

The Musical “Why”: Philosophical Understandings in Children’s Musical Cultures

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Music

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Abstract

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Music

What is music? Is music beautiful? How does one best represent sounds visually? What’s music’s “vibe”? These are just some of the philosophical questions about music that children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School in Seattle, WA asked and explored during my collaborative, ethno/musicological research project. Focusing on the previously unexamined philosophical components of children’s musical cultures, this research took place over the course of four months of fieldwork within the Philosopher-in-Residence program at the school. Within this project, children engaged in a community-based, child-centered model of Philosophy for Children (P4C) called a “community of philosophical inquiry” (CPI) (Mohr Lone and Burrough 2016) to work

together to consider two primary research questions: (1) What are children's philosophical interests in, or dispositions surrounding, music? and (2) What collaborative strategies can ethno/musicologists and philosophers use alongside children to better understand and describe the philosophical elements of music and musical culture in their lives?

In doing so, the children and I thought, felt, talked, and made music to determine what they themselves think about music and how they know what they believe they know about music in their own lives. Described across four ethnographic vignettes and subsequent theoretical analyses, I offer an examination of the four prominent themes of philosophical interest and disposition that children and I collaboratively determined were of importance during fieldwork: musical ontology, beauty as an aesthetic experiences of music, affect as a musical and philosophical modality and practice, and acoustemology as a musical and philosophical modality and practice. Combined with considerations or relevant past research from the fields of ethno/musicology, music education, and Philosophy for Children, these vignettes and analyses consider children's discussions, questions, material culture, and music making practices as they relate to philosophizing about music and musical engagements with philosophy. Finally, this work reflects on the value of collaborative, child-centered, philosophical research for the enrichment of music studies and music scholars as a whole.

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¹ I once promised Dennis a special shoutout in my dissertation (a notion he responded to with a characteristic chuckle and an encouraging statement, "Well, I'll look forward to reading that one day, Jack.") While I am sad that he is no longer here to read this, Dennis: this very first footnote is just for you. You were the first queer academic and scholar that I ever knew, and you inspired me so very much as a young queer person and aspiring academic. You helped mold me into the scholar and the teacher that I am today more than you will ever know. Thank you for being a phenomenal teacher and mentor to me.

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Jumping a bit off track from a traditional acknowledgement, there are several ideas and schools of thought that have been absolutely game-changing in my life and in my own thinking and doing towards a PhD that I wish to acknowledge briefly here. That is, while the following chapters will obviously be replete with citations of scholarship that

situate my work in “the field” (some of which are still included here, despite their later appearance, because of their importance in my life beyond this degree), I wish to acknowledge several ideas that shaped me as a person and thinker. If knowledge is power, then I owe a debt of gratitude to the many thinkers and ideas that have made me feel powerful throughout my life, whether they directly characterize the nature of my scholastic pursuits or not.

First, I would like to acknowledge reflexivity as a stream of scholarly thought and practice. While works of some of the scholars mentioned here will likewise be given attention later in this document, I wish to give them a more personal acknowledgement here for the effects that they have had on me as a thinker writ large. That is, I wish to acknowledge scholars focusing on reflexivity in ethnomusicology (Michelle Kisliuk, Kay Kauffman Shelemay, and Jeff Roy), and gender, sexuality, queer, and feminist studies (Claire Hemmings, Donna Haraway, and Cleo Woelfle Hazard) whose works have explored and valorized themes of selfhood and thinking about the self/other boundary that changed the way I think about myself as a scholar. These conceptions of self-reflection and transparency in intercultural work as the work, themes of life-writing and crossing personal-political and emotional-academic boundaries as forms of praxis, and considerations of the virtue of making the processes themselves that produce scholarship (like the doing of fieldwork or the writing of a dissertation such as this) visible to audiences as equally important to the findings or products of their research processes have been invaluable to my own growth as a scholar.

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Finally, I wish to briefly acknowledge Keetman-Orff Schulwerk² as a school of thought in the music education of young people. While Keetman-Orff Schulwerk is certainly not the only learner-driven approach to music education (or education writ large), it is the method of child-centred musical learning with which I have the most familiarity and that began my own educator journey towards understanding the value of letting children make their own active decisions about the processes and directions of

² Here I designate "Keetman-Orff Schulwerk" rather than the more typical "Orff Schulwerk" to highlight the contributions of Gunild Keetman that often go unacknowledged in discussions of music and music education for children within the realm of "Orff Schulwerk."

their learning. That is, while specific strategies or processes found in Keetman-Orff Schulwerk did not necessarily directly apply to the work with children described subsequently herein, the common aphorisms within Keetman-Orff Schulwerk to “let the children be their own composers” or to help young people “bloom where they are planted” have always remained in the back of my mind as reminders that the best learning occurs when children are given agency in their own learning, regardless of the anxieties around time or progress that I might feel as a teacher. Surely this was one reason I found such great affinity for learner-centered, community-based Philosophy for Children that ultimately came together with music in this very project.

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In the spirit of living in harmony with the land and ecosystems around us (a value I was raised with and that is also reinforced by Indigenous Studies), there are several places that likewise deserve recognition here for the ways that they have shaped me and given me opportunities for growth, oneness, wellness, and nourishment as I explored opportunities at various institutions throughout my life.

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To my students, whose creativity and willingness to question inspire me every day.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Prelude: Making a Case for Asking Questions like a Child

Have you ever played the “Why” game? That is, have you ever played the game many young children like to play where they repeatedly ask “why?” in response to almost anything someone else says? To offer an example from my own recent experiences with my three-year-old niece,

Jack: “Maggie, can you stop swinging your purse around like that?”

Maggie: “Why?”

Jack: “Because it’s not safe and it hurts when it accidentally hits me.”

Maggie: “Why?”

Jack: “Because the buckle can scratch you—see my leg there where I got scratched?”

Maggie: “Why?”

Jack: “Because you were swinging it around and it hit me—now, can you please just not swing it around anymore?”

Maggie: “...Why?”

Many adults often tire of this “game,” considering it an unnecessary or circular exercise in questioning things that are “common sense” at best, or a delay tactic with no real wondering or curiosity below the surface at worst, but I want to challenge you here: try it with yourself. No, really. The next time you find yourself wrestling with a situation or an idea, ask yourself “Why?” or “Why is this the way that it is?” Then answer yourself as best as you can and then ask “Why?” of that answer too. Repeat this process as earnestly as you can until you can’t do it easily anymore.

While you may go through *many* rounds of what seems like mechanistic self-talk, eventually, you will likely stumble upon something that makes you curious, something you never thought to question, or something that you haven’t questioned in quite some time. Eventually, if you don’t find your way to an unconsidered perspective or some sort

of resolution, you will find yourself asking “Why?” and either not having an answer (take note of these questions and seek several answers outside of yourself from trusted sources) or realizing that while you do have an answer it still somehow leaves you wanting (“Why doesn’t that answer feel satisfactory?”) It is these very moments, moments that ask us to stop and rethink or reassess what we think we know and believe or that leave us unsatisfied with our own understandings, that reveal the deeper value of this game and the wisdom of children who play it: Developing a natural curiosity and questioning nature about the world around us, especially about things we assume to be fixed or that we do not yet know to be true, is an important step in becoming a creative, free agent in the world and towards making informed and assured decisions in one’s own life. While answers, reasons, and responses to questions will vary, the importance of questioning as a way of understanding and growing will remain steadfast throughout life.

While this is especially true for younger people who are still earlier in the processes of identity formation and who are still learning about the world and how to question the world around them, it is similarly true for adults (especially researchers) who are often trying to find new ways of understanding the world around them and new questions to ask. Likewise, while some aspects of children’s lives are frequent subjects of this type of philosophic questioning and inquiry (“Why do I have to go to school?” “What’s the meaning of life?” “How do you know when you *really* like someone?”), some, like music and the arts, are much less commonly the focus of careful, critical thought and exploration by children. Instead, these philosophical questions about music

are often the domain of adult ethno/musicologists.³ (Cook 2008) And so, I ask... Why? Why is it the case that children are not more often encouraged to question and consider complex ideas regarding musical meaning and understanding? Why have adult researchers not given more attention to the philosophical questions, thoughts, and feelings of children themselves in the domains of the arts and music? And perhaps most importantly, what are children's own big ideas and values surrounding music and the arts, and how can adults and researchers work with children themselves to answer these questions?

Childhood, Children, and Research with Adults

As pioneering ethno/musicologist Andrea Emberly asserted in her dissertation on children's musical culture specifically: "No universal definition of childhood can ever accurately represent all of the diverse factors that contribute to defining childhood." (2009, 53) Furthermore, as explored in *The Future of Childhood* (Prout 2005), "children" and "childhood" have proven to be especially difficult categories to define discretely within scholarship, with many models being proposed across disciplines over the course of the past two centuries. As such, a common theme across studies of childhood at large has been the examination of who and what exactly comprise the categories of "children" and "childhood" in the work scholars do and also, how best to study or work

³ When speaking of the intersections of music studies and cultural studies as a "field" or "discipline," I choose to disrupt the simple categories of "musicology" and "ethnomusicology." Rather, I choose to use the root "ethno/musicolog-" in the hopes that the intentional slash will remind us all that binary disciplinarity, or being either/or musicologist or ethnomusicologist, seems intellectually limiting and personally stifling to this queer scholar (among others; Slominski 2020), especially since I have completed research and graduate degrees in "both" areas. As such, when referring to the broader field of music and cultural studies generally, I will use "ethno/musicology," echoing Nicholas Cook's 2008 call to arms in *The New (Ethno)Musicologies* when he states, "We are all (ethno)musicologists now." That being said, when using quotations or discussing others' work in this area, I will preserve the original orthographies of the source or people in question.

with children once the boundaries of such a category are determined. As Prout (2005) considers, children as a group of people have typically been defined first and foremost by their biological age or circumstance even as many social and constructivist models have also been developed, and indeed, for the purposes of this research completed in public schools, age continued to be an important factor in considering childhood given the age-grade divisions imposed on our sessions.

Following Emberly's distinction (2014, 3), I "refer to children in the generalized terminology adopted by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) as any person under the age of 18, recognizing that this limit is rarely a factor in research projects because childhood, youth, and adulthood are rarely measured solely by biological age in most contexts." However, this project will use the term "young people" in addition to "children," noting the necessities and difficulties of universalizing notions, determined largely by adults, about who counts as a "child" and what counts as "childhood" in the presence of academic definitions. Moreover, in considering children and their musical lives, I likewise consider the social and relational models of children and childhood that situate childhood as a dynamic intercultural social group with inherent power relations to adults (Dunne and Kelly 2001; Alanen 2001). Arguing for a new model of "childhood" that rejects dualisms or oppositional binaries that seemed to theoretically divide childhood studies historically (i.e., child vs. adult, nature vs. culture, biological vs. social), Prout (2005) ultimately suggests that "children" and "childhood" exist at the intersections of the sociocultural definition and understandings of extended biological juvenility. That is, Prout posits that children are defined by the ways that their embodied, biological experiences of juvenile existence

are in a dynamic loop of constant (re)negotiation and (re)definition along sociocultural axes that are simultaneously informing and informed by their biological existences. As such, he ultimately suggests that research in childhood should thus attempt to follow the intersections of the body and the sociocultural, a point that is especially well-taken for the purposes of this research that considers just such intersections of embodied knowledges and their relationship dynamic sociocultural knowledges in subsequent chapters.

As one might expect, then, the study of children's cultures, especially musical cultures, often begins with considerations of issues surrounding the degree to which: (1) children's cultures are imitations of adult cultures or their own culture in earnest (Campbell 2010), (2) children's cultures reflect a "children's culture" projected onto them by adults (such as music educators) vs. reflecting children's own creative productions (Marsh 2008), and/or (3) children can be defined more fully and contextually with their own input (Montgomery 2009; Emberly 2009). Similarly, questions such how to account for differences across cultures of how children are defined (Emberly 2009), and to what extent the almost-omnipresent adult lens through which children are filtered when research is conducted (Marsh 2008) further inform my understanding as to what constitutes the sociocultural boundaries of childhood through intersectional and often intercultural approaches to the study of their musical cultures.

Similar to the need to understand the boundaries of "children" and "childhood," the nature of interactions between childhood and adulthood has also been foundational in the study of children's cultures and are important for consideration here. Many scholars have explored how to come to grips with the boundaries and borders of

childhood and adulthood, the transitional and liminal space between them, and the power dynamics when adults consider children's cultures. These considerations have often led to more fluid understanding of these boundaries, and thus do some work to further legitimize the cultural productions of children to adults, if at very least through their interconnected nature to adult (musical) cultures. Understanding the importance of considering children as a dynamic and intersectional cultural group, scholars who work with children are increasingly taking an ethnographic approach of using endemic or "emic" models to create salient and culturally-responsible scholarly commentary on children and their musical cultures informed by children's own understandings and values. While this strategy may be classic for ethnomusicologists at this point (Herndon 1993), the application of "emic" models to studies of children as a cultural group specifically differentiated from children's intersecting geopolitical/regional cultural identities (that may overlap with adults) is more recent (Gaunt 2007; Emberly 2009; Campbell 2010). That is, considering children's own words and understandings to construct meaning is relatively new compared to the ways this model has been applied historically, especially within ethno/musicology.

Studies of Children's Musical Cultures

As in other fields, the consideration of children as a culture group and the study of children's cultures more specifically, has only recently come to the fore in music studies (Campbell and Wiggins 2013). Following McCarthy (2010), this project considers children's musical cultures to be the holistic participation of children in musical activities and the social and cultural contexts in which they occur. As Campbell (2010, 5) discusses in her groundbreaking work on children's musical cultures,

Children's engagement in music frequently is paid minimal attention by teachers and parents, even when it may be the rich repository of children's intimate thoughts and sentiments. They have opinions about music, perspectives about where and when they listen and "do" music, and for what reasons. They have decided what music is, what it is not, and how much of it to allow into their lives. Music may be the treasure children prize for their own personal pleasure, and a tool for their use in understanding the world in which they live. Music may be their own expansive and expressive thinking at work, a means through which to develop thoughtful reflections of their experiences. But we have seldom taken time to tap either the musical thoughts or the natural musical behaviors of children or to seek systematically the function of music in their daily lives.

As Campbell lays out, children are a rich repository of cultural knowledge about music, even as, until relatively recently, children have not been considered as such by teachers, researchers, or most adults at large. Thus, this project is inspired by and follows in a line of ethno/musicological and music education scholarship that seeks to better understand understudied sites of children's musical cultures that has been developing since at least the mid-twentieth century that will be further explored below (Brăiloiu 1954; Blacking 1967; Merrill-Mirsky 1988; Minks 2002; Campbell 2002, 2010; Gaunt 2006; McPherson 2006; Marsh 2008; McCarthy 2010; Campbell and Wiggins 2013; Emberly 2009, 2014, 2015; Emberly and Davhula 2019; Downing 2019; Bickford 2017, 2020; Cantarelli Vita 2021, and Dahm 2023). Moreover, this research also expands upon this line of scholarship by offering new, philosophically-focused strategies (Turgeon 2000, Gould 2006; Kanellopoulos 2007; Mohr Lone and Burroughs 2016; Tan 2017; Santi 2017; Eade 2023, and Mohr Lone 2024) for working *with* young people to explore, analyze, and document their own "musical thoughts" and "musical behaviors" through a philosophic lens, a focus that has not yet been explored meaningfully within the realm of studies of children's musical cultures.

