story of each case relative to our personal dispositions but also highlights the importance of place as a unique context for each observation. The home as such is often thought of as private and difficult to access since the researcher’s presence may change the emotional context of that personal space. Our stories of observations situated within our respective homes have a special significance, since our multiple roles enabled each child to feel comfortable and relaxed whilst participating knowingly in the research task.

Our personal histories and the development of our self-identities as academics, researchers and parents have all contributed to this position where we can look for intersecting fields of analysis of the creative arts-based expression of our children. We believe that as we use autoethnographic story-telling within this paper, “we come to a deeper awareness of how

we shape and are shaped by these moments and our multiple understandings of them” (Murray Orr & Olsen, 2001, p. 2).

The data for these intersecting autoethnographies is drawn from the respective journals we kept when we were parent-researchers and visual and audio documentation of our respective children in the home. In addition, the conversations we had and the actual reflective writing were part of the data set, thus ensuring we drew on multiple sources of evidence (Duncan, 2004). We were involved in what Hamilton, Smith and Worthington (2008) describe as memory work, writing our respective stories while continually stepping back and reflecting “on the pattern of her life and the meaning of certain events and experiences” (Karpiak, 2010, p. 49). The act of writing was the continual act of analysis of our experiences, meaning that “as a method, autoethnography is both process and product” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). As this analytic writing occurred we began to uncover common experiences about being parent-researchers, particularly when we identified moments in our experiences as parent-researchers that had significantly impacted on our lives as parent-researchers (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). These autoethnographic intersections will be presented as a series of vignettes.

Vignettes

Origins of being a parent-researcher

Rosemary: As a teacher educator at various tertiary institutions over some years, I had often considered where my research interests might lie, and how I might progress in my own studies following the completion of a Master’s degree in the area of dance education. After moving to my current university, I found my life partner and consequently had my child Georgie. This was both a thrill and a challenge since I had no close family support and had no personal experience in caring for infants. As my parenting skills and confidence developed, I was drawn to photographing and videoing every detail of my daughter’s progress (Carpenter, 1997). It was not just those common childhood milestones which I recorded, but also simple daily life moments in the home, often round her play and particularly moving to music which was a favourite activity. It was a revelation to find myself viewing this new focus in my life, and reviewing it through the lens of the researchers. This personal and family-based documentation (Nespor, 1998) enabled me to see for the first time much that I had read about and lectured on in early childhood education happening before my own eyes within the domestic environment. I was particularly curious to observe Georgie’s movement exploration and her obvious connection to musical stimuli, since this formed my own arts education background and training. I had not come across any literature thus far that focused on a parent documenting their own child’s creative movement and music development from birth, so this prompted a new area of investigation for me. I was automatically part of this arts-based development as Georgie’s parent, and I would make choices which would have direct impact upon her experience both in the home and further afield. I was immediately drawn to this as a research focus, alongside the roles of parent, teacher and artist.

Peter: In the year 2000 I began my first academic position at a university. I moved city with my partner for this job. I said goodbye to my previous career as a school teacher. I was scared. But I had some wonderful colleagues who helped me in both my teaching and in my research. I began a research project with a colleague that focussed on preschool music. This whetted my appetite to learn more about early childhood music development. I read voraciously on the subject. When Wendy, my partner, fell pregnant with our first child (Jack) I began thinking about my son-to-be, about the adventure that this would be, being a father for the first time. I felt a sense of excitement about nurturing him musically. I realised I would be there from day one of his life to see how he developed musically. I would be part of that

development process as his father. I began thinking about how this might relate to my work, the things I had been reading about in relation to early childhood music development. I had not come across any literature that focused on a parent documenting their child's musical development from birth. Might this be something new, not only for me as a father, but me as a researcher? The answer was *yes*.

As is evident Peter and Rosemary realised that there was something worth exploring about the ways in which our research was intersecting. We thought there was a rich field for exploration and the possibility of bringing new perspectives to how the arts contribute to the shared experiences and connections between parent and child.

Advantages of being a parent-researcher

Peter: There are distinct advantages in being a parent-researcher, including role immersion as researcher, access to the research participant and co-researcher's world, and insider knowledge being a parent and researcher.