As McCarthy (2010) outlines in her own historiography of the study of children's musical cultures, the study of children's musical cultures began historically with folklorists' concerns about the preservation of musical culture in the nineteenth century. However, these early studies merely collected children's songs, rhymes, and chants from adults; children themselves were not often direct participants in research on children's musical cultures until the 1920s, with anthropological interests in working directly with children beginning in earnest in the mid-twentieth century (McCarthy 2010). Ethno/musicological interest in children's musical cultures began primarily in the 1950s and 1960s. Of particular note, Brăiloiu (1954) considered whether or not children's musical culture was a universal phenomenon (i.e., that there could be a single children's musical culture shared among young people) or a culture-specific phenomenon. Shortly thereafter, British anthropologist and ethnomusicologist John Blacking turned his attention toward the first landmark culture-specific study of children's musical cultures in his trailblazing work on Venda children's songs (Blacking 1967), where he focused substantially on the practices and repertoires pertinent to the lives of children in Venda culture. Finally, music education turned its attention to the study of children's musical cultures and the meanings children themselves make of music primarily in the 1980s and 1990s (Campbell 2010; McCarthy 2010).

Prior to the 1990s, many studies of children's musical cultures often assumed children's musical cultures were ersatz adult musical cultures (Campbell 2010) or took for granted that children's cultures would eventually develop into "fully-fledged" adult cultures (Schwartzman 2001). That is, they did not consider that children might have unique cultural knowledges or ways of knowing and being that could be somehow

distinct and separate from the adult culture they were thought to be heading toward. However, scholarship in the 1990s and early 2000s generally focused more sociologically on children themselves, informing our understanding of children as both a supercultural group and as subcultural groups that overlap and intersect with other cultural boundaries (Slobin 1993). Thus, the consideration of childhood and children's musical cultures as coming from unique social positions worthy of study, as has been done with many other cultures not native to one's (adult) self, has been relatively recent in music studies and is in need of further studies.

As scholarship developed in the 2000s, Campbell (2010) explored the meanings children make and express with regard to their own musical cultures explored through interviews. Campbell found that children often display a wealth of knowledge about the meaning and value of music from their own perspectives. For example, in conversation with an 11-year-old girl, Tuyen, Campbell offers a child's take on the meaning of music and implies that value towards music education, recounting as follows: "You wouldn't starve without music. But" (with every little thing [Tuyen] learns about it, she sees that) 'it makes my life worth more?' There it was in a nutshell, the clear purpose of musically educating children, *to make life—their lives—worth living.*" (2010, 183) Regardless, or perhaps in spite of, adults' musical values that children are subject to, children often define music, its "goodness" or "badness," and its worth on their own terms, which invariably informs our understanding of the importance of children's own musical knowledges. Simultaneously, while not a study of a specific children's musical cultures, Woodford (2016) likewise called for new considerations of children's musical intelligence and the necessary pedagogical implications that follow. In particular, he insists that,

Perhaps the greatest challenge for those wishing to develop in children some measure of intellectual and musical freedom and independence is thus to help them develop a critical awareness of the ubiquity and significance of the music in their lives, by going beyond the notes and any pedagogical methods to critically examine their origins and provenance of inherited myths or ideas surrounding or embedded in them that will continue to shape their thought and behavior so long as their mythic or illusory 'character remains unperceived.' (285)

That is, he argues for a new type of critical musical intelligence or engagement with children that moves them beyond unselfconscious, technical musical skills and knowledges towards greater appreciation and awareness of the intellectual and cultural implications of music in their lives. Similarly, many of the scholars from this period likewise began to give attention to considerations of children's emotional responses and feelings surrounding music (Gaunt 2006; Marsh 2008; Campbell 2010; Cantarelli Vita 2021). However, these considerations were mostly with regard to the nature of what children's emotional responses to music were and how those responses might enrich our understanding of children's musical lives. These studies do not engage with emotions as a framework or modality for understanding musical culture or musical philosophy in a holistic or systematic way in the lives of children.

Another area for consideration with regards to children's musical cultures in an increasingly digital world is children's engagements with musical materials, specifically recordings. Bickford (2017, 2020) and Cantarelli Vita (2021) examined children's musical engagement with digital platforms and digital musical frameworks. Whereas Bickford (2017, 2020) considered mp3s and the culture of music and musical sharing around sharing popular music in the lives of "tweens" or adolescents, Cantarelli Vita (2021) explored the use of archival recordings of children within a collaborative framework alongside elementary school children. Focusing on children's musical cultures,

Cantarelli Vita and her students explored the use of archival recordings *of children by* children towards the development of “respectful resonance,” or intercultural understanding and empathy. Cantarelli Vita (2021,189) stated that,

Students became increasingly attuned to the contexts of the songs, and to the children who sang these songs. Their attention and carefulness when interacting with archival recordings insinuates that they developed something beyond just a cultural awareness. Their understanding of the culture of songs and singers lead them to an embrace of a “respectful resonance” with people and culture, and a certain bonding with the children whose voices were featured on the archival recording.

Thus, children can and do participate and create meanings within digital musical cultures with similar levels of autonomy and creativity found in acoustic musicking.

Finally, in turning towards the previous considerations of the intersections of children, philosophy, and music within music studies, there is almost no work in this area. Beyond, a limited number of studies in music education (Gould 2006; Kanellopoulos 2007) which will be explored momentarily within the context of Philosophy for Children, virtually no ethno/musicological attention has been given to either the philosophical interests, concerns, or facets of children’s musical lives or cultures, nor has any attention been given towards the development of philosophical methods of research for the consideration of children’s musical cultures. As such, this research seeks to begin to fill the gap in scholarship considering these topics.

While these previous works have laid an invaluable foundation, many of them attend primarily to the task of expanding adults’ knowledge *about* children’s musical cultures; however, many scholars are beginning to recognize the importance of producing knowledge *with* and *for* children and their musical cultures, an ideology that has only been embraced within the past twenty years of scholarship. (Montgomery

2009) Indeed, one pervading question in contemporary research involving human subjects over the past fifty years at large has been, “To what degree should research with living cultures be collaborative and/or mutually beneficial?” While this question has been asked in ethnographic work in anthropology and ethnomusicology since at least the 1970s and 1980s during the so-called “crisis of representation” (Geertz 1973; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; McMurray 2020), it is perhaps nowhere more pressing of a concern than in the expanding practice of working with children (Emberly 2014). While the prevailing theoretical answer to this question has been an affirmation of community self-determination, this goal is often lacking owing to the difficulty of achieving it in practice and the requirement of additional considerations and approvals, especially where young people are involved.

Ethics and Challenges when Working with Children

In considering the power differentials between adults and children, there are also specific challenges faced by researchers focusing on children’s cultures. Acknowledging the adult lens through which research about/with children is filtered, Fine (1999, 130) argues that, “Adults are always salient in children’s societies by virtue of the authority that is implicit in their status, and all data collected from children by adults must be examined for effects arising from their presence.” That is, given that adults almost always hold more social power and authority in relation to children, adult bias will inevitably show in research about children carried out by adults. Moreover, Alldred (1998, 158) points out that,

Popular psychological notions about children (about fantasy, ‘impressionability,’ reliability as witnesses) form the inescapable context within which [children’s] statements will be heard. The complexity of issues that we face is illustrated by

the fact that these same psychological discourses of the subject which allow some children to be heard, will disallow other children, including those who present contradictory or illogical accounts and don't manage to make themselves understood by (particular) adults, in 'adults' terms.'

Thus, even when researchers have worked painstakingly to design methods, practices, and processes that center children and strive to allow them to be the primary voices in the co-creation of knowledge, both children and their adult researcher comrades often find themselves in a frustrating and difficult-to-combat context for how children are likely to be understood by some adults and misunderstood by others. Thus, the larger power structure in which children and adults who work with them find themselves tends to prioritize adult knowledges and understandings (in research and interpretation) and remains an omnipresent consideration toward ethical and collaborative work with children.

Such considerations are similarly reflected in methodological concerns for working with children. In addressing considerations of participant observation as a methodology, Marsh (2008, 45) argues that "by far the most accurate assessment of 'endogenously determined contexts of use' is provided by the participants. However, it would seem that an adult, by nature of her adulthood, or 'otherness,' cannot be a participant observer." While all ethnographic research undertakings face issues of insider/outsider power dynamics surrounding the nature of participant and non-participant observation as a research method, the study of children by adults is especially fraught given the implicit power differential between adults and children that define adults as "Other" than children. This relationship almost inevitably causes adults to over-determine childhood as a non-participant observer, despite their best interests.

Even in discussions, careful considerations must be made not to overpower the voices of children. For example, as Christensen (2004, 174) writes, “The dialogical approach is fruitful and necessary if children are to be actively involved in research. It requires that the ethnographer ‘retrains’ their attention so that they do not dominate conversation, as adults often do. It requires a shift towards engaging with children’s own cultures of communication, including the context and timing of communication, which are often key to this process.” Christensen’s points are well-taken, as a similarly dialogic approach will be further explored in Chapter 2 within the discussion of Philosophy for Children.

Philosophy for Children (P4C)

Philosophy for Children (P4C) is the broad title given to the movement of academics, educators, and thinkers working towards exploring philosophical inquiry with children that began in the U.S. in the late 1960s and early 1970s. It is also the title given to the diverse collection of practices and methods that have developed and grown among this movement of people philosophizing with children since the Philosophy for Children movement’s beginnings (Naji and Hashim 2017). Given the wide scope of the history of the Philosophy for Children movement since the 1960s, and the wide breadth of scholarships and literatures on Philosophy for Children outside of the context of music and the arts relevant to this project, here I will focus primarily on the philosophical strategies and methods drawn from Philosophy for Children communities and scholarships that have most informed the methodology of this research. That is, I will focus primarily on the practices comprising Philosophy for Children that I have learned and applied as a method (see Chapter 2 for more description), as well as the previous research relating Philosophy for Children to music (Mohr Lone and Burroughs 2016;

Turgeon 2000, Gould 2006; Kanellopoulos 2007; Tan 2017; Santi 2017; and Eade 2023) rather than attempt to summarize the historical context of the entire Philosophy for Children movement or the full scope of the innovative practices comprising it.

Offering a learner-centered model of philosophical inquiry with children centered around questioning and dialogue as fundamental philosophical practices, *Philosophy in Education: Questioning and Dialogue in Schools* by Mohr Lone and Burroughs (2016) forms the core of the Philosophy for Children practices adapted in this study. Moreover, given my own years of study and collaboration alongside Dr. Jana Mohr Lone (discussed more fully in the “Context” section of Chapter 2), the fundamental methods explored in *Philosophy in Education* have likewise been practiced and refined throughout my PhD coursework and in various contexts before fieldwork application. Mohr Lone and Burroughs (2016) describe the process of doing philosophy with children as one where children’s philosophical interests are central to both the content and the method of engagement. That is, adults facilitating philosophy sessions for children work towards equity for all participants to help children to do their own self-guided *philosophizing*, rather than leading children in learning a child-friendly history of great ideas or teaching children the dominant schools of thought within the academic discipline of philosophy in a way accessible to young people.⁴ As such, children are encouraged to follow their natural curiosities and intellectual interests

⁴ Note that this model of child-centered philosophy, where children are encouraged to do their own philosophizing is sometimes referred to as Philosophy *with* Children (PWC), rather than Philosophy *for* Children, as Philosophy for Children was originally envisioned as a way of making philosophy accessible to children as a topic area. However, in contemporary practitioner circles, this distinction is by no means formal. (For more, see “The Institute for the Advanced of Philosophy for Children (IAPC) Program” by Lipman in Naji and Hashim (2017)). As such, I will simply refer to the philosophical model of working with children that I have adapted as “Philosophy for Children.”

towards the greater goal of cultivating their own philosophical sensitivities, and more importantly, their own philosophical culture within their school or philosophical setting. Attending to the various interests, ideas, doubts, wonders, and ways of thinking, knowing, understanding, valuing, and doing, Philosophy for Children offers one lens towards understanding and exploring non-material forms of culture as an ongoing and formative process in children's lives, as we shall see in subsequent chapters describing the musical and philosophical culture of Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary.

The model Mohr Lone and Burroughs (2016) describe for achieving this is called the "community of philosophical inquiry" or CPI. A CPI has four distinguishing characteristics: (1) "members of a CPI are engaged in structured, collaborative inquiry aimed at building meaning and acquiring understanding through the examination of philosophical questions or concepts of interest to the participants;" (2) "[A CPI acknowledges] that all members of the group, including the facilitator, are fallible, and therefore hold views that could end up being mistaken;" (3) "Participants in a CPI generally refrain from using much technical philosophical language or direct references to the work of professional philosophers to construct their arguments;"⁵ and (4) A CPI must "[establish] an environment of intellectual safety, one in which any question or comment is acceptable, so long as it does not belittle or devalue others in the group, and which allows trust and a corresponding willingness to present one's thoughts to participants."⁶ (Mohr Lone and Burroughs 2016, 54–55) To summarize, a CPI must be a

⁵ For the purposes of this study, I would likewise extend this sentiment to "technical ethno/musicological language or direct references to the work of professional ethno/musicologists."

⁶ For the purposes of this study, I would likewise add "an environment of musical safety, one in which any musicking (or no musicking) is acceptable so long as it does not belittle or devalue others in the group and supports a community of musical and artistic exploration and trust."

safe space for dedicated, collaborative, and supportive philosophical inquiry based on the interests of participants that works towards equity and accessibility for all participants, regardless of their age or amounts of formal knowledge or training, and that acknowledges that anyone can be wrong and that that is okay. Importantly, this process is flexible and open-ended in nature. Given the democratic and equity-focused nature of a learner-centered CPI, participants hold significant power to shift or change this format as they see fit, so long as these suggestions do not undermine the core values of the group and so long as they are in good faith. This flexibility is built into the community-based nature of the method.

While Mohr Lone and Burroughs' work (2016) does include several suggestions of prompts and sessions that engage music as a prompt for philosophical discussion (many created and submitted by graduate student practitioners), their work as a whole is not musically focused. Indeed, while many practically-focused sources for Philosophy for Children do include some reference or suggestion towards music and the arts as a possible prompt for sessions, surprisingly few have been focused in this area topically. In particular, Turgeon's (2000) article, "The Mirror of Aesthetic Education: Philosophy Looks at Art and Art Looks at Philosophy," offered several suggestions for a range of musical activities within a Philosophy for Children model. She especially highlights listening and discussion, as well as several suggestions for artistic responses like moving, musical accompaniment, and visual art responses. However, Turgeon's model prioritizes sessions that focus on "the four classical aspects of aesthetics: the artist/creator, the work of art, the performer, and the audience," rather than leaving the scope of the session more open towards children's interpretations. (2000, 25) Likewise,

while she rightfully suggests that “a sound introduction to aesthetic inquiry should include the mimicking of sound and form through physical action,” actions which children certainly do undertake in aesthetic inquiry, children’s own original music making or cultural elements that arise through music and art are not considered. (2000, 26)

This trend is likewise reflected in the works of Tan (2008), who considered music videos as potential prompts for philosophical inquiry, and Santi (2017), who proposes a jazz metaphor for considering the impromptu and improvised nature of child-centered Philosophy for Children models (an interesting example of applying a music metaphor back onto philosophy which highlights the child-centered nature, but ultimately not practically-focused in its scope.)

The only works addressing music making as a primary consideration of Philosophy for Children are works by Gould (2006) and Kanellopoulos (2007), who adapted Philosophy for Children methods within the field of music education. Gould (2006) closely examined the dance and music compositional processes of K-8 music teacher Carol Matthews within the educational tradition of Reggio Emilia, relating Matthews’ processes to “philosophy of experience” and towards the consideration of philosophical components of creating original movements and music. Importantly, Gould considers Matthews’ processes from a reflective scholarly standpoint, analyzing and offering her own thoughts on and interpretations of the implicit philosophical nature of the method used. On the other hand, Kanellopoulos (2007) offers his own experiences of adapting dialogue-based Philosophy for Children method in the context of children improvising within an Orff Schulwerk approach to music education. In particular, he offers a succinct argument for considering the value of combining Philosophy for

Children and children's music making as a source of new knowledge that are well-taken by this study:

In the same way that we are trying to let children enter the realm of artistic creativity through composing and improvising—not allowing their lack of professional expertise to inhibit their effort—we could try to let children begin reflecting on music making, initiating dialogues which address central issues of philosophy of music. Just as children compose or improvise, thus participating in communities of practice which deal directly with the core issues pertaining to music (formation of musical ideas, development of structural relationships, expressiveness, communicative nature of music making), so we could regard children as humans who can directly get involved with issues that pertain to the philosophy of music: What is music, composition, improvisation, silence, experimentation, audience, player? Can improvisation be repeated? Does music express? If yes, what and in what sense? What does listening involve? What is a mistake? What does it mean to think musically? (2007, 123)

Kanellopoulos argues for meeting children where they are at both musically and philosophically, suggesting that children are effective cultural informants and research collaborators capable of engaging the same sorts of philosophical, musical questioning as adult scholars, even as they aren't often given chances to do so. Moreover, in his own philosophical music-making research context, Kanellopoulos indeed examined the philosophical dialogues of children around their own improvisations to answer the very questions outlined in his call to action for considering children as worthwhile collaborators in philosophical research on music. While Kanellopoulos (2007) does not examine cultural significances or cultural models alongside his work in a way that would be considered ethno/musicological, his initial foray into philosophical methods of musical research with children are still worthy of consideration here, despite the age of his study, given that it represents a rare example of philosophical music making.

Need, Purpose, and Guiding Research Questions

In considering the above studies of children's musical lives and cultures and the aforementioned scholarship pertaining to Philosophy for Children that have been focused towards music and the arts, it has become apparent that research considering the philosophical elements of children's musical cultures is lacking. Likewise, literature considering the philosophical benefits of original music making are similarly lacking. Said differently, while there are some intellectual threads woven throughout the various literatures that consider the intersections of children, music, and philosophy, there has not been a thorough or focused study that considers these intersections, let alone one that connects these intersections to considerations of culture that would be described as ethno/musicological. Simultaneously then, though perhaps unsurprisingly, very little attention has been given towards the consideration or development of collaborative, philosophical models for working with children to study their musical cultures, whether they be topically focused on philosophical interests or non-philosophical interests. Thus, the field of ethno/musicology would benefit from probing more thoroughly the unexplored philosophical elements of children's musical cultures and children's practices of understanding and making meaning surrounding music. As well, developing original techniques and refining existing ethno/musicological practices for such research hold the potential for new ethno/musicological praxis in the study of music cultures across culture groups to emerge and enrich the discipline.

As such, the purpose of this study comes into focus and is twofold: (1) to explore and describe the philosophical elements of children's musical lives and musical cultures

that have, so far, gone mostly unexamined in ethno/musicology, and (2) to develop new collaborative, philosophical, and ethno/musicological techniques to utilize alongside children in exploring and describing their own philosophical interests and engagements with music. From this dual purpose, two primary research questions can be extrapolated which will help focus the subsequent chapters considering the intersections of childhood, philosophy, and musical culture. The first question is of a cultural nature: (1) What are children's philosophical interests in or dispositions surrounding music? In answering this question, I will work with children to ascertain what philosophical interests they have regarding music, as well as considering to what extent children display philosophical dispositions or tendencies towards engaging with music as a form of culture. Said differently, we need to know both if and how children engage with music in a philosophically meaningful way, as well as what their specific philosophical interests in or ways of engaging with music are. The second question is of a methodological nature: (2) What collaborative strategies can ethno/musicologists and philosophers use alongside children to better understand and describe the philosophical elements of music and musical culture in their lives? This question focuses our attention towards the development and consideration of new techniques for the field of ethno/musicology in working with young people towards generating new ways of obtaining previously unexplored cultural knowledge about music and philosophy. Thus, the findings of this research will consider both new contributions to ethno/musicological insight on children's musical cultures with regard to the philosophical as well as new contributions to ethno/musicological method and practices.

As such, this research project is my effort at working with children to devise some strategies and processes towards the pursuit of collaborative philosophical inquiry around musical culture. Moreover, beyond answering such questions within children's musical culture, this project is simultaneously about the pursuit of developing strategies to create opportunities for intellectual and ethno/musicological research collaboration with communities of children. As described above, I have turned to the field of philosophy, specifically the Philosophy for Children movement (Mohr Lone and Burroughs 2016), where significant strides in helping young people to develop just these types of intellectual curiosity and critical and creative thinking skills have been made in the past several decades, whereas ethno/musicology has only more recently begun to tackle formative and collaborative models of working with children. (Emberly 2014; Emberly and Davhula 2019). In doing so, I aim to help young people develop intellectual and musical freedom (Woodford 2016) by helping them to develop tools to investigate the historical, intellectual, sociocultural, and affective (Gill 2017) contexts of music, using skills developed through a community-based philosophy program in public schools.

Beyond continuing to explore children as a distinctive and understudied population in ethno/musicology, it is likewise my hope that by creating strategies and processes that foster children's philosophical intelligence around, or disposition toward, music, that I can help to remove the metaphorical blinders implied by Woodford (2016) around critical musical intelligence that ultimately limits one's understandings and experiences of music in their lives, especially the lives of children. Said another way, by finding creative and clever ways to support children (and adults) in playing the "why"

game that began this chapter in musical settings, alongside other child-driven philosophical exercises and games with musical foci, it is my hope that this work will help people to develop the types of intellectual and musical freedom alluded to by Woodford (2016) and Emberly and Davhula (2019). Moreover, as the methods of this research are collaborative, child-centered, and participant-driven, it is likewise my aim to expand the field of ethno/musicology by offering new examples of research that question the assumed roles and power dynamics between adult/child and researcher/subject towards more ethical, fulfilling, and informative modes of research in ethno/musicology, philosophy, and music education.

Overview of Chapters

The goal of this introduction has been to introduce the relevant scholarly literature, disciplinary histories, and ethno/musicological and philosophical framings to foreground the forthcoming original, collaborative research on the philosophical elements of children's musical cultures. In doing so, I have surveyed the scope of ethno/musicological literature pertaining to children's musical cultures, as well as the relevant studies within Philosophy for Children that have shaped this study and which situate it interdisciplinarily in these fields, with focus on the potential contributions of this research to the field of ethno/musicology for the purposes of my PhD dissertation. As such, I have outlined the dual purpose and research questions, which will be explored and answered in the forthcoming chapters.

Chapter 2 considers the method and context of this project in earnest. I first review the ethnographic method of with focus on strategies of participant-observation and ethnographic description (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011) and the core of

ethno/musicological techniques for considering, analyzing, and describing music and culture specifically (Barz and Cooley 2008; Campbell 2010, Gill 2017). Following that, I likewise describe the community of philosophical inquiry (CPI) model drawn from Philosophy for Children (Mohr Lone and Burroughs 2016) that I have adapted to form an original, collaborative, philosophical, and ethno/musicological research method for working with children to consider the philosophical components of their musical culture and lives. Subsequently, I offer necessary descriptions of the contexts of this research, describing Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School, Seattle Public Schools, the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO), and the University of Washington before concluding with an overview of my fieldwork completed there over the course four months in 2024.

Following the description of the method and context, Chapter 3, entitled “Philosophizing about Music: Musical Ontology and Beauty in Children’s Musical Cultures,” considers two ethnographic vignettes that inform the field of ethno/musicology with regard to children’s interests and dispositions toward the philosophy of music. First, I describe a fourth-grade session where children used the community of philosophical inquiry model to consider the ontology of music (Bohlman 1999) after first viewing a recording of John Cage’s live performance of *Water Walk* (1959) on the 1960 television game show *I’ve Got a Secret*. Within this, I explore the various paradigms of ontology considered by the children through the work of ethno/musicologist Phillip Bohlman (1999), and also reflect on the process of philosophical inquiry about music with children. Second, I describe a session with children in fourth-and-fifth-grade where they played an original philosophical game

called, “Is It Beautiful?” I highlight their discussion of beauty and aesthetics surrounding a video recording of Patti LaBelle’s live performance of “The ABC Song” on the children’s television show *Sesame Street* in 1999. In doing so, I consider the children’s discussions of what they found to be some of the important factors in determining what one’s aesthetic experience of beauty and music is, and reflect on the larger issues of aesthetic development in children’s lives (Eaude 2023; Mohr Lone 2024). Within these two vignettes, the most prominent themes explored as representative of children’s philosophical interests in music were musical ontology (Bohlman 1999) and experiences of music and beauty (Eaude 2023; Mohr Lone 2024).

Shifting from thinking and talking about music towards making and performing music, Chapter 4, entitled “Affect, Acoustemology, and the Philosophical Music Making,” considers two ethnographic vignettes that inform the field of ethno/musicology with regard to music making as a site for collaborative philosophizing and philosophically-focused creation and performance of music. Chapter 4 considers what can be learned about the philosophical nature of children’s musical cultures through music making as well as what can be learned about music making as a modality for philosophizing about music. First, I describe a third-grade session wherein children composed their own original pieces with graphic notation in response to a recorded video of Cathy Berberian’s live performance of her composition *Stripsody* (1966). In particular, I highlight two children’s compositions entitled “Pain” and “Animals” to highlight the ways that children engage embodied knowledges like affect (Gill 2017) and acoustemology (Feld 2015) as modalities of understanding and philosophizing about music and within music making. Second, I describe a session with Ms. Terry’s

fifth-grade class where children played the original musical game “What’s the Vibe?” to consider their own playlist as well as the original group compositions that this game inspired using their own understanding of “vibe.” Having described children’s use of affect and acoustemology as modalities of understanding and relating music, I examine children’s intentional use of affective and acoustemological practices towards communicating what they consider the “important parts” of music to be in creation and performance. Finally, I reflect briefly on music making a site of unexplored potential for philosophical inquiry.

Finally, Chapter 5 offers conclusions regarding the four major themes that surfaced during this study (musical ontology, beauty and music, affect, and acoustemology) as well as reflections on the methodological value of collaborative philosophical research with children for the field of ethno/musicology as a whole that are demonstrated in this study. After a brief review of the purpose and research questions guiding this work, I offer summative points on the new cultural insights into the musical lives of children that this study has considered as well as the insights gained regarding the methodological value of my original adaptation of the Philosophy for Children community of philosophical inquiry model toward collaborative ethno/musicological research with children as a method of research. Finally, I revisit the context of this project to consider its limitations as well as potential extensions or adaptations for further considerations, such as the potential that music has a catalyst for social and moral philosophy, rather than only the philosophy of music.

Chapter 2

Method and Context

Prelude: Children Asking Questions about Research

“Does anyone have any questions?” I had just finished going through the assent form for my project with Ms. Hamilton’s second-grade class. Immediately, many children asked questions about my experiences at the University of Washington. They wanted to know what a PhD requires and doesn’t require, and what it means for me to be both a student and a teacher at the same time. These questions were similar to those I had received in other classes, and seemed to follow the general trends of curiosity the children had about adult-student life and college as a whole. These were concepts with which most were already familiar it seemed, albeit not always in a detailed way. Likewise, these questions showed the children’s continued interest in connecting to me on a more personal, human level and getting to know me and the facets of my life that I was sharing through this project that they could relate to: being a student, having some sort of a responsibility or relationship to schooling, and the local institutions in our community that we are variously connected to like the University of Washington. I enjoyed the continued opportunity to share and get to know the children, and I readily answered them with the same respectful, good-natured candidness with which I tried to approach all of the children’s questions about my life. Well, I answered as best as I could alongside the need to remain succinct for the sake of time (an ongoing tension when working with young people whose time and lives are often structured even further beyond their control than our own is sometimes as adult researchers.) However, as the children were wont to do, I was immediately reminded that they can and will surprise me

with the depths of their considerations, even when I think I'm prepared and even when it may not be directly related to philosophizing about music within a class session.

"What if our parents force us to participate?" Jangmi asked suddenly. "Hmm... what do you mean?" I clarified. I had been steadfast in my insistence throughout my research permissions processes and during my explanation of the project to the children that participation in the study required "two yeses: one from you [assent] and one from your family [consent]." I had assumed that the most likely discordance, if any, between the two would be children who wanted to participate but who did not (or could not) return a signed consent form from their guardians. I had not really considered that a child's family would instead try to force them to participate when they didn't want to do so. Jangmi expanded upon her question, asking, "What happens if our parents say 'yes' but we say 'no'? Do we still have to be part of the study?" to which I responded, "If your parents say 'yes' but you say 'no,' then we wouldn't have two yeses, and you wouldn't be part of the study. At the end of the day, it's up to me whose voices and ideas I choose to include, and if you don't want to be included, then I won't include you. No one can be forced to participate in this study."

She nodded, and I continued with the rest of the children's questions before proceeding with my session for the day. However, Jangmi's question struck a chord with me. In my preparations for fieldwork, I had reviewed the university's "Consent" overview webpage for researchers prior to submitting the materials for my study for review by the University of Washington institutional Review Board (IRB). This webpage stated that child assent may not be necessary, or could even be overridden when "the research has

the potential of directly benefiting the child and the IRB has approved the researcher's plan to allow the parent(s)/guardian(s) decision about the child's participation to override the child's wishes. In this case, it may be inappropriate to seek assent because the child's wishes will not inform the decision."⁷ That is, in the event that the adult researchers, the adult staff of the University of Washington IRB, and the adult guardians of the children all agree that the benefits of participation outweigh any risks they have identified for the children in question, they may choose to disregard the wishes of that child. Not only that, should researchers have ethical concerns over this, they can rest assured that the child's wishes would *not inform the decision*. To be frank, I found this problematic as a humanist and a teacher, which is why I had insisted upon an assent process for all of the children in my study in an effort to honor their wishes and voices against the grain of advice provided by my institution.⁸

While Jangmi and her family both ultimately did decide to participate (hence the inclusion of her example here), it was in that very moment, at the very onset of my project, that the stakes for really hearing and honoring children's voices became clear to me. For even as I knew that any of the children who chose not to participate in my study would continue to participate in philosophy sessions, and in fact, would participate in the very sessions that I would be recording for the purposes of my project, I also knew that honoring their decisions around participation and inclusion in my research project was crucial. That is, I knew that for the purposes of community-centered, collaborative

⁷ For the "Consent" web page of the University of Washington Office of Research, Human Subjects Division, see: <https://www.washington.edu/research/hsd/guidance/consent/#6e>

⁸ Note that the University of Washington Institutional Review Board did review and approve all of the assent materials used for this research.

research with children (Emberly 2014; Cantarelli Vita 2021), honoring and validating their wishes as a lesson in applied ethics in research methodology was a value that superseded any benefits participation in this ethno/musicological study might have held for them, and certainly superseded any benefits I might receive as the researcher through their enforced participation.