Adler and Adler (1996) are often quoted in the literature as advocates of being parent-researchers, and in particular valuing role immersion as parent-researchers. Similarly Poveda (2009) argues that being a parent-researcher allows for "sustained and detailed observations of children's evolving daily behaviour" (p. 2). The ready availability of a parent-researcher's children at all times allows for such observations (Adler & Adler, 1996, p. 41). This role immersion necessitates not only formal data collection, but those more informal moments between those formally documented moments, often at the most unexpected times. For example, when Jack was 6.5 years he was watching the animated DVD *Over the Hedge* at a party we were attending. He and another boy raced out of the room they had been watching the movie, singing the chorus to the song "Rockin' the Suburbs" which featured at the end of the movie. They stopped, looked at each other, Jack sang the first phrase of the chorus, then his friend sang the second. Jack then sang the third, his friend the fourth. The adults present smiled. One adult complemented the boys on their singing; this resulted in Jack telling his friend that they could sing other songs like this, "taking turns." The boys decided to go back to the room they had been in, write down a list of songs they both knew, and then sing the songs in this way. This spontaneous musical moment was not planned, or even scaffolded by adults. Rather, it simply happened. I immediately went to the car, took out my digital audio recorder, and described what I had just witnessed. Such unexpected music making in our everyday family life where we had not planned to document music making occurred frequently, and as Jack got older we became expert in recording this music making.

On a personal level I found that role immersion also resulted in building rapport with my son. This is something that as a parent I expected, but from the age of 5 when Jack was an active and vocal participant in the research we did, the rapport we had built up allowed me as a parent-researcher to ask Jack questions about his music making and be a co-researcher in his musical engagement. There were many occasions when Jack would be making music when he would invite me to record what he was doing. For example, when Jack was playing the electronic keyboard he would tell me what he was playing and invite me to record what he was playing. From the age of 7 Jack had become so self-aware of his music making that at times he would record himself singing or playing the piano or keyboard, then give me the recording "for my research" (Jack's words).

The access that a parent-researcher has to their children is unparalleled. In the first two years of Jack's life my partner and I were nearly always with him, so we had a unique opportunity in terms of documenting Jack's initial musical engagement. We got all those "in between" moments which we couldn't have been prepared for, couldn't have planned for. The

only way another researcher could have had access to all this data would be to literally live alongside us.

Although role immersion as researcher and access to the research participant's world are significant advantages of being a parent-researcher, the greatest advantage of this research paradigm is the insider knowledge I had of Jack's world. In numerous cases this resulted in my being able to interpret Jack's behaviour in ways that an outside researcher might not be capable of. For example, in documenting Jack's first piano lessons with me as his teacher, I was able to interpret much of his conversation because it referred to his life beyond the piano lessons and music making that I was privy to as his father. This was made apparent to me when I shared much of this documented footage of our piano lessons with colleagues. On one occasion Jack began a piano lesson by lining up six of his favourite stuffed animals on top of the piano prior to playing. Then having played his first piece, he commented to me, "My friends liked me playing music." When listening back to an audio recording of this part of his piano lesson, Jack began miaowing like a cat. "Cat likes this music too," he said. When I shared this co-researching technique with colleagues (that is, allowing Jack to listen back to his piano lessons and comment on his music making as part of the research process) they were baffled, with questions being raised about "Cat." One colleague went back to the video footage of the piano lesson and indicated that there was no cat "listening" to Jack's piano lesson. It was only when I explained, with my insider knowledge as Jack's father that "Cat" was Jack's make-believe friend who he said only "came out" at home, that this scenario could be explained.

Rosemary: In the first few years of Georgina's growth and development, it was obvious to me that each child will reach movement (gross motor) milestones at different ages. I found myself comparing my daughter with the other children at play group and as she experimented with expressive movement I found myself drawn to her creative process since it was an aspect of my academic lecturing with pre-service early childhood and primary teachers. Initially I was unaware of the connection of my domestic life with my professional research interests, simply marvelling in how my only child could and would experiment with her body in motion. Her body became the instrument and movement her language of expression, a notion I had written on in researching creative dance processes (Bennett, 1995).

The role immersion and uptake of opportune moments of discovery within the parent-researcher situation, as discussed by Adler and Adler (1996) and Poveda (2009) gave me a level of excitement about my daughter's artistic and creative development. It was a privileged position in which I found myself, since Georgie was neither self-conscious nor constrained in any way during these participant observations noticed and recorded within the home. They were often simple moments of play where the child's movement was a unique "next step" within her gross motor range or fine motor gestures, or particularly linked to auditory stimuli (such as a favourite piece of music) that she liked and would often repeat over and over. These readily available moments made me realise the advantage I had to a research "zone of proximal development" (Daniels, 2005; Doolittle, 1997; Wass & Golding, 2014) which was often "off limits" for the researcher – the private space of the family home. It reminded me that formal participant observer-subject relationships could be compromised because of the intrusion of the non-family member researcher and their documentation/recording devices, which could distract or detract from a creative moment. The subject being a very young child would also be less likely to follow their natural, free, expressive play in the presence of a "visitor" who had come into the safety and comfort of their own home environment. I had the advantage also to be concurrently parenting and lecturing during this time. My own consciousness was drawn to aspects/moments of cross-over where ideas of creative movement and dance choreography were uppermost in my teaching mind, and evidence of the beginnings of such were occurring within my parenting mind inside the home space.