Scope of Research

Formal data collection at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School spanned four months (March 2024–June 2024), resulting in approximately twenty-five (25) hours of recorded audio of participant-observation within philosophy sessions, three-and-a-half (3.5) hours of audio field note recordings (or recordings of my reflections, thoughts, ideas, and specific highlighted moments or quotes from a given session), eighty-seven (87) photographs (all environmental or material culture), as well as material culture in the form of original scores produced by children across seven (7) different classrooms (approximately 175 children total). The classes of children with whom I worked ranged in grade level from Kindergarten (approximately 4–5 years old) to Fifth grade (approximately 10–11 years old). Some classes met only once a month, some met once every two weeks, and some met weekly for sessions ranging in length from 30–60 minutes.⁹ Formal data collection was limited to my time in philosophy sessions with children across the fourth months; any quotations, descriptions of sessions, or attributions to specific, pseudonymous individuals contained in this dissertation are from the period of formal data collection and the recordings or notes listed above. That being said, my prior and ongoing work with the children in this project have likewise influenced

⁹ See Appendix I for Weekly Schedule.

my understanding and consideration of this fieldwork as a whole, which will be reflected accordingly in the subsequent chapters.

Ethnographic Method

This research is informed by field noting, participant-observation, and ethnographic writing practices drawn from the core of strategies of ethnographic research (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011). Indeed, while I preferred to create audio recordings of my observations and insights from daily sessions to comprise my field notes, regular reflection on the daily ongoings of this work were critical to both the thick description and the identification of themes found in the subsequent descriptions of musical philosophy with children. After each session (often in the spare moments between sessions while my thoughts were fresh), I would record myself using the voice note function on my iPhone 12 mini to create audio, ethnographic field notes detailing the relevant details and happenings in a session, specific points or moments to return to in the recording of the session that were fresh in my memory, and reflections on developing connections or themes throughout fieldwork. These recordings would likewise sometimes build on previous sessions, especially when the same prompt or game was used.

The scope of my participant-observation was primarily focused on time spent as a facilitating teacher with children at a public school, and thus was similar in some ways to ethnographic case studies completed within music education (Marsh 2008; Campbell 2010; Dahm 2023). However, as discussed in Chapter 1, Marsh's (2008) points are well-taken that participant observation is always a fraught term with regard to working

with children. While techniques of engagement drawn from participant observation like letting children lead discussions and letting them make agentic decisions about the very structure of our sessions was used, and I was often floating around the room participating in small group discussions, I was nevertheless in a position of power as an adult in the room. My engagement with children often further expanded into shared community events and establishments, and this ethnography is informed by time spent in shared community with children, even as these moments are not explicitly described. While thick descriptions will primarily focus on discussions and music making during philosophy sessions, my previous and ongoing relationships with the children and our shared community offer enrichment to this work. All of which will be described using the practice of ethnographic writing, or writing that seeks to recreate written accounts of the necessary events. This ethnographic writing (as has already been demonstrated) is similarly performative and reflexive (Kisliuk 2004; Shelemay 2008; Wong 2008, 2015, 2019) in that it attempts not only to recreate an account of the events of a session, but to do so by drawing on creative, non-traditional, feelings-laden, and at times colloquial language and writing style alongside critical self-reflection of myself in the research process and radical self-inclusion of aspects of myself when relevant, as scholarly praxis.

Musical Ethnography

This research is indebted to the works of many ethno/musicologists whose vision of the field and its potential shaped the final form of this project. In particular, ethno/musicological research that focuses on application of the ethnographic method

towards musical lives and cultures as an approach to musical scholarship (Barz and Cooley 2008) has been formative to my own mixed methods. More specifically, scholars focusing on ethnographic reflexivity and performativity (Kisliuk 2008; Shelemay 2008; Wong 2008 and 2015) in both music research and documentation were instrumental in considering how to describe my sessions, as discussed above. One branch of topical foci that informed both my approach to the field and my orientation towards musical ethnography was gender, queerness, and queer and feminist praxes in and out of the field. (Hayes 2010; Koskoff 2014; Hankins 2014 and 2015; Sunardi 2015; Barz and Cheng 2020; Kohfeld 2021) Another topical branch of the field of ethno/musicology that informed my practices were affect (Feld [1982] 2012; Hahn 2007; Gill 2017; Wong 2019) and, relatedly, studies of larger sonic structures and sonic ways of structuring one's physical world and understandings (Feld 2015). This study's techniques were also designed in line with scholarship working towards mutually beneficial, ethnographic musical research with children (Emberly 2009 and 2014; Emberly and Davhula 2019; Cassio Igari, Cantarelli Vita, Flesher, Armstrong, Gestsson, and Campbell 2020; Dahm, Flesher, Cantarelli Vita, and Campbell 2022). Finally, recent local fieldwork of a musically ethnographic nature in Seattle Public Schools (Cantarelli Vita 2021; Dahm 2023) have contributed significantly to the research strategies described in the forthcoming chapters around children's philosophical engagement with music.

To offer a more descriptive explanation of the strategies drawn from these scholars that comprise the ethno/musicological method of this study, this research uses a collaborative approach to musical ethnography (Emberly 2009 and 2014) that centers the voices, ideas, and feelings of the children with whom I worked. It employs thick

descriptions of musical settings, musical discussions, musical games, composition sessions, and live performances and improvisations or “utterances” (Campbell 2010) that occurred within the framework of collaborative philosophizing sessions with children, with a keen focus towards feminist and community-centered techniques. These thick descriptions were drawn from recorded sessions and field notes, as well as material culture of children. Importantly, this research is similarly reflexive and performative (Kisliuk 2008; Shelemay 2008; Wong 2008 and 2015), situating myself as a music researcher and collaborator endeavoring to use writing creatively as a modality to recreate the experiences I had and understandings I gained during my fieldwork with self-awareness, rather than simply describing them in a self-effacing way. This is done through writing that intentionally breaks with conventions of formality and impersonality in academic writing, instead striving towards a more personal (and therefore affectively-charged) tone. Finally, while much of this work focuses on the philosophical and musical ideas and inquiries explored by children, this research is likewise informed by the feelings and interpersonal, affective aspects that doing collaborative, ethnographic, and philosophical research with children often entails. This work entailed audio recording of musical descriptions, processes, and performances, and likewise entailed background musical research on topics relevant to both the interests and musical examples brought into sessions by the children, as well as background musical research for my own planning purposes. It involved listening and transcription as primary methods of analysis. While another core method used to engage children during fieldwork was informed by the community of philosophical inquiry (CPI) model drawn from Philosophy for Children discussed subsequently, the primary method of

analysis of the findings remains within the scope ethno/musicological purview. Hence, the findings provide new ethno/musicological strategies for considering the intersections of children's philosophical and musical cultures as well as original primary research about the specific culture of the children with whom I worked in Seattle, WA.

Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) Model

As discussed by Mohr Lone and Burroughs in *Philosophy in Education: Questioning and Dialogue in Schools* (2016, 57), the typical (but flexible) structure of a session in a community of philosophical inquiry (CPI) is comprised of five (5) main parts: (1) a prompt of some sort, (2) time for reflection and consideration, (3) the emergence of questions the prompt has raised, (4) discussion, and (5) some sort of closure. While Mohr Lone and Burroughs do not include it in their list, in practice the prompt can be and often is preceded by a short warm-up or situating of the prompt to come. This general structure undergirded many of the sessions that I led in the scope of my fieldwork. As such, this core method and sequence of the philosophy sessions with young people utilized in this research further enrich the mixed methods of this study.

A typical session within my fieldwork proceeded as follows: after a short warm-up or necessary situating of the prompt, the children were presented with a prompt of some sort with the aim of stimulating philosophical interest and inquiry surrounding music and sound. While I as the facilitating teacher had much control over the prompts used, in keeping with a learner-centered model (as described in Chapter 1), the prompts were typically ones that emanated from or had been inspired by the children prior to our current session. After listening, reading, watching, playing, or performing the prompt,

the children were given time for reflection, often in the form of small-group discussions of what they found interesting, puzzling, or noteworthy about the prompt. During this time, the children were especially encouraged to shape their thoughts into questions that were ideally of a generative, philosophical nature. The children in the community of philosophical inquiry were encouraged to ask open-ended questions that could prompt many different answers or types of responses, rather than questions that would be satisfied by factual or definitive answers alone that would not generate as much in-depth discussion.

After the children had time to reflect on the prompt and discuss it informally, the community of philosophical inquiry refocused towards any questions that had emerged or shaped around their reflections on the prompt. This portion of a session was usually a whole-group activity. Depending on the questions that emerged, one or several questions were chosen, often using a fair, democratic process like secret ballot voting, to form the basis of discussion, which often remained whole-group. At this point, the children engaged in either a self-directed or facilitated discussion of the question(s) and the prompt (depending on their self-moderating capabilities), following the thread of ideas wherever their peers took the conversation in good faith (that is, without intentionally trying to get the session off track). Notably, this portion of our sessions was by far the most diverse and flexible. Beyond the children themselves controlling the flow of conversation, the line of inquiry, and the topical themes and examples, this section was always adaptable to the needs and desires of the children. For example, if they wished to revert to small groups to stimulate more conversation or if they exhausted one question sooner than expected and wanted to move on to another, these things would

happen. Finally, after discussion and/or time were exhausted, some form of closing exercise was engaged. This was often a summation of the main areas of discussion, leaving the group with further questions, reminding them of the recommendations that others had generated in the discussion, or even just time to chat further with someone nearby.

In my own adaptation of this process towards musical foci, often this process included later reconsiderations of the prompts after the initial presentation, at the request of children themselves. Similarly, when the prompt itself was a game or an exercise that further structured a session, the period of reflection and emergence of questions often followed an elongated or unfolding presentation of the prompt, with lots of smaller, ongoing periods of reflection and discussion throughout the session rather than one primary one. Likewise, if students were exploring music making or composition, the shape of the session would transform, with the primary discussion period often focused on brainstorming and musical and sonic exploration, with discussion at the end of the session after performances (and often shorter in nature). Furthermore, more time was given to exploring sound and symbol during the period of small group discussion. Finally, since some prompts or topics often required longer periods of engagement (and/or since participants themselves often wish to return to a topic), sometimes this process was expedited or revisited depending on previous familiarity with a given topic or prompt.

Context: Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO)

The Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization, or PLATO, is a Washington State 501(c)(3) non-profit organization with national and international presence whose mission is “to nurture young people’s curiosity, critical thinking, and desire to explore big questions, through philosophy and ethics programs for children, educators, and families.”¹⁰ (PLATO 2024) PLATO’s inception began with the Northwest Center for Philosophy for Children, founded in Seattle, Washington in 1996 by Dr. Jana Mohr Lone. This Center became affiliated with the University of Washington Department of Philosophy in 1997 and eventually became the University of Washington Center for Philosophy for Children, which was where I first began learning about Philosophy for Children. In 2010, the Squire Family Foundation (SFF), the Center for Philosophy for Children, and the American Philosophical Association (APA) worked together to found PLATO within the APA’s Pre-College Instruction in Philosophy working group, until it became its own 501(c)(3) non-profit organization incorporated in Washington State in 2012. Recognizing similar goals and opportunities for expansion and sustainability, the University of Washington Center for Philosophy for Children and PLATO merged into a single organization in 2022.¹¹ (PLATO 2024)

In terms of programs, PLATO offers many opportunities for philosophical engagement for members of the public of all ages, K-12 children, educators, and scholars alike. Some of these include: multiple Philosophy in Schools initiatives that serve public and private K-12 students across the United States, online philosophy

¹⁰ See “Our Mission” on the web page “Why PLATO?” here: <https://www.plato-philosophy.org/why-plato/>

¹¹See “PLATO’S History” on the PLATO website here: <https://www.plato-philosophy.org/plato-history/>

classes for young people across the globe, the Washington State High School and Middle School Ethics Bowls and the new High School Ethics Open, a biennial conference for folks doing Philosophy for Children work, multiple peer-reviewed publications, a public blog, collegiate courses for undergraduate and graduate students, and several types of classes and workshops for educators, among other growing and developing work.¹² (PLATO 2024) My own study of Philosophy for Children began with graduate courses at the University of Washington in “Philosophy for Children” and “Philosophy in Schools,” within the UW Center for Philosophy for Children. While these courses initially began as part of my University of Washington Graduate Certificate in Ethics, my own burgeoning interest and passion for philosophy with young people ultimately led me to complete the Center’s Certificate of Mastery in Philosophy for Children in 2021.

In addition to my own study, PLATO has provided many opportunities for me in terms of practice and employment. My own facilitation of philosophy sessions for children began in 2021 when Dr. Jana Mohr Lone invited me to co-lead two fourth grade classes at a local Seattle elementary school that were having Zoom sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, I also led weekly, online Zoom philosophy sessions for children in the U.S. and abroad for multiple weekly programs lasting eight-weeks each in 2021–2022 before settling into my current role as the Philosopher-in-Residence at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School for the 2022–2023 school year and beyond. An official Community Partner of SPS, PLATO has established Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) for the district and each school with a

¹²For more information, see: <https://www.plato-philosophy.org/>

Philosopher-in-Residence, who likewise attends SPS Community Partner meetings. Additionally, I have been invited to be a judge and moderator for the Washington State High School Ethics Bowl since 2022 and also for the Washington State Middle School Ethics Bowl in 2024 and 2025. Finally, while it falls outside the realm of PLATO's programming, I am further indebted to PLATO for fostering the connections with other graduate students and philosophers working with young people that helped facilitate the opportunity for me to teach for the University of Washington Robinson Center for Young Scholars' Summer Stretch program, for which I have co-taught a four-day-a-week, four-week-long summer course on the Philosophy of Sci-Fi and Fantasy for children between the ages of approximately 12–16 since 2023. As such, my own experiences, training, and expertise in the community of philosophical inquiry model of Philosophy for Children has largely been co-developed alongside my growing role and connections within PLATO.

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) and the Department of Liberatory Education

Seattle Public Schools (SPS) comprises 104 schools serving students in grades Pre-K through Grade 12. As the biggest school system in Washington state, SPS serves a population of approximately 49,226 students (23,283 of those students being in grades K-5) and employs 6,486 staff members across schools. The majority of students in the district identify as people of color, with 56% of students identifying as something other than "white." Moreover, 159 different countries of origin and 150 native languages or dialects are represented across the families served by SPS.¹³ (Seattle Public Schools

¹³ See the SPS "About" page: <https://www.seattleschools.org/about/>

2024) Recognizing both the disparities and strengths contained within this diversity of students, the SPS strategic plan states,

At Seattle Public Schools, we are working to dramatically improve academic and life outcomes for Students of Color by disrupting the legacies of racism in our educational system. [...] This work is about changing broken systems and undoing legacies of racism in public education. By actively becoming an anti-racist educational system – and ensuring students furthest away from educational justice thrive – conditions in Seattle Public Schools will improve for all.¹⁴

Focusing especially on African-American boys and teens, this strategic plan works towards an anti-racist educational system that undergirds much of the work I have seen throughout SPS in my many interactions with it, both for the purposes of this project and otherwise. Indeed, even my own application to SPS Research Review for the purposes of getting approval to do fieldwork within the district required that I as a researcher demonstrate how my projects could support the SPS strategic plan and work towards education equity for students of color who comprise the majority of SPS students.

Along these same lines, the SPS Department of Liberatory Education has also been a significant source of inspiration and support to me as an SPS Community Partner in my role as a Philosopher-in-Residence at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School. This influence was because of the significant overlap in goals and the group meetings I participated in with the Department of Liberatory Education as an SPS Community Partner. As described in an interview with three administrators within the SPS Department of Liberatory Education, “The word *liberate* means set someone free from a situation, especially imprisonment or slavery, in which their liberty is severely restricted. It can also mean releasing someone from a situation that limits freedom of

¹⁴ See the SPS “Strategic Plan”: <https://www.seattleschools.org/about/strategic-plan/>

thought or behavior.”¹⁵ Expanding on this idea, they likewise state that, “The team believes we all have a moral and ethical obligation to teach our children in a way that liberates their minds, bodies, and spirits.” (Seattle Public Schools 2024, emphasis original). As such, Philosophy for Children as a whole and this project overlapped significantly with these goals. That is, considering moral and ethical ways to engage children, engaging children themselves in moral and ethical considerations, working toward learner-driven learning (where children both drive the content and instruction through self-directed participation), fostering free thought and expression among children (especially around pre-established systems of thinking and learning that may or may not work against education equity and justice for children), and working to always remember children as whole people are goals implicit in Philosophy for Children, as described above, as well as SPS.

Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School

Fieldwork for this project was conducted at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School,¹⁶ a public school in SPS located on Duwamish land that is now known as Seattle, Washington. Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School is a culturally and linguistically diverse school with a robust academic report card across its multiple educational programs. For example, approximately 20% of the general education students are multilingual learners, with fifteen languages represented across the school (predominantly English, Somali, Vietnamese, and Spanish). Additionally, the school

¹⁵ See the SPS “Liberatory Education” page: <https://www.seattleschools.org/news/liberatory-education/>

¹⁶ The actual names of the school and all participants have been changed to protect anonymity. That being said, I have tried to ensure that all pseudonyms reflect the cultural heritage of the original names that they are meant to represent. That is, identity markers such as gender and ethnicity apparent in children’s names were preserved when choosing pseudonyms; however, if a child’s name had additional semantic meaning (like the name “Joy,” for example), those markers were not preserved to protect individual identity.

serves the local and historically black neighborhood located in South Seattle, as well as surrounding neighborhoods and districts depending on students' needs, with most students in the general education program identifying as African American, African, Asian, or Hispanic.¹⁷ Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School students are likewise academically diverse, as the school supports both a special education program for students with intensive needs and a program for students who are enrolled in the gifted education program.¹⁸ The majority of the classes with whom I worked were classes in the general education stream, with a few classes falling within the program for gifted students.

Comprised of approximately 470 children and forty-five teachers, Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School is also, in my experience as an educator, one of the most holistic and progressive public schools at which I have had the privilege to work. In addition to the Philosopher-in-Residence program coordinated through PLATO, the school boasts a robust Social Emotional Learning curriculum across all classes and grades, as well as several other enrichment programs, such as the Speak with Purpose public speaking program, the Changemakers program that highlights local individuals who have changed their communities for the better, and mindfulness programs designed for children in which child-focused practitioners push into classrooms to

¹⁷ This language is taken from publicly-available documents produced by Washington's Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), Seattle Public Schools (SPS) and/or Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School staff themselves (e.g., the OSPI Washington State Report Card for the School, the Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP), the Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School website, etc.) In the interest of anonymity, these documents will not be given full citations, but can be made available to committee members upon request.

¹⁸ The program for gifted education, also referred to as the "Highly Capable Cohort," "HCC," or "HC program," was a district-wide, school-specific program in Seattle Public Schools. Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School operated as one of two SPS "HCC" elementary schools. As of the 2023–2024 school year, the HC program as a whole was being sunsetted by the district. Those in HCCs will finish the program, but new cohorts will not be formed.

engage in meditative and reflective exercises, to name just a few. All of this is perhaps best summed up in the school's motto: "At [Dorothy Hollingsworth], We are Resilient, Empathetic, Accountable, Lifelong Learners (REAL)." Moreover, the school describes its goals for education as follows:

We embrace the responsibility of closing the opportunity gap so that our children will create a more just world. We are focused not just on teaching reading, writing, and math, but on preparing students to be informed and active citizens. By the end of Fifth Grade, we want students to have mastered grade level standards and to be empathetic, have strong problem-solving skills and take responsibility for their actions, be comfortable working with people from different backgrounds, understand their identity and how this influences ways in which they see the world, and to have developed a strong voice to speak out when they see injustices in the world.¹⁹

As such, Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School presents a socially responsible and liberatory model of education that aims to empower children, especially those from historically underserved communities who make up the majority of its general education population and the neighborhood in which the school resides. This is in line with the previously described SPS strategic plan and Department of Liberatory Education, and as such, this research situated in the school was aligned with these goals.

In my capacity as the Philosopher-in-Residence, I worked with seven classrooms in Kindergarten, Second, Third, Fourth, Fourth-and-Fifth (mixed), and Fifth grades. While the majority of my classes skewed towards upper grades (with five out of seven classes being third grade and above), many of these classes were comprised of children that had previously had philosophy in an earlier grade. That is, while formal data collection in these classes only lasted four months, this period occurred during my

¹⁹ As above, this information is from the Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School Continuous School Improvement Plan (CSIP).

second year as the Philosopher-in-Residence at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School.²⁰ Thus, while some participants in this project were new to me for the 2023–2024 school year, many of the participants in this project were children I had met with regularly since October 2022, across grade levels and classrooms. Likewise, I was, and remain, an active and engaged member of the school community at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School, a community that encompasses a much broader range of activities and time spent with the children and their teachers at the school than just during philosophy sessions. Many of these experiences, such as participating in school-wide field day, assisting in the Fifth-Grade Pickle Parade, sitting in on social justice and social-emotional learning lessons with the school counselor before my own sessions, attending cultural performances led by community groups, and various other school initiatives that overlap and intersect into the classrooms of which I am a part.

Even further, my relationships with the children that will be illustrated here were also deepened through shared community connections, such as finding our families next to each other at the bowling alley or having the children run up to me when I perform at local park festivals like Honkfest West to say, “Hey Mr. Jack!,” or to introduce me to loved ones: “Dad, this is ‘The Philosopher!’” All of this is to say, there will be many moments throughout this dissertation where greater depth or context (especially personal, sociocultural, and emotional contexts) will be given that exemplifies this level of depth in my engagement with my local fieldwork community, despite the fact that specific quotes, examples from sessions, and vignettes illustrating children’s ideas

²⁰ The 2023–2024 school year was the sixth year of the Philosopher-in-Residence program at the school as a whole.

about the intersections of music and philosophy will draw their origin only from the four-month period of formal data collection. For a list of child participants who are quoted directly in this study broken down by pseudonym, classroom, grade, and chapter(s) in which they appear, see Table 2.1 below.

Pseudonym	Classroom	Grade	Chapter(s) in which they appear
Jangmi	Ms. Hamilton	Second Grade	2
Danny	Ms. Martino	Fourth Grade	3
Harmony	Ms. Martino	Fourth Grade	3
Koa	Ms. Martino	Fourth Grade	3
James	Ms. Martino	Fourth Grade	3
Morgan	Ms. Martino	Fourth Grade	3
Ian	Ms. Martino	Fourth Grade	3
Sahlu	Ms. Martino	Fourth Grade	3
Lexi	Ms. Martino	Fourth Grade	3
Howard	Ms. Todd	Fourth Grade	3
Gertie	Ms. Todd	Fifth Grade	3
Amy	Ms. Thompson	Third Grade	4
Becky	Ms. Thompson	Third Grade	4
Aubrey	Ms. Thompson	Third Grade	4
Margaret	Ms. Terry	Fifth Grade	4
Marion	Ms. Terry	Fifth Grade	4
David	Ms. Terry	Fifth Grade	4
Wendy	Ms. Terry	Fifth Grade	4
Chris	Ms. Terry	Fifth Grade	4
Destiny	Ms. Terry	Fifth Grade	4
Amelia	Ms. Terry	Fifth Grade	4
Sally	Ms. Terry	Fifth Grade	4

Table 2.1: Child Participants Quoted in this Study

Positionality

Here I offer a brief statement of positionality, in an effort to make sure that I am also given thorough description in this work. Moreover, I offer this statement to ensure that as many of the labels and identities that I embody and that matter to me are represented here as can be, especially when they may not otherwise be described within the ethnographic vignettes that will follow in Chapters 3 and 4. Furthermore, given that the children with whom I work have gotten the chance to know me well over the past six months to three years that I have been working with them, I wanted to offer a more descriptive statement about myself for readers to further understand and contextualize my positionality within this study.

Jack Flesher (he/they) is a fat, able-bodied, spiritual, queer, white settler living on the lands of the Coast Salish people that are now known as Seattle, Washington. Having grown up in, lived in, and worked in Appalachia as a working class person for the first 26 of his 34 years, “Appalachian” is a cultural identity that remains strong for Jack, despite now living in the U.S. Pacific Northwest. A passionate and creative person, Jack identifies strongly with the professional identities of “teacher,” “scholar,” “musician,” and “humanist” and is proud to be part of the first generation in his family to complete a collegiate degree, and the first to undertake a doctoral degree. Additionally, activism remains an important aspect of life for Jack, whether it is working towards educational equity in his various classrooms, making public protest art and music with friends, or marching in the street alongside his community to support the rights of women and queer people that are sadly being rolled back every day in the U.S. In his

free time, Jack enjoys being in nature, getting his hands dirty with clay or cooking, and working to expand his eclectic earring collection (a favorite talking point for many of the children in his classes.)

Final Reflections

In sum, this chapter has highlighted the specific methods that will inform the practices of this research. Namely, this dissertation considers original primary source data in the form of ethnographic vignettes drawn from discussions about music and music making from participant observation, field notes, audio recordings, and thick description of sessions that occurred throughout the fourth month period of fieldwork. Within this, I have adapted the community of philosophical inquiry model (Mohr Lone and Burroughs 2016) of Philosophy for Children towards an ethno/musicological research process that is both collaborative and philosophical in nature. That is, children in this study were collaborators and co-researchers to the extent that the process of community-based philosophical inquiry used to explore the philosophical components of the children's musical culture at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School informed the questions that were asked that defined the themes of this research. Likewise, these sessions were designed following the demonstrated interests of children. Moreover, given that this model is learner-centered, the children also helped determine the method to the extent that they had considerable agency to direct our sessions together. Of course, this is not to undermine the power position I held as the adult researcher and philosopher-in-residence in designing the sessions, even based on children's interests, requests, and feedback.

Simultaneously, this chapter has likewise highlighted the context of this research, situating the various actors in the network of the Philosopher-in-Residence program that functioned as my fieldsite. Specifically, the four important layers of context for this research are: 1.) the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization that comprised the philosophical grounding and programmatic framework, 2.) the Seattle Public Schools setting that comprised the backdrop of educational goals and structures that informed and aligned with this study's goal for liberation and mutual benefit for children, 3.) the setting of Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School itself that informs our understanding of the community of children with whom I worked and the culture of the school in which my fieldwork was completed, and 4.) the completion of this research by me, an adult PhD candidate researcher from the University of Washington, a queer ethno/musicologist and teacher, and the philosopher-in-residence at the school before, during, and after the completion of fieldwork. Taken together, this web of communities triangulates the musical culture of the children of Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School within the framework of community-based, collaborative, philosophical ethno/musicological research alongside children.

Chapter 3

Philosophizing about Music: Musical Ontology and Beauty

What is music? What counts as music? What's the difference between "notes" and "sounds"? While seemingly simple in their construction, these types of questions surrounding the nature and metaphysics of music (otherwise known as the ontology of music) often require much discussion to be understood meaningfully. Indeed, ethno/musicologists (Bohlman 1999), sociologists (Small 1998), and scholars who focus on the philosophy of music (Goehr 1992; Ridley 2004) have likewise considered these questions in their now seminal works as starting points for robust ethno/musicological and philosophical inquiry around how to define music. Given that these same questions return time and again as the focus of scholars across disciplines, I remain unsurprised that these questions are also often the same starting points for the curious and intelligent children in my weekly philosophy sessions when musical prompts are considered. This has been especially true when the sonic features or performance practices of the prompts used in our sessions fall outside the realm of traditional art music.

Thus, this chapter focuses on the consideration of the philosophical underpinnings of sound, silence, and sonic art, or the philosophy of music, in the lives of children, using two ethnographic vignettes as case studies. The first vignette highlights the session "Water Walk" with children, ages nine to ten, in Ms. Martino's fourth-grade class. A video excerpt of John Cage's performance of his own composition, *Water Walk* (1959), is the prompt for children's experience and philosophical considerations. The

second vignette highlights a game I created called, “Is It Beautiful?”, which was meant to prompt thought about the defining aesthetic details of music and art for children, ages ten to eleven, in Ms. Todd’s mixed fourth- and fifth-grade class. Taken together, these two vignettes and the analyses of the session that accompany them highlight the themes within musical ontology (Bohlman 1999) and the intellectual importance of beauty as an aesthetic experience of music in the lives of children (Eaude 2023; Mohr Lone 2024), both prominent themes that surfaced throughout my fieldwork with children.

These sessions demonstrate children’s interest in and capacity to engage in philosophical discussions of music surrounding ontology and beauty specifically, in much the same ways that the adult scholars of music mentioned above have done, albeit in writing and conference presentations. In doing so, I offer explorations of both what children think music “is”, and “is not” and what children believe comprises beauty as an aesthetic experience of music. I offer insights as to children’s formation of their own ontologies of music’s essence and meaning, especially across a dichotomy of “notes” and “sounds,” and likewise I consider the intersections of music and beauty in children’s consideration of music and art. Finally, through these vignettes that describe my original sessions with children and my analyses thereof, I offer examples in practice of new strategies that ethno/musicologists can use to work towards the exploration and consideration of children’s philosophical beliefs and and culture surrounding music through my musical adaptation of the community of philosophical inquiry model and games towards ethno/musicological inquiry alongside children.

***Water Walk* (1959) by John Cage**

Water Walk (1959)²¹ is a piece of experimental art music by renowned U.S. American composer John Cage (1912–1992). *Water Walk* takes place over the course of approximately three minutes, and it requires the performer to use a stopwatch to time a planned sequence of sonic events precisely per the score. While the piece uses some traditional instruments, like an acoustic grand piano and cymbal, it also calls for several non-traditional instruments, such as a moving electric toy fish, a blender full of ice, and a bathtub full of water. The composer also indicated several uncommon performance practices, among them, asking the performer to prepare themselves a drink one step at a time sporadically throughout the piece and requiring them to periodically release the pressure on an active, pressurized pressure cooker. While the work features several moments of traditional musical practices (such as Cage playing chord progressions on the piano), I believe the piece is best described as a musical exploration of water-related sounds unfolding precisely in time to comprise a singular piece or work of music.

I chose *Water Walk* as a prompt for a philosophy session with children for a myriad of reasons. First, I chose this piece because Cage's work was well-suited as a response to the emerging inquiries and interests of the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School. In its realization through the game show, *Water Walk* seems to ask similar questions to those the children had raised in previous sessions,

²¹ See the following link for the exact video excerpt I used:

<https://youtu.be/gXOIkT1-QWY?si=ThZHVpEIMTIQh4oB>

I likewise sometimes showed a second version at the request of children. They often requested another given the quality of the 1960s video recording. See:

https://youtu.be/FjU6zh-08_I?si=GYETHHTqoPctwHSvI

like “what is art?” and “what is music?” (even in circumstances in which music was not the sole or explicit focus of a class session). Second, this was a piece I had used in the past to generate discussion with former students in grades 3-6 in my position as an elementary and middle school music teacher. From those experiences, I knew that children often enjoyed the silly, “mad scientist” quality the piece held, especially when performed by John Cage himself. In fact, Mohr Lone and Burroughs (2016) similarly suggests a prompt aimed at musical ontology using John Cage’s *4’33”* (1952). However, I chose to focus on *Water Walk* during my sessions, as I felt it offered more tangible anchor points than *4’33”* as a discussion prompt for ethno/musicological engagement. The presence of traditionally musical sounds, traditionally non-musical sounds, and “plot,” or sociocultural interest given the game-show setting of the performance, all offered more starting points for discussion than I have found was the case in the past when I had performed Cage’s *4’33”* instead. Finally, given that Cage’s own compositional philosophy and style is marked by musical works that explore some of these same ontological ideas that surround the nature of art and music and an interest in the intersections of music and philosophy writ large (Mount 2011; Kostelanetz 2023), it seemed that *Water Walk* would create opportunities for children to be able to explore their own interests in defining art and music specifically.