However, once I had connected with my colleague Peter during our conference presentation session, it became obvious there were many advantages to researching my own child, not least of which were the role immersion as researcher, access to the research participant and co-researcher's world, and insider knowledge being a parent and researcher (Adler & Adler, 1996). I noted as parent-researcher I was privileging certain elements of the process of creative expression for my daughter, such as providing time, space and access to music with which she liked to move. I took many photographs (as a doting mother) which often highlighted evidence of Georgina's dance making process which were both revealing and unique. I was conscious that as her Mother, I was able to disappear in the background and remain neutral within Georgina's awareness, as opposed to an outsider who might come into the home as a participant observer (Weir & Costall, 2015). I began discussing the movement and dance data I had collected with my daughter, providing opportunities to draw herself dancing and to tell me about what she was doing. These conversations were recorded anecdotally in my diary, as I noted significant milestones in her development over a period of years (Carpenter, 1997; deVries, 2011).

As my colleague Peter noted, the parent-researcher's facility for role immersion necessitated not only formal data collection, but those more informal moments between those formally documented moments, and similarly these occurred often at the most unexpected times. Once when preparing to attend a family function and Georgina was dressed in a new outfit, I was excited to see her dancing in a new way. The dress had a large voluptuous skirt which whirled around Georgina's body as she experimented with turning and twirling in the lounge room. She was fully absorbed in this process, varying the type of turning, the speed and the level – eventually falling to the floor in laughter as she was so dizzy. It was the combination of new movement vocabulary, balance and coordination and the pleasure of the response of her clothing to the twirling motion which combined to extend her creative response in this situation. She did not notice my recording of this moment with the camera at the time, but was anxious to see the photographs afterwards (Alaca, Rocca, & Maggi, 2016).

As soon we began to share our experiences as parent-researchers with each other and with our wider collegial group, we found the people were asking questions about the validity of this research. Specifically they wondered about researcher distance, bias, and ethical concerns.

Rigour

Rosemary: Once I had begun to report on these observations as “parent-researcher” to a wider audience I recognised the inevitable questions which would arise concerning the rigour of studying one's own child. Initially it was not my intention to report on this personal and home-based research, but simply use it to affirm my knowledge and stimulate my further research into the early stages of creative expression through movement and dance. It was curious that some colleagues were encouraging of this process of documenting my own daughter, whilst others (particularly at a national conference level) were scathing of the lack of rigour and clear bias which would emerge from such data. I had to grapple with the tensions between the clear advantages I experienced as mother-teacher-artist-researcher within the home setting, and the lack of triangulation and ethical validity (Weir & Costall, 2015) of such research. I questioned my subjectivity which may affect the data collection and my personal relationship with the subject which may taint the analysis and outcomes? (Berger, 2015). However, as long as I continued to document both the objective movement observations and my own more emotive responses for deeper analysis, I felt there was something very valuable with the data from the home setting.

It was consultation with more experienced research colleagues which also tested my research method as they asked the hard questions around a single case study where the subject was my own child (Yin, 2014).

Peter: When I was initially thinking about researching Jack's musical development I had many conversations with academic colleagues. A couple had researched aspects of their own children's development, albeit for very short periods of time. They advised me to make sure I documented everything and have it available for others to see. The reason? They told me that they had experienced a backlash when they had initially presented research focusing on their own children, with accusations of being "too close" to the research subject and not being able to objectively analyse what was occurring with their child. So what they did was make sure they had their data (i.e., video footage, audio recordings, photographs, other artefacts) available for others to peruse when they presented this research at conferences. When I heard this I was surprised – because it was rare at conferences to get more than just a snapshot of some of the data that had been collected for research. But they told me this was all about being completely transparent as a (parent) researcher, so others could see firsthand the rigour of the research they had conducted.

The more I thought about this the more I realised that I would be continually having to legitimise to others my role and position as a parent researching my child (Kabuto, 2008, p. 177). I would need to convince others that I was not biased in the way I interpreted data about my newborn son's musical development. Therefore from day one I decided I had to follow the rules of ethnographic research and keep notes about what happened as it happened (Ellis & Bochner, 2000), documenting "objectively" what I saw and heard, alongside the more emotive (i.e., what I was feeling and how *I* as a father responded). I was continually looking for alternative ways to view or interpret a musical event involving my son, remaining as open-minded as possible. I used a field journal where I wrote down my initial thoughts about an event, and then I would continually revisit the event and my interpretation of the event.