***Water Walk* (1959) with Ms. Martino’s Fourth-Grade Class**

Ms. Martino’s class was my last class of the day on Fridays, and the children always offered a pleasant way to end the week. While most classes had good days and bad days, both in terms of the quality of their behavior and the quality of their

discussions, the mix of children in Ms. Martino's classroom seemed to have an unusually good rapport during most of our sessions. The children's dispositions seemed to be the right balance of silliness and seriousness, and they managed to be focused and on topic the vast majority of the time (even as there were, of course, still moments where reminders to listen to others had to be given.) This was also the consensus among the Instructional Assistants (IAs) in the staff lounge of Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School, a topic I had discussed with several of them just recently when I dropped by the lounge between class sessions. This was one of the reasons why I was especially excited for our session later that day. The other, of course, was the fact that I was set to begin recording sessions for my fieldwork that day, and I was excited to see what ideas and insights the children would share after our last session on Nina Simone's "I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to be Free" had generated such a robust and fulfilling conversation around what "freedom" really meant, how it would feel, and why Nina Simone in particular wanted to feel that way.

On entering the classroom, the children were sitting at their desks, arranged into table groups of about 4–6 children per group. Most children were focused on the projector screen, where a CNN10 news broadcast for children was just finishing up, while others were engaged in silent reading. While most classrooms of children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School gave focus to current events, Ms. Martino's class was especially keen on learning about ongoing social issues. I greeted Ms. Martino who was sitting at the computer by the door. Above her was a large, printed picture of her face with an additional handwritten speech bubble proclaiming: "We strive for Stanford, not standard!" referring to Stanford University as an academic goal for the

future. Not seeking to exclude other institutions, this motto supporting an early-college interest approach was accompanied by many colorful college pennants, from Stanford University as well as several other U.S. colleges, scattered around the walls of the classroom. The classroom theme of striving for higher education also characterized the children's table groups, as each island of desks had a colorful, printed, laminated Washington state college or university logo hanging above it designating their table group names: University of Washington, Western Washington University, Gonzaga University, Central Washington University, and Washington State University. As Ms. Martino gave instructions to clear desks and get ready for philosophy, the children became alive with action. Several children stepped up to greet me at the front of the room on the rainbow-circle patterned carpet. "Hi Mr. Jack—did you watch *Jujutsu Kaisen* yet?!" Danny asked. "What are we doing today?" "Are we watching a video today?"

Viewing of *Water Walk*, Small-Group Discussion, and Generating Questions

"We are!" I replied. "Today we're going to watch a video of a performance of a piece called *Water Walk*." Before beginning the video, I offered the children some context surrounding the performance that I had drawn from the full episode from which our shorter video had been excerpted. I first explained the general format of the game show setting of *I've Got a Secret*: a special guest with a secret would be invited and a panel of judges would try to guess their secret based on what they witnessed or discussed and after quizzing the contestant. Several faces lit up with delight at the mention of secrets, and so I continued my explanation, offering them John Cage's

secret in advance: “[his secret was that] he was a composer, named John Cage, and that he was about to perform one of his own compositions, or a piece of music that he made.” Finally, I offered them more context on John Cage, making a connection to the local Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle, where the composer had taught for two years in his early career.

The video provided much for children’s attention: the composer’s placement of an “electric fish” on the soundboard of the piano, the tinkling of ice cubes dropped into a glass, and a one-time use, a hand-held party popper that blasted paper streamers into the air with a pop when the string was pulled. The first hints of audience laughter began in the recording, especially when the composer squeaked a rubber duck and sprinkled water over a vase of flowers and onto the surface of water in a bathtub. Children watched and listened, with some children showing visual signs of dismay over the audience laughter and others seeming to understand their laughter. When the composer placed his forearms on the piano keyboard to sound a large tone cluster, ten-year-old Harmony’s face contorted, expressing her own concern over the treatment and use of the instrument and showing clear discomfort in what she was hearing versus what she expected to hear.

As the video ended, I instructed the children to “take five” (minutes) to discuss impressions, curiosities, and questions the video inspired with the others at their table. Following the community of philosophical inquiry model that the children were well accustomed to at this point, children began chatting in their small groups, exchanging ideas with peers and beginning to form their ideas into questions that would be useful to

bring to the whole group discussion later. Meanwhile, I circulated from small group to small group. As I walked up to Danny's table, children were discussing the instrumentation of the piece. Danny turned to ask both me and his classmates: "Why did he pick all of those things?" Koa also inquired about the use of kitchen blender: "What was that one thing smoking?" As we discussed Cage's choices of instruments, I offered their table context on what I thought was likely the blender's motor being overexerted, as the ice it was being used to crush had most likely jammed and caused the motor to begin smoking.

As I walked up to another table, I was immediately met with a keen question as James asked, "Is this music?", after which he dropped a book onto his desk, as if to test his hypothesis about the piece which held similar motifs of random or aleatoric sound. He looked at me expectantly as I responded, "Well, it could be music, at least as John Cage, the composer, defined music. What do you all think?" I offered an answer while also refocusing the children on their own definitions of music and their own understanding of John Cage's implied definition, rather than my own. After thinking for a moment, James nodded in the affirmative as his table began debating whether or not a sound needed to be exactly replicable to be music. Indeed, some children at this table were insisting that sounds must have distinguishable characteristics like duration or articulation to be replicable and thus to "count" as music. However, James was resolute in his insistence that sounds with random qualities along these same axes, including the sound he had made by dropping his book on the desk, could be distinguished "by the sounds they make" or their timbre, and thus, that they were replicable and could comprise music.

“What are y’all thinking about? Any questions?” I asked as I turned around, hoping to jumpstart discussion at Morgan’s quiet table behind me. In response to my query as to whether the children had questions, Harmony responded: “Not really. [It’s] just weird.” After another extended pause, I probed again, “So one vote for weird, got it. How about the rest of us?” Morgan followed, “I feel like he [Cage] was doing something for like the background of a movie or something.” “Yeah!” affirmed several others at her table. “That’s a good comparison!” I offered. “Have you all ever seen videos of people making sound effects for movies before everything became digital? It looked a lot like this, actually.” “I think I’ve seen one,” Morgan replied. Not satisfied with this reading of *Water Walk*, Harmony questioned, “But what was he doing? What was the point?” As I left the table discussing this question, I was excited to see that there were already differences of opinion about the piece emerging, as that meant that our discussion would likely be robust and fruitful.

After the children had had time to discuss *Water Walk* in small groups, I refocused the class towards whole-group discussion. “What are the questions that we have?” Ian’s hand shot into the air, and he asked, “Why does [Cage] make strange music with strange instruments?” As I transcribed his question to the projected Microsoft Word document where I was keeping a list of their queries, I called on Harmony next, who stated, “Umm... can I just say that, like... I don’t think it’s music.” As she noticed the faces of her classmates shift at her response to Ian’s question, partially since it was an answer given in lieu of a question of her own and partially because their opinions on the piece seemed to differ, Harmony quickly added, “Is there something specific we’re supposed to say for that...?” Offering clarification, I responded, “No; we’re just taking

questions right now.” Refocusing her point towards a possible question, I offered, “So... is your question... ‘Is it music?’” After a moment of thought, Harmony responded, “Yeah,” as Ian affirmed my restatement of Harmony’s point into a question, adding, “That’s a good question!” However, not seeking to direct Harmony’s inquiry, I further offered, “I mean, don’t let me put words in your mouth! If you want to word your question a different way, we definitely can.” Harmony affirmed this question again, nodding her head vigorously towards the refocusing of doubt towards ontological consideration.

Restating her point from the small group discussion period, Morgan asked: “Is it music, or is it background sound (for a movie or something)? ‘Cause it kind of sounds like that.” Calling on Koa’s group, he offered yet another ontological question, “My table was just wondering: what *is* music? What is the definition of music?” As I typed her question, I called on Sahlu. “What’s the point? Why did he [Cage] do that?” “Any other questions?” I asked, giving a last call before voting. Offering one final question, Harmony chimed in again, saying, “Why did he pick the randomest name: *Water Walk*? I know he tried to explain at the beginning, but it doesn’t make sense.”

Summing up their collective philosophical inquiries around music and the piece, I offered, “So, I’m going to read through all of our questions one more time, and then we’ll take a vote. And again: just vote for one, but as normal, it’s okay if our discussion ends up bleeding into other questions; some of these are pretty similar.”

- 1.) Why does he make strange music using strange instruments?
- 2.) Is it music?
- 3.) Is it music, or is it background noise (like for a movie)?
- 4.) What is music?
- 5.) What's the point? What does he want us to learn from *Water Walk*?
- 6.) Why did he choose the name *Water Walk*?

“So think about which one you want. Do we want to vote without seeing each other?” I asked. An immediate “YES!” rang out from the children who preferred an anonymous (or secret ballot) vote to an open vote, with only a few disappointed-sounding “No”s following the resounding collective affirmation. After polling the children, I informed them that the question with the most votes was question number 4: “What is music?” As they opened their eyes or raised their heads, several children excitedly shouted “yessss,” “yay,” and “wooo!” at the chosen question. Taking this opportunity to pivot our discussion to the question selected, I asked, “So, what is music?”

Discussing “What is Music?”: “Notes” vs. “Sounds”

After a moment of pause where the children waited to see who would speak first, an unknown voice rang out: “Something a lot of people like to listen to” just as Ian’s hand raised tentatively into the air. Ian offered, “It’s a type of art, and it’s, like, normally a sound. It’s a type of sound, like we just said, that people listen to.” Ian had noticeably incorporated the comments of his classmate who had spoken out of turn, a strategy he was especially good at deploying in his thoughtful engagements with his peers (and impressive for a child of ten). I then called on James, who offered a different way of

defining music: “Um... I can describe... genres of music. Like, I would describe rock-n-roll and metal as ‘violent sounds.’” Offering a clarifying restatement of James’ point for anyone who might not know the word “genre,” I reiterated, “Okay, so specific categories, or genres—that’s the word he used for musical categories: genre—so, specific categories or genres of music have different qualities.” Offering a more technical definition, Koa proposed, “I think music is anything that is... a series of beats or noises, any noises, that are put together to make a song.” Pivoting to Lexi, she considered James’ earlier point as her own starting point for trying to define music and to decide whether or not *Water Walk* fit that definition with her first comment of the day: “I just want to say, if we decided if [*Water Walk*] was a genre, then we’d probably know more, like, if it was music or not.” Offering a follow-up question, I inquired, “What genre do you think this would be?” However, no child offered an answer to my follow-up question.

Returning to a technical or formal definition of music, Harmony built on Koa’s points, offering her own definition of music. “So I think, ‘what is music?’, to me, is... sound. It’s like a series of sounds, usually notes, that... sort of like Koa, a series of sounds or notes that make a song that people resonate with.” Seeking to test this definition, James asked, “So... would you consider a series of beats that sounds like, ‘[unique vocal sound],’ music?” James made mewing sounds followed by an elongated, voiced tongue roll that eventually changed to several moderate-speed, voiced plosive sounds within his example, which lasted approximately two seconds. While Harmony considered this example, one child immediately called out, “yes.” After a pause, Harmony responded resolutely, “...No.” as several more children called out to affirm this

example as music. Following up on this James asked, “Well that’s a series of sounds, so...” Recalling her own definition, Harmony stated that James’ example was “not a series of *notes*” to which James politely reminded her, “You said, ‘a series of sounds or notes.’” Revising her own earlier words, Harmony stated, “I meant sounds-slash-notes. Sounds that are notes, sorry.” As James and Harmony pursued this line of thinking further, Ian also offered his opinion on the matter, stating, “I agree with James because those are notes.” As many more voices erupted in “yes”s and “no”s over the topic.

I continued to both summarize and prompt for additional comments, stating, “So I’m hearing that we’re having a discussion about: what’s the difference between a ‘sound’ and a ‘note’? And then, yeah, does this piece count as notes? What do you think? What is the difference between a ‘note’ and a ‘sound’?” Offering a halting explanation, Danny began to describe the difference, stating, “Normally, with like certain instruments, or types of instruments, you know what letter it is so you know which note it is on the instrument. But this one doesn’t really have actual instruments, so... how is it notes?” At this point, it began to become clear to me that some of the ideological divide in the room between those who felt that sounds that were “notes” comprised music and those who thought that “sounds” alone comprised music seemed to be stemming in part from the divide in the room between those who studied violin or viola in school, and/or who took private instrument lessons outside of school, and those who did not have instrumental music instruction. That is, I began to notice acutely that the majority of children in favor of a “notes”-driven definition of music that were agreeing with each other were mostly the children who likewise studied music more formally on traditional, European classical instruments. Conversely, those in favor of a “sounds”-driven

understanding were mostly children whose interests in music were self-driven, listening-focused, and more concerned with popular music, and importantly, whose musical lives were not as tied to traditional instrument playing.

Discussing “What is Music?”: Instruments, Musical Notation, and Whales

After a short, collective pause for reflection, James tentatively raised his hand again to clarify Danny’s line of thinking with regard to instruments and notes. “So... are you saying it kind of has to be on instruments?” After Harmony and Danny reaffirmed that instruments have notes (though specifically *not* affirming that notes could only emanate from instruments as he had asked), James pressed on with another test: “Would you consider beatboxing an instrument?” As the class knew, James was an avid beatboxing enthusiast. “Mmmmm... a little.” Harmony offered, as several others likewise chimed in with answers that seemed to indicate that “it depends.” Danny, however, offered a fuller explanation. “Well, it’s more like using your...um... like... your... your *you* to make sounds.” Struggling to find the words at first, he pressed on, “It’s kind of like your mouth or body is the instrument. Like, I could do this—” He proceeded to tap his flattened fingers against his mouth, which was changing in size and shape, creating various pitched examples by forcing the air inside of his changing mouth shape to resonate. As the children began to discuss whether or not Danny’s example consisted of “notes” or “sounds,” Harmony offered a summation of the rebuttals, saying, “ I disagree with Danny, actually, because... I consider, like, clapping or tapping on your legs, that’s a rhythm or a beat, but if it’s not really organized, it could just be sound.” Differentiating her own understanding of “notes” from Danny’s instrument-driven

understanding of them, Harmony's summation offered a new understanding of music: the *organization* of different musical elements like pitch and rhythm as an important differentiating factor for musical "notes" and non-musical "sounds."

Offering his own reframing of this position, Ian said, "I agree with Harmony that that [clapping and tapping] is not a note, cause you can't really change pitch. Like in music, that would look like... I forgot what it actually looks like, but it's like an 'X' with a line up there." I quickly drew the example of musical notation he was describing on the white board at the front of the classroom. "Like, that shows a beat instead of a note. Notes have different pitches; a beat sounds the same, but you can only make different rhythms with it. So I agree with Harmony that a rhythm or a beat is not a note."

Referring to what is commonly called a ghost note, or an iconic musical representation of a note with rhythmic value but no specific pitch, Ian took Harmony's point further, suggesting that pitch, at least with regard to "notes," might be the musical factor that mattered for organizing musical "notes" and differentiating them from non-musical "sounds." Further shoring up the thinking from the children studying instrumental music, Lexi dissented with Ian and Harmony, stating, "Well, you can make notes by tapping and clapping, cause in music, there's this book that we always do that has activities that have us clapping, like—" she gives a brief example of a steady clapped beat before continuing, "so we *know* notes." Referring to the *Essential Elements for Strings* series by Hal Leonard that she and other children used in instrumental music class, I offered a summation for those in the room who might not understand where the discussion had gone.

After a brief explanation of how musical notation conveys rhythm and pitch using an improvised, vocal example of both pitched and unpitched notation, I offered a refocusing towards a previous point to try to include more of the children in the room who were not well-versed enough in musical notation for this level of discussion. Reconsidering Danny's earlier point, I said, "So, one of the other things we were talking about was instruments, and I'm curious: are there instruments in [*Water Walk*]?" Picking up this thread, Ian said, "My definition of an instrument is: it's something you can use to make music, so yes I do think there are instruments because he's using, uhh... lots of objects to make music. At least I think this is music. Harmony said she doesn't believe this is music, so she might not consider those instruments." Feeling it might be helpful to our discussion, I replayed a short portion of the video, specifically, the portion where Cage played specific, consonant chords on the piano, to see if this stimulated any new considerations. Following his own points, Ian continued, "That is definitely an instrument. I know piano is an instrument. Sometimes I'm a bit unsure whether something is like... actually meant to be played, but I know for sure piano is meant to make music. But I don't know for sure that, um, throwing radios onto the floor was actually music." "What do we think?" I asked. "Are the radios music?"

Responding to the question I extrapolated from Ian's remarks, James proposed, "I think so. It makes a sound that's like a drum. Like if I drop this book on the ground, for example." James stood and dramatically dropped his book on the classroom floor, creating a single, sharp thud. "I could make the same sounds using a drum." Expanding on James' idea, Koa offered, "I just want to say, what I think of as an instrument would be anything that can be used to make noise, like, a noise that can be used to make a

song. As long as it can be used to make music, it's an instrument." As several children offered thoughts responding to James' and Koa's points (and their own examples of books falling to the ground), it became clear that even as many children agreed that anything *could* be a musical instrument, it still seemed, based on their comments and body language, that many felt there was still something missing from a definition of music based solely on instruments, or at least, one that hoped to satisfactorily differentiated music "notes" from "sounds," or "music" from "noise."

As our session wound to a close in the final few minutes, the children briefly and quickly touched on two more topics they felt were relevant to the discussion of music: repeatability and intention. Offering the violin as an example, Lexi proposed that for a sound to be music (and for an object to be an instrument), it must be able to be repeated. Giving another example, she posited that even as a falling book may be able to make a sound that could be used in a song, it was not necessarily one that could be repeated exactly. In response to this, others brought up the practice of digitally sampling "random sounds" as evidence that, with the aid of technology, even exact repeatability was also something that could be overcome for non-traditional instruments. Similarly, children began to discuss whale song as an example of recorded, repeatable musical sounds. This, however, immediately spurred an outburst surrounding whether or not whale song was "only communication" or "music." In response to this, Harmony exclaimed inquisitively, "Now I'm thinking, if whales are smart enough to think about... if we shout or talk: 'would that be music?' If we're thinking about whether whales are making music, do other animals think that we are making music?" As many of the children began to wonder at Harmony's question that hung in the air, I noticed that we

were only a moment from the dismissal bell, and so reluctantly, I offered a summation of the day, and a final class vote to let us all track where we were at the end of our conversation. In answering the question, “Is *Water Walk* music?”, fourteen children voted “yes,” four children voted no, three children voted “not sure,” and approximately four-to-five children abstained by default (in that they did not vote.)

Ontology of Music

The most common theme that emerged throughout my fieldwork at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School surrounding the philosophy of music in children’s musical cultures was that of the ontology of music, or the nature or metaphysics of music. Across ages and classes, when children turned their philosophical attention towards music as a topic or example, questions like those that initiated this chapter were often brought up in discussion, as “Water Walk” with Ms. Martino’s fourth-grade class above demonstrates, and children probed the challenges of defining music for its nature, structure, and components. In his seminal essay “Ontologies of Music” (1999, 17), ethnomusicologist Phillip Bohlman posits that “what music *is* remains open to question at all times and in all places.” Indeed, Bohlman goes on to explain that “Multiple ontologies of music exist at both the individual and local level, as well as at the global level” and that these plural ontologies “[map] both individual musical experiences and the landscape of world music cultures.” (1999, 17) Expanding on these ideas, Bohlman outlines many prominent ontologies of music throughout his essay, many of which were the same ontologies put forward and considered by the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School. The ontological paradigms of music that Bohlman

(1999) outlines that I will focus on here primarily are: “Music ‘Out There’ / Music in the Numbers” (22), “In the Notes / Outside the Notes” (28), “In Time / Outside of Time” (29), “Vom musikalischen Schönen [On the Musically Beautiful] / On the Unremarkable in Music” (30), and “In the Body / Beyond the Body” (32). Drawing on these frameworks, I demonstrate that the children with whom I worked were interested, capable, and expansive in their own thinking about music, reflecting many of the same types of intellectual engagements and philosophical questions and considerations of adult ethno/musicologists like Bohlman. Beyond just the so-called “music itself,” or the sonic experience of music, children’s ideas, understandings, questions, and values surrounding music are meaningful in forming a holistic view of their musical culture, and as such, I offer the above description of original, interdisciplinary methods in-practice through ethnographic vignette and the below analyses for adult researchers working with children to explore the often untapped area of the philosophical underpinnings of children’s musical cultures.

Perhaps one of the most detail-oriented sessions about musical ontology in my fieldwork, the nine- and ten-year-olds in Ms. Martino’s fourth-grade class were especially interested in considering the difference between “sounds” and “notes.” In other words, the children were often interested in figuring out what characteristics or organizing features might distinguish non-musical sound from musical sound (presuming that there was a difference to begin with, of course). Indeed, even among children with the most accommodating definitions of music, that anything *could* be music, nobody thought that everything *was* music (or by contrast, that no sounds were music). Every child acknowledged some distinguishing feature between a sonic

instance of non-musical sound and musical sound. Diving to the heart of this issue, Bohlman describes this same paradigm as “Music ‘Out There’ / Music in the Numbers.” Offering a summary question of this particular ontological consideration himself, Bohlman asks, “Does music exist anyway, with or without the intervention of human actions to bring about its reification?” (1999, 22) To ask this question differently, is music necessarily related to humans in some way, or does it exist on its own in the world? Certainly, many of the children pursuing “notes” as the basis for their definition of music were appealing to many of the same logics that Bohlman points out are common in this vein of philosophical thinking about music, such as the scientific method for testing and measuring found in mathematics and physics. Many of the discussion points involved replicability of measurable, sonic information like pitch, rhythmic duration, and timbre. Nine-year-old James in particular offered several questions and tests for the ideas put forward by his group and the class. Interestingly enough, though, this was often from the perspective of a skeptic, given that James’ own thoughts about music and the piece did not rely on the tests he was using to complicate the examples given by his peers (whose bounded definitions, it seemed to James, should have been testable). Simultaneously, the children’s ultimate consideration of whale song and anthropocentrism (or human bias) in music likewise revealed their interest in this paradigm of musical ontology, considering how much human, cultural input was necessary in making musical determinations.

As the same conversation revealed through continued exploration, musical notation and musical literacy were interwoven into the children’s descriptions and often affected their understanding of the boundary between the two. Bohlman writes of this

paradigm as “In the Notes / Outside the Notes” (1999, 28),²² highlighting the messy middle-ground of musical notation as a site for defining music. Bohlman states, “Musical notation serves as a recognition that music cannot adequately be notated. Something disappears or changes during the course of oral tradition and performance, and the sounds that notes represent recuperate as much of that sound as possible.” (1999, 28) That is, he describes musical notation as always necessarily lacking critical components of music in performance, and yet, it is that same lacking that is valuable because it makes the specificity of the musical components that notation *cannot* describe clearer in their absence. In other words, while musical notation cannot fully encompass all of the important components of a given musical tradition, we do gain a better understanding of what the important components are *because* we notice when they are missing in a performance of only what is notated.

That being said, Bohlman’s considerations of this ontological model of music still falls in line with many of the same issues the children often explored in our sessions, as many thought that musical sounds needed to be repeatable and not random. Bohlman describes this as “the problem of identity that arises from the use of notation” in that notation is often the basis for defining specific musical works (i.e. a specific song “itself” vs. a specific “performance” of a song) or the concept of a musical work (i.e., the blues as a genre or form vs. a specific performance of the blues.) (1999, 28) To be sure, many of the children arguing for a more specific or bounded definition of music (the “notes”

²² Interestingly, Bohlman’s usage of “sounds” and “notes” in this example does not differentiate non-musical sound and musical sound as the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School did in their usage, but rather, he uses these terms instead to differentiate actual physical sound and the iconic representation of physical sound. Regardless of this difference in language, his differentiation still highlights the children’s emphasis on notation as a source of musical knowledge.

camp) were often referring to examples and underlying concepts from particular, notated musical texts within a Western classical musical tradition based in musical literacy. In particular, the Hal Leonard *Essential Elements for Strings* instrumental methods book for beginning musicians referenced by Lexi is aimed at mastering the ability to produce consistent, repeatable sounds on particular instruments within the scope of a Western classical art music tradition. Simultaneously, many of the children who were arguing for a more inclusive definition of music (the “sounds” camp), while not referring to specific examples from notation, often identified features of music that mattered to them that standard, Western notation does not define. For example, Ian was willing to stake that any object used to make music could be an instrument, which he also used to support his own ultimate belief that *Water Walk* was music. Even as his own logic and discussions to that point had helped form and support the “notes” camp of children favoring a definition of music driven by their understanding of Western classical musical notation, Ian ultimately still eschewed an exclusionary definition of music limited by his own formal musical instruction based in standard musical notation because of conflicting beliefs about things he was aware standard musical notation alone does not capture.

Finally, and to a lesser scope, the children also discussed the same ontological points regarding music and time, music and its aesthetic remarkability, and music and its relationship to the body, all paradigms Bohlman discusses as “In Time / Outside of Time” (1999, 29), “Vom musikalischen Schönen [On the Musically Beautiful] / On the Unremarkable in Music” (1999, 30), and “In the Body / Beyond the Body” (1999, 32), respectively. That is, they spoke of the importance of considering music’s relationship to

time via their considerations of beats and rhythms. Likewise, Harmony pointed out in her comment that music is required to “resonate with” people, or to facilitate an aesthetically or personally remarkable experience beyond function to count as music. Finally, in considering the embodied components of *Water Walk* (like Cage’s performed stage directions and the titular walking), the children likewise gave attention to how important a connection to the human (and eventually whale) body was for music. That is, as Bohlman describes, the ontology of music and its relationship to the body presents many issues of both identity and autonomy that the children were often apt to discuss in musical topics like our discussion of *Water Walk*. Indeed, this particular paradigm often came up in discussion of popular music and music with topics related to social justice.

While the experiences of “Water Walk” with Ms. Martino’s fourth-grade class comprised an especially rich source of primary data for analyzing the theme of musical ontology, both for the level of specificity employed by the children and the way that their thinking around a range of ontological paradigms of music offered many clearly-defined examples, musical ontology as a whole was one of the most common themes in my fieldwork, arising in many sessions across grade levels. In analyzing this theme, Bohlman’s work offers an effective and helpful ethnomusicological touchstone for categorizing and defining the specific paradigms of thought that the children considered as descriptive of the philosophical components of their musical culture. However, while notable, the most informative finding of these experiences was not the specific ontological paradigms that defined the specific philosophical characteristics of the musical culture of the children with whom I worked that Bohlman had described

previously. Rather, the most informative finding from these experiences was the fact that, within the scope of the Philosopher-in-Residence program, children were self-motivated to ask the same types of philosophical questions as adult ethno/musicologists.

Moreover, when the community of philosophical inquiry model that the children were used to was adapted and applied to music as an ethno/musicological research method, the children were able to consider their own curiosities and beliefs around musical ontologies with a wide breadth of nuanced thinking around a diverse host of different implicit paradigms in much the same way that a trained adult ethno/musicologist might. Put simply, in the opinion of this author, the most valuable finding in analyzing the emergent theme of musical ontology was this: within the scope of collaborative, child-centered philosophical research on music, children were able to examine and refine their own thinking around complex philosophical topics in music (like ontology) and display both a level of dialogical finesse and a level of interest in the wide range of perspectives that arose from our considerations to a degree that was on par with an adult ethno/musicologist writing about musical ontologies (noting, of course, the very different vocabularies employed.) Whereas Phillip Bohlman's extensive elucidation and description of various ontological paradigms of music as an adult ethno/musicologist is perhaps not groundbreaking knowledge, the fact that children were capable of asking similar questions and exploring several expansive paradigms in their own investigation of musical ontology in their lives is groundbreaking, at least within the field of the study of children's musical cultures in ethno/musicology.

Is it Beautiful?: A Game of Aesthetics and Reasons

While many of the sessions that I designed and utilized during my fieldwork were focused on children generating their own philosophical questions for exploration surrounding a musical work or a distinctly musical exercise, philosophical games often differed from the standard sessions in that children were typically given a structure and/or question in advance that they then used as the basis of consideration across various examples or media. “Is It Beautiful?” is a game that I created in response to the topics of aesthetic experiences, specifically, beauty, that often arose when children considered artistic examples as prompts in our sessions. While “aesthetic experience” has been debated and variously defined in music education (Määttänen 2003), for the purposes of this project, I synthesize Määttänen (2003, 64) in defining an aesthetic experience broadly as the socially-contextual and personally-felt responses to interacting with objects of art; importantly, these responses are not disconnected from “the art itself” or the art object, but rather, they are considered to essential components comprising the whole of the *work* of art. Within this type of an experience with art or music, beauty is a particular aesthetic experience that is a sense of delight and appreciation when interacting with art, especially (but not always) visually (Eaude 2023). Moreover, while there have been previous studies regarding children’s considerations of beauty and their ability to make aesthetic judgements (Winston 2010) and taste or preference surrounding aesthetic qualities of music (Nieminen, Istók, Brattico, and Tervaniemi 2012), these studies have not given meaningful attention to the underlying processes or deeper philosophical implications of aesthetic experiences like beauty in

music. Rather, they have focused on generating primary knowledge about children's preferences as they relate to musical qualities or features.

As Euade (2023, 673) describes, "Regular exposure to what is deemed beautiful seems necessary for children to know what others deem to be beautiful or otherwise and *to decide for themselves*. Therefore, immersion in an environment with a wide range of opportunities and experiences of the natural world, art, music, story – and much more besides – is valuable." (emphasis mine) However, Euade (2023, 673) goes on to state that, "[exposure alone] is not sufficient since aesthetic development requires chances for reflection and representation." Likewise, Mohr Lone (2024, 553–554) states, "The interplay between creativity, aesthetic appreciation, and philosophical inquiry allows students to understand art and aesthetic experience in deeper and more meaningful ways." Expanding on this idea, she likewise posits that, "Explicitly bringing philosophical inquiry into art classrooms, therefore, does not entail the introduction of a new subject, but provides new ways and approaches for addressing the philosophical topics that are already central to art education." (Mohr Lone 2024, 553–554) As such, this game was designed to provide diverse media for consideration and self-directed opportunities for critical, collaborative reflections on beauty as a formative philosophical *and* artistic experience, especially as it related to music, following the specific interests and dispositions of the children themselves.