But I realised that even this was not enough. It was still just me interpreting what I saw my son doing. So I brought in others to view and comment on my interpretation of data, such as Wendy. "But she's his mother!" a colleague said incredulously when I mentioned this. "She's just as close as you are!" So I ended up begging colleagues to view my data and my interpretations of the data. While they occasionally provided possible alternative ways to interpret data, not once was my own interpretation of this data refuted by them; I never got "You are *sooooo* wrong about that, Peter, so very very wrong."

I'm glad that I did get these other perspectives, but I was equally glad that they confirmed that my interpretation/analysis of data involving my son was rigorous, that it was not blindly inaccurate because I was focusing on my son. I felt vindicated in the way I had gone about doing this research.

We both reached a point where we were convinced of the rigour of our research and were able to convince others. Part of this was that we were able to recognise and articulate that at different points in our research endeavours we assumed different roles and looked through different lenses.

Multiple roles

Peter: Being a parent-researcher was challenging, as I had to juggle multiple roles. The two most obvious roles that I played were parent and researcher. The two have been intertwined as I came to the role of first time parent and researcher. That is, I was a new academic when Jack, my first and only child, was born. At home I was always "on" as a researcher, and flexible and open about the data gathering process. I was constantly observing Jack and looking out for

his responsiveness to music, and subsequently documenting this. As a result I was constantly in role as a researcher while at the same time being in role as a parent.

When Jack was born he was placed in the hospital's Intensive Care Ward, and was away from my partner for the first week of his life. During this period she rarely saw Jack, as she was physically unable to get out of bed. I spent most of my time with Jack, spending hours by his side in the Intensive Care Ward, speaking and singing to him, with accompanying stroking of hands and arms. The speaking I did was unlike any kind of speaking I had been engaged in prior to Jack's birth. Commonly termed "motherese" (or in my case "fatherese"), this musical speech is infant-directed speech with vocal sounds that the parent and infant have in common (Papousek, 1996, p. 90). At this time I was very much in role as a parent, concerned for my son's well-being and being constantly by his side. However, even at this time I was aware of Jack's responsiveness to music and the way we communicated musically, forming "vocal narratives of shared emotion and experience" (Trevarthen & Malloch, 2000, p. 6). Although I was in role as a parent I was also in role as a researcher, albeit to a lesser degree, observing and documenting his behaviour.

As Jack grew I found myself in a new role, that of musical partner. That is, I would interact musically with him, in musical activity that he initiated. I would sing with Jack, dance with him to music or explore musical instruments with him. In some cases, however, as I played with Jack I saw opportunities for musical growth. Therefore my role as musical partner became more of music teacher. For example, following months of vocal play with each other, I saw opportunities to expand Jack's vocalisations. We had spent a lot of time engaged in musical play using our voices, frequently either singing together, or responding to each other's improvised vocalisations. Jack's response to my vocalisations appeared to be random until he was 28 months, at which time he began to mirror what I was singing. This included copying dynamic changes, the tempo of vocalisations, and pitch and rhythmic changes. Jack's mirroring of pitch resulted in my deciding to expand the pitch range of my vocalisations and encouraging him to vocalise back to me using this extended musical vocabulary. In deciding to do this, and facilitating this, I began to see myself as music teacher rather than musical partner. That is, I was consciously facilitating new musical learning for Jack. I was now in role as music teacher, but at the same time was still wanting to document Jack's musical responses, hence was still in role as researcher, and to a lesser degree at this moment also identified with my role as parent and musical partner. Therefore I inhabited multiple role identities, and these role identities changed depending on the context (Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Rosemary: My delight in the movement milestones of Georgie's development were coupled with relief that her physical development was on track with the expected. However, it was her individual movement moments where I saw evidence of exploration of fine and gross motor patterns and connections to rhythm and best of the accompanying music which were equally exciting, as these reflected my personal background and in-depth training as both a musician and a dancer. I could see evidence of the elements of dance (Laban XXXX) being explored at their most basic stage, with Georgie taking her first steps and linking locomotor movement to travelling pathways around the house. There were instances of discovery of each joint's movement capability, and then the consequent patterning of these bending, circling and sliding movements of arms and legs or head into a "dance." I was fascinated that Georgie has such lengthy attention span and focus where movement was concerned, and that she was able to repeat sequences that pleased her with minute variations each time. This correlated with other aspects of her development such as the repeating of favourite songs, poems and nursery rhymes or the reading of the same story book many times over. The multiple roles I inhabited within the home were such that I found an osmosis occurring between mother, teacher, researcher and artist (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008) with one or another of these roles taking dominance at any one time but the remaining roles still lurking beneath the

present moment. I found myself documenting my own reaction to this experience of being “in role,” since I was not an experienced researcher and I had constant demands on my time as a tenured tertiary academic. There was both a divergence and also a convergence of roles over time. I inhabited multiple roles (Stryker & Burke, 2000) and felt that each was important in the balance between home and work. I was constantly learning. This was also reflected in my reading at the time, concerning the notion of embodiment (La Jevic & Springgay, 2008) and the idea of ArTography (Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008), both of which talk about the notion of multiple roles and types of thinking within the one person. I sought out feedback from my colleagues and noted casual conversations with friends to assist in the reflection on my experiences (Cresswell & Miller, 2000). The richness of this discussion and my parent-research experience were strong motivators towards formally beginning to pursue my doctoral studies.

Having explored our multiple roles (researcher, parent, teacher, artist) we realise that we as adults who are in a position of authority inherently provide opportunities and impose limitations on the explorations of our children. We felt that this was a matter that we had to address.

Power and privilege

Rosemary: As parent in the researcher-subject relationship, I acknowledge I was constantly embodying a position of power, authority and responsibility in my connections to Georgie in our home environment. I now realise that my novice ventures into the realm of research of this close relationship needed further consideration as I held the dominant position when it came to Georgie’s creative explorations into movement and dance. My first attention was as the enthralled observer of these special rich moments in her artistic discovery of the language of the body. She displayed an innate capacity at opportune moments where her unique physical expression often took me by surprise. Predictably I began to plan ways to engender more of such moments but I came to recognize my subtle change towards enabling more of these “spontaneous” dance events. This took the form of privileging tools that could facilitate Georgie’s creative improvisation – the clearing of furniture to provide enough space for sequences of locomotor movement in our lounge room, the provision of musical instruments and Georgie’s favourite music recordings for ease of access, and she was allowed to operate the home sound system to play her own choice of CD (not something usually permitted a 3 – 4 year old child). And of course, as Mother I had the decision as to the amount of time possible to pursue a movement moment! I could allow extended time for Georgie to follow a movement idea until it came to its own resolution within her own experience – her thought process, emotional responses and kinaesthetic and motoric pleasure in that moment of dancing could be allowed to evolve and resolve without being cut short by the domestic demands of usual household schedules of pack-up time, meal-time or bed-time. Thus Georgie was given the rare chance to see a creative movement idea through to fruition. This manner in which I was facilitator of Georgie’s creative development held a level of power within the role, but it felt to me at the time to be more about nurture, encouragement and enabling a wonderful connection I was privy to observing between my daughter’s growth and development and her affective learning and experience of the arts of music and dance.

My presence within each of these creative moments in the home, and many other events where I was not in the moment’ but stumbled into the dancing as part of my domestic activity with and around the child at home, were such that I was prompted to further investigate where and how these moments might be connected to Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development” (Wass & Golding, 2014) or even Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014) notion of “flow” as represented in early childhood. Connections to brain-based research (Davis, 2004) also

seemed illuminated by Georgie's preferences, choices and free play where new neuro-pathways were visible and consolidated through her repetitive and problem-solving actions (Santer, Griffiths, & Goodall, 2007). The strong connection between human movement responses to music and my observations of my daughter pointed me towards further investigation of the choreographic process in the later life of the artist.

Peter: Being aware of the power I held as Jack's father and researcher was significant issue that I was constantly aware of. The ethics of researching my own child's musical engagement has been something I have constantly grappled with. Having always been an advocate for informed consent Wendy and I deliberated for a long time as to whether we should research our son's musical engagement. That is, as a newborn Jack would not be able to decide whether or not he wanted to be part of the research project. We decided that as long as we continually assessed how the research was unfolding and that under no circumstance was Jack placed in any emotional or physical danger, then the research would proceed until Jack was able to articulate whether he wanted this research to continue or not.

My partner does not come from a research background. She viewed the idea of documenting Jack's musical engagement as an extension of being a parent. I came to the project with a research background, so for me the project was not just about documenting Jack's musicking, but analysing what I was documenting, and from this analysis making decisions about what music making opportunities would be provided for Jack. As a result I was aware that in terms of Jack's music making I was in a position of power. To counteract this power I made a conscious effort to always provide Jack, from the youngest age, with a choice in terms of musical activities he might or might not choose to engage in.

As Jack got older and he begun to talk I consciously addressed these power relations by foregrounding Jack's voice in the research, and as Kabuto (2008) did, using the voice of the young child being researched with to guide the research process (p. 186). For example, at 35 months when Jack attempted to sing "Humpty Dumpty", he stopped singing because he appeared frustrated that he could not sing the higher pitches at the end of the song ("all the king's horses and all the king's men, couldn't put Humpty together again"). Jack went from happily singing to silence, with his head suddenly lowered. I asked Jack if he wanted to sing the song with me. He replied angrily, "No Humpty Dumpty!" I began singing the song, but Jack quickly said, "No no no!" I knew Jack could not sing such high pitches – or at least he had not sung such high pitches to me. I told him he did not have to sing anything he did not want to sing. Jack replied: "Good, no more Humpty Dumpty!"

From the age of 3.5 I would explain to Jack that he did not have to have Dad recording his music and taking photographs of him making music, he just had to ask me to stop if he did not want this. And it happened. During the recording of his first piano lessons with me, where he was frustrated that he could not play a new piece. In this instance Jack asked me stop recording his playing.

In the final year of my researching Jack's music making (when he was eight years old) we discussed research – not only what we might research and how, but how the findings were presented. He would ask who I was going to be presenting to (he was particularly fascinated about me presenting his music making to my students at university), and I would always sit down with him and play for him any audio or video clips, and show him any photographs or artefacts he generated, that I was thinking of presenting to an audience. When doing this I would explain that if he did not want me to present any of this material he only had to say so. He asked me not to present something – a video recording of his dancing in response to music; Jack explained that his dancing looked stupid so he didn't want other people to see it.

To address the inequities of power we came to look at our children as co-researchers and co-constructors of knowledge and experience.

Child as co-researcher

Peter: The way I thought about my research relationship with Jack began to change when Jack was 2.5 years old. Prior to this time I thought of myself as researcher and Jack as research participant. That is, I was researching Jack's musical behaviour. However, as Jack began to talk, this way of thinking and my approach to this research changed. That is, as I engaged in dialogue with Jack I came to think that Jack was no longer being researched on, but researched with (O'Kane, 2000). I was no longer simply observing Jack's musical behaviour, but through talking with Jack a respectful relationship began to build where I listened to his voice, acknowledging that even at this very young age Jack was able to provide a "valid and worthwhile perspective to offer on events that affect ... his life" (Roberts-Holmes, 2005, p. 66).

Positioning Jack as a co-researcher at a young age is not only respectful to the child, but logical. As Nespore (1998) writes, "young people have experiences with "research" in the course of their everyday and institutional activities that shape how they interpret and participate in our research endeavors" (p. 369). For example, one day after school (aged 6) Jack sat at the computer typing. When asked what he was typing, he replied, "All the songs I know." Jack occasionally asked for help with spelling over the next fifteen minutes. When finished, he counted the number of songs he had typed. I asked him how many he had listed. He replied, "Twenty-three ... That's a lot." He paused to think, then continued, "I must be a good singer. Josh only knows nine songs and Sam knows ten songs." In writing down and counting the songs he knew, then comparing his results to two of his peers, Jack was not only experiencing research, but conducting research.

Nespore (1998) writes, "How better to open up discussion about the meanings of the research process, and kids' understandings of the processes of knowledge production, than to enlist them as researchers in our work, or better, in projects of their own design?" (p. 370). When Jack reached the age of 4.5 years I discussed with him the possibility of recording his initial piano lessons with me as teacher and then listening back to those lessons together where Jack would have the opportunity to talk about what he was hearing. In providing this option to Jack – which he accepted – I was endeavouring to foreground not only Jack's voice as a learner, but also by having him listen to an audio recording of his lessons with me provide him with the opportunity to comment on his music making, and also allow for his *interpretation* of events centering around his music making. Therefore Jack was a researcher in his own musical learning, a co-researcher with me.

At the age of 8 Jack initiated a specific research project focusing on his musical learning. The project began as a dinner table conversation. I had just returned from a conference and was telling Wendy and Jack about a keynote address that I had found interesting, the address focusing on children's responses through the medium of drawing to three researcher selected music examples. Jack said, "I do that. I like drawing to music." I explained that *Star Wars* was one of the pieces of music the children in the study listened to and then drew to. Jack said, "That's too easy, I'd draw a spaceship or Darth Vader. It'd be better to draw to my favourite music." This suggestion, initiated by Jack, led to a small scale project where Jack selected his favourite music (audio recordings) and drew to this music. As this project focused on his favourite music, this was an opportunity to better understand Jack's musical preferences and understanding of this preferred music through the medium of drawing. As Jack initiated the project I suggested that he decide how we would design the research project. Jack wanted to record his drawing. I asked him to decide if he wanted to talk about his drawing as he did the drawing, or talk afterwards. He chose the latter, saying "so you understand what I'm doing."

Rosemary: Since I was becoming more informed about the process, style and methods involved in my research, I also began to consider Georgie's role as more than "subject." The

situated data gathering in the family environment of our home space made it feel a very private and somewhat random process of participant observation, dependent of my responsiveness to the casual moment of Georgie's choice of activity. I did not deliberately set out to construct a research schedule of time, place or actual data-led activities, but merely collated all those that had been noted, noticed, observed, journaled and digitally documented. I found that I was constantly deliberating on what was occurring as I connected Georgie's creative expression of music in movement to the theory of such processes in my lecturing work and the pre-service teacher education I was delivering at the work-place. Collegial discussions with Peter and others often led me to tangential reading of the articles of other researchers who had peripheral connections to aspects of my own investigation. I was constantly amazed at what I observed as a parallel between the early childhood freedom of movement improvisation guided by the felt/embodied/kinaesthetic motivation, and what I knew of my study of contemporary adult choreographers in our western dance theatre tradition, the best of whom were able to re-connect to their "inner child" in order to express new, innovative and unique movement vocabulary (Levitin, 2007).

Georgie's role as co-researcher was not one of deliberate investigator, but I certainly began to talk with her about my work/research as she matured. It was noticeable that she had a strength and clarity about her movement intention far beyond what I would have expected having assessed this aspect of dance education in the senior secondary dance curriculum around Australia (Australian Curriculum, 2016). I was also corrected by my daughter when verbally interpreting the drawings she had done of herself dancing. For example, one such drawing Georgie did at age 4 years was of a circle within a larger circle with what appeared to be facial features and limbs attached. I took this to be one creature (such as a pig on the farm). "No" said Georgie, "that is me when I am near and then dancing far away over there." She had given me a sophisticated explanation of both the movement quality (twirling) and the spatial perspective (near and far away) which would not have been analysed correctly without the voice of the child herself in this relationship to the research process.

Anderson (2013) also speak of the power of the voice of the child and the importance of validating the rigour of the child-related research in respecting the equal value of their collaboration within the research process. In storying children's experiences of environment there are strong statements towards the notion of equality and ethical processes for researchers working with and alongside young children. Undertaking this research we understood that it would have both personal and professional benefits. Peter and Rosemary work in an environment where undertaking and disseminating research is an imperative. As parents we also gained insights about how we thought about our children and about how they experienced that arts. However we had not considered what the outcomes may be for Jack and Georgie.

What did our children get out of the experience?

Peter: I look back over the many years documenting Jack's engagement with music and ask, *what has Jack gotten out of this research?* Jack has a comprehensively documented musical childhood. He often asks if he can look at or listen to footage of his music making when he was younger; he appears to get a lot of pleasure from this. Jack clearly enjoys music making now. If I had not been documenting his music making – and in turn being his musical partner and music teacher, I can only wonder if Jack would have had the benefit from such sustained engagement with music in his first eight years of life. Being a co-researcher has also resulted in Jack developing research skills which he continues to employ. That is, he likes to not only collect data and document it, but will then analyse it. This has been seen in many ways. Recently this took the form of surveying his classmates about whether they owned a dog, and what type of dogs they owned. Having collected the data, Jack concluded that there were

enough class members to hold a dog party (before surveying his classmates Jack indicated that a good sized party would be between eight and twelve owners; there were twelve).

Ultimately, then, I feel comfortable that with my partner I have been co-researching Jack's musical engagement since birth in an ethical way. It does not appear to have had any detrimental effects on Jack, and if anything he has benefitted as being part of the research. But still, informed consent is an issue. Certainly Jack gave his informed consent to being part of the research from the age of 4, but I do sometimes ask myself just how informed this consent was. After all, having his musical engagement researched, and being a research participant, is all Jack has ever known. Was he conditioned to participate in this research? Did he feel compelled to be part of this research because I was conducting it and I was his father, and this research was part of father-son time? These are some of those messy ethical questions that have emerged from this research, and are questions that are not easily answered.

Rosemary: Georgie did not appear to acquire research skills in the same way that Jack had done. As an adult dance educator I knew that Georgie was getting all too rare opportunities to take an idea through experimentation and exploration to some sort of conclusion, often a performance for herself or for me. Just like Jack, Georgie is an only child. Her experience is the norm and she is not aware that her life could have been different. Georgie enjoys living in the moment. This "mindful" existence is a common feature of early childhood (Semple, Lee, Rosa, & Miller, 2010). When younger she was happy to experience and then to discuss what she had done but as she has gotten older she has become more self-aware and is less inclined to lose herself in movement exploration. The beginning of formal schooling was for her a significant change particularly in the ways she chose to express herself. She now found herself with a group friends and socialising became important to her. She appeared to be happier matching her movement style to that of her peers. Given her new preferences we have not continued with this co-research but I have continued to foster her interest in music that seems to fit well in her social and educational environment.

Discussion and Conclusion

The discussion of our intersecting autoethnographies in this format has provided a marrying of the roles we were enacting as adults and we both found that this offers real depth of understanding, a longitudinal collection of data and an ease of analysis within a comparatively unusual situation. The home setting and the multiple roles each researcher has embodied makes this descriptive research rich with personal experiences juxtaposed with professional understandings of creative arts development and the young child. It was however, the interpersonal dialogue between two academics in a similar time and place within their approach to this research which made for unique characteristics within this autoethnographic narrative style inquiry (deVries, 2011). The vigorous debate concerning the validity and strength of the data collected, alongside the teacher-educator role where specific arts education methodologies were being dissected, meant that there were new findings which complimented our knowledge and experiences in our individual and shared settings.

It was noticeable that as a parent researcher, rather than as a participant observer in another's household, there was a freedom and relaxed nature to the noticing of our children's creative expression at the opportune moment which is often missed due to scheduled visits or a calendar which does not suit the creative event (Weir & Costall, 2015). For each of us the subject being our own child was a fortunate illumination of the embedded behaviours of each child without the interruption of external people, equipment or discussion around the recording of music or dance explorations in the home. The child in each case also had the feeling of power and control to disengage with the process of recording data at any time, due to the confidence within the relationship felt with their respective parent. In this way, there was more

authentic types of child-centred data and there was unparalleled access to the creative moments within the home setting. This provided a window on child directed creative behaviours through music and dance which previously may not have been available to the researcher, since these moments do not normally occur on cue.

Another positive by-product of the multiple roles each of us shared within this process (parent-researcher-artist) was the enrichment we each noticed of our own parenting through engagement in creative arts expression with our children. In addition there was validation of the encouragement we each undertook as part of our nurture and care of our child in the formative stage of their personal development. With our innate and varied personal and professional backgrounds, there were many times when we brought the artistic into the parenting role, and the teacher into the creative artist role alongside our child. This took our child parent relationship beyond the day-to-day domestic routines, and we both felt this added significant value to our relationships through making music and dancing with our children.

Research in the home was of immense value particularly to Rosemary, who found returning from maternity leave to the work place, she had lost some professional confidence. Rosemary was often diffident in putting forward academic ideas and so she discovered that there was a reality of her home life which she could then bring to the workplace, encased within a research domain. It was a turning point for Rosemary. This project brought intention and richness to the personal case study as expressed in both her teaching and her research roles in academia. Since Peter was further along the research pathway, and his child a little older, there was a point of comparison there for both researchers to learn from each other in this process. The resultant narrative made for accepting of the differences each brought to this intersection of ideas, there was a sense that this was “real research” that meant something for both themselves and their colleagues.

Peter taught his son the piano but Rosemary did not teach dance, but rather she fostered and supported Georgie’s desire to dance. It is the depth of observation possible in both home environments which produced some startling outcomes without interfering in any way with the children’s creative process. From our experience, the “normal” research setting does not allow exploration but can truncate what is experienced as the child subject can be compliant and want to please. Having an observer who is a stranger, children change and perhaps show off, or become shy. In any case, there is marked difference in the data recorded due to the change in the physical and inter-personal context. For this reason, both Peter and Rosemary valued what they were able to record, analyse and discuss since it was rich, real and personal.

This intersection of autoethnographic research offers an untapped research opportunity with depth, rigour and meaning, when sited within the home and incorporating the existing parent-child relationship. Too little research explores the potential role of parents as educators and facilitators of their children’s creative expression, and as such this type of observation and recording of behaviours which help the blossoming of creativity could lead to fulfilment of a child’s potential. There is scope for extending the cognitive benefits of the creative arts, and the home is the first and most natural place to nurture this. Our intersecting autoethnographies have looked at where creativities begin; the first steps in a creative education process.

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Author Note

Academic, educator, musician and dancer, Rosemary has been teaching across a range of Australian universities for the last 25 years. Her focus has been firstly in arts education and more recently in the qualitative research of her own and other's early arts experiences in relation to personal growth, intellectual development and wellbeing. Her Masters research was an in-depth study of the body in dance, and the issue of safety in pedagogical practices across the wider Australian arts community. Rosemary is currently completing a PhD in early childhood creativity and dance whilst lecturing in teacher education at Monash University, Melbourne Australia. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: rosemary.bennett@monash.edu.

Peter has taught at Monash University along with a number of other tertiary institutions where he has been a leader in music education. His current appointment to Central Queensland University is also in the field of pre-service teacher education. Peter's research and extensive publications cover qualitative examination of music teaching and learning. He has investigated young children and also the elderly experience in music and creative arts. He is a published author and poet.

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