"Is It Beautiful?" is a simple game: children are presented with various examples across types of media (music, visual art, poetry, etc.) for exploring the same question for each example: "Is it beautiful; why or why not?" Throughout this game, children are

encouraged to offer different types of reasons for why they think and feel as they do. Similarly (and importantly), they are also encouraged to consider whether or not the reasons given for why something is or is not beautiful are compelling or relevant to the examples being considered. Throughout the game, children are able to continually complicate their own understandings of beauty as an aesthetic experience, and to consider how these understandings may be dependent on, or related to, the type of example being considered. Importantly, I began this game with a warm-up discussion about the difference between “a thing itself” and “a record of a thing itself.” Put more simply, our warm-up was often spent focusing on what the differences might be between deciding whether an *actual* sculpture we could see and touch in front of us is beautiful vs. whether a *photograph* of a sculpture is beautiful, and how that awareness might inform our discussions about its beauty.

As I’ve conceived of and made use of the “Is It Beautiful?” game, it is not solely music-focused. Depending upon the grade level of the children for whom the game was intended, various prompts across media were used. Below, I’ve offered a list of prompts, many drawn intentionally from individuals or media with local connections to the Pacific Northwest. Likewise, many were chosen because they were types of media or topics that the children had previously discussed in our sessions. That being said, some of these were pieces I chose because I thought they might offer a new perspective or type of consideration to our discussions (and included things I personally found both beautiful and not beautiful). The prompts were as follows:

- 1.) a photo of the Seattle Space Needle with some of Downtown Seattle and the Olympic Mountains at sunset;
- 2.) a photo of *One: Number 31* (1950) by Jackson Pollock;
- 3.) a photo of a generic elementary school classroom (open source Google image);
- 4.) a photo of the sculpture *Fountain* (1917) by Marcel Duchamp;
- 5.) a video recording of Patti LaBelle's performance of "The ABC Song" on Sesame Street ((1998) 2009), also known as "Gospel Alphabet;"
- 6.) an excerpt of an audio recording of *Night on Bald Mountain* (1867) by Modest Mussorgsky, or an excerpt of a video recording with audio of the same piece as it appears in Disney's *Fantasia* (1940);
- 7.) A video performance of *Water Walk* (1959) by John Cage in the television game show *I've Got a Secret* (1960);
- 8.) a read-aloud and the visual text of the poem "The Year of the Goldfinches" (2018) by former U.S.-Poet Laureate and University of Washington Alumna Ada Limón;
- 9.) a read-aloud and the visual text of the poem "Appalachian Elegy (no. 4)" (2012) by bell hooks;
- 10.) a read-aloud and the visual text of the poem "Be Glad Your Nose is On Your Face" (1984) by Jack Prelutsky;
- 11.) A video recording of a humpback whale, including the prominent sounds of whale song and whales playing;
- 12.) a live-action photo of houses in hurricane weather;
- 13.) a photo of a child's winter coat (used as a focus tool to consider the experience of wearing a winter coat rather than the coat itself);
- 14.) An open source photo of a hot, cheesy deep dish pizza;
- 15.) The experience of a feeling (spurred by improvised, guided imagery spoken aloud surrounding the idea of "coziness.")

For the purposes of describing "Is It Beautiful" with Ms. Todd's fourth- and fifth-grade class below, I will focus primarily on the children's discussion of the video recording of

Patti LaBelle's gospel performance of "The ABC Song" on Sesame Street ((1998) 2009),²³ also known as "Gospel Alphabet." In doing so, I will highlight how the children's considerations of beauty related to music further enriched their exploration and understanding of the value of music as an aesthetic experience within the scope of their musical lives.

"Is it Beautiful?" with Ms. Todd's Fourth- and Fifth-Grade Class

Summarizing Prior Discussions of Art

As I stood at the front of Mrs. Todd's fourth- and fifth-grade class, we were just about to begin our third round of the game "Is It Beautiful?" So far in our game, the ten- and eleven-year-old children had discussed both intentionality and familiarity as important traits in determining whether or not they found something to be beautiful. After first considering a photograph of Jackson Pollock's *One: Number 31* (1950), they had queried each other over whether or not the characteristics drips and splatters of paint on Pollock's canvas had been made intentionally, and also, whether or not such intentionality mattered when deciding whether or not the painting was beautiful or aesthetically pleasing to the viewer. While the class was divided over whether or not they considered *One: Number 31* (1950) to be beautiful, they were more aligned on the belief that how much intention one had while creating a work of visual art did, in fact, make a difference in whether or not someone found it to be beautiful. More children agreed that examples with greater intentionality had a greater chance of being beautiful than those who felt intentionality did not matter as much in determining if and how

²³ For the exact video I used, see: <https://youtu.be/G0hYxuDav0g?si=jkad733KtPyavOkD>

something might be beautiful. That is, most children seemed to express that even if they themselves did not personally find something beautiful, they were more likely to appreciate others' capacity to find it beautiful when they knew or could reasonably assume that it was created with greater levels of intention than something that "just happened."

Similarly, their consideration of the second example, an open source image of a generic elementary school classroom, had likewise commanded discussion around intentionality (since this was a photo that was just "a regular place" and not a "piece of art"), but also around the idea of familiarity. That is, several children spoke to qualities the classroom in the photo might hold that they thought were individually beautiful; however, most children agreed that the quotidian nature of the example, and their own extensive familiarity with such a setting, ultimately reduced its overall beauty in their collective opinion. As eleven-year-old Howard described it, "I can see how the rainbow [posters] in the back might be beautiful, but it just looks like a normal classroom." In fact, this example had prompted more specific types of critique and description than the first example had, with several children identifying specific features or qualities that they thought detracted from its beauty, such as the fact that the desks weren't all the same height, that there were not enough personalized decorations, and that it looked too "staged" or photograph-ready, rather than representing a more active and visibly-used classroom like their own. These discussions of intentionality and familiarity necessarily foregrounded our next area of discussion: music.

Viewing “The ABC Song” by Patti LaBelle

Having concluded these discussions, we continued to the video of Patti LaBelle performing the “The ABC Song” on *Sesame Street* comprising our third round: “Alright! Our next example is a YouTube video of a performance of a song some of us may know. Let’s take a watch and see what we think.” The children were very excited for the video example to come. They were often especially excited to watch video excerpts, as many of the children were themselves prolific consumers of YouTube, as they had discussed many times in our previous sessions. As I began the video, I was especially keen to see how the children would respond to this example given that “The ABC Song” was also familiar to most of them. As native English speakers and English Language Learners in a U.S elementary school, almost all students had encountered the basic version of the “The ABC Song” before. Likewise, I was particularly interested to see how they would respond to both the nature of the performance as an example of “children’s music,” or music directed towards children as an audience occurring on a similarly familiar children’s educational television show, and its musical recontextualization into a different genre by Patti LaBelle as a masterful musician and performer.

As the video began, many of the children responded immediately with recognition, noting the *Sesame Street* logo in the corner of the video. Several children responded to the muppet (puppet) Little Chrissy playing the piano, some with excitement and some with dismay. As Patti LaBelle began to sing, I immediately noticed the bodies of several children began to move, with a spectrum of motion from gently swaying to the beat, reactive facial expressions, more vigorous head nodding, and even

hands raising and moving. With the melismatic ornamentations of the introduction complete, LaBelle began singing the alphabet lyrics of the main verse in her own characteristic style, and several more members of the class expressed recognition with “Ohhh”s and “LOL [lawl] What?” ringing out.²⁴ As more muppets began to join the set, seemingly called to the siren song of LaBelle’s singing, so too more of the children began to move along with them. In particular, several children of color in the room seemed to be enjoying the performance, with many representing the most enthusiastic movers and responders among the class of children.

As LaBelle began her second iteration of the alphabet with the assistance of the assembled muppets on the screen, I heard a voice blurt over the light sounds of movement and the occasional whispers under the audio: “Can we sing along?” “Yes!” I replied. Several children began signing along, a couple quietly with LaBelle and a few with the muppets responding to her. Most of the children appeared to be enjoying the performance, and more than I expected given their responses to the classroom photo only moments ago. As LaBelle and Little Chrissy rounded out the second verse of the alphabet, the piano suddenly picked up and the rollicking third and final iteration began, with LaBelle encouraging participation herself, singing, “Everybody sing!” As the muppets, LaBelle, and several of the children were singing and clapping the final verse, Ms. Todd walked up to me and spoke to the fact that some of the children had families that went to churches with gospel music and that it seemed to be showing given their movements and gestures in response to LaBelle’s gospel performance. As the video

²⁴ Here, the abbreviation for “Laughing Out Loud,” or “LOL,” was verbalized phonetically, sounding like “lawl,” rather than spoken anagrammatically, like “L-O-L,” a common pronunciation among digitally native generations.

came to a close, I refocused the children towards our discussion: “Is it beautiful? Why, or why not?”

Discussing Beauty and “The ABC Song” by Patti LaBelle

Immediately, many children began to offer effusive comments praising LaBelle’s performance, as I heard voices call out the words “magical,” “Earth-shattering,” and “legendary.” As we began to discuss specific elements of the performance and how they related to the majority opinion that the piece was in fact beautiful, a divide began to emerge among the children. Some children found LaBelle’s singing to be the feature that defined the piece as beautiful, but were much less enthusiastic about “the puppets” or the fact that it was a “song for little kids.” Simultaneously, other children spoke to the opposite understanding of its beauty: that they personally really enjoyed the *Sesame Street* context and the muppets specifically, but, as Howard remarked, “her singing was fine, but just wasn’t really my thing.” His comment spurred responses from several of his classmates, especially from those who had found LaBelle’s impressive vocal technique to be one of the driving factors in their determination of their experience of its beauty. Offering some context for LaBelle’s performance, Ms. Todd spoke to the children about gospel music and its importance in black communities. In discussing Kirk Franklin (an award-winning American gospel artist) as an example, she humorously described some of the children’s responses to the performance (including some of those who were somewhat critical of LaBelle) as “a real Kirk Franklin moment!” which prompted several of the black children in the room to sign “same” in American Sign Language, as they vigorously rocked their outstretched pinky and thumb back and forth between

themselves and her. This was the children's non-verbal conversation signal at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School for agreeing, or resonating, with what someone else was saying.

Another emerging thread of our discussion was that of nostalgia, or a wistful longing or affection for the past. Indeed, Gertie's sentiment summed this sentiment up the best when she sighed, saying, "Ahh, the good ol' days," with a good-humored sincerity that was only half-joking about how old those days felt to her at eleven. This was echoed in our discussion, as some children expressed joy and others dismay at feeling mentally and emotionally returned to earlier days of childhood with the song and the *Sesame Street* context. Many who expressed joy discussed sentimentality and reminiscence for memories with grandparents who listened to gospel music, while many who expressed dismay spoke of younger siblings who "still" watched *Sesame Street* or who "still" listened to "music like this." As one child described "appreciating" the piece and especially the singing, but not finding it "beautiful," Gertie responded by saying "it brings joy to the child inside me."

Acknowledging how "moved" she felt, I saw an opportunity to help weave together the threads of nostalgia and the children's conversation over which components they found beautiful or detracting from beauty began to combine. "So I'm hearing that some of us liked it, but didn't find it beautiful, and I'm hearing that some of us were really moved and found it beautiful, but I'm curious: how do you know if it's beautiful or if you just liked it? Lots of us were literally moving, but does something need to 'move you' to be beautiful?" The discussion turned briefly towards the nature of

beauty as an intellectual experience, an emotional experience, a bodily experience, or some combination of these things. While the children did not come to a consensus, with some saying “you just know” if something is beautiful to you and others saying “something can be beautiful even when you *don't* like it,” it did become apparent that the majority of children who were most convinced that the performance was beautiful were those who had expressed either nostalgia or who had been especially physically moved during our viewing of the video.

Beauty and Music

Lifelong educator and scholar Tony Eade acknowledges the difficult and problematic nature of defining beauty, despite the fact that people seem to frequently and effortlessly make aesthetic judgements around this quality. In his 2023 article, “Reflections on How Young Children Develop a Sense of Beauty and Should Be Guided in Doing So,” Eade draws inspiration from the Oxford English Dictionary definition of beauty as a starting point for his own considerations of how best to attempt to define the elusive term. He offers the following tentative definition of beauty: “First, beauty depends sometimes, though not always, on a combination of qualities. Second, it relates to ‘delighting the senses or mental faculties’, suggesting that ideas of what is beautiful are rooted in sensory, emotional responses. Third, beauty is frequently associated with what one sees, though it can be evoked by other senses.” (Eade 2023, 665) Indeed, beauty, or whether or not one’s own aesthetic experiences of delight in the qualities of a thing as they related to the senses or mental faculties, was a topic that frequently arose in my fieldwork with the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary

School. Moreover, whether or not someone considered something to be beautiful, and how that perception itself affected one's understanding of or disposition towards music, was a throughline theme in my time with the children, even when we were not overtly discussing beauty. For example, in the earlier vignette of this chapter when Harmony stated in her discussion of *Water Walk* in Ms. Martino's fourth grade class that music needed to "resonate with" her, she was acknowledging the intellectual importance of these same anchoring sensory, emotional responses that Eade acknowledges are central to beauty as an aesthetic experience and concept, even as that particular discussion ultimately focused primarily on intellectual ontologies and the specific sonic aspects of Cage's piece.

Regarding how best to explore the topic of beauty in earnest, Eade offers some direct advice to adults who work with children towards the understanding and development of beauty as an aesthetic experience of music. He states:

Adults should channel rather than stifle children's creativity and encourage questioning, reflection and different types of representation [...] Adults can maintain a sense of mystery and possibility by not closing down opportunities too soon, remaining curious and expressing views tentatively rather than seeking, however subtly, to impose their own sense of beauty [...] However, it may be appropriate at times to challenge, or at least question, children's views, to encourage them to reflect more deeply, especially as their cognitive functions become stronger. (2023, 675–676)

Speaking to the importance of child-directed experiences of aesthetic consideration and development with minimal adult support (rather than adult interference), Eade likewise states that, "the process [of developing a sense of beauty] is also a social one where other children and/or adults can help children to enrich their sense of beauty and their ability to make more informed judgements about what is beautiful." (2023, 674) Given

that Eade directs practitioners hoping to explore beauty with children towards a child-centered, collaborative, and philosophical approach to the topic, the community of philosophical inquiry model, which encourages children to have just such self-directed, social, philosophical experiences, seemed like a natural fit to explore the topic of beauty directly with the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School for the purposes of this dissertation.

In Ms. Todd's fourth- and fifth-grade class, the children's discussion of Patti LaBelle's *Sesame Street* performance of the ABC song demonstrated several of the same points as Eade (2023) in their own explorations of the topic of beauty, specifically as it related to his definition of beauty. In particular, much of their discussion centered around the specific combination of components or qualities of the performance that they found delightful and otherwise stimulating to their senses and bodies. For example, many of the children spoke to their perception of the beauty of LaBelle's voice and performance, but some also acknowledged that the setting of *Sesame Street* and the presence of puppets specifically detracted from the beauty of her performance. Similarly, in other classes who explored the same piece within the context of "Is It Beautiful?", the children often spoke to other specific components they found appealing or off-putting, such as Little Chrissy's piano playing, the oft-noticed "absence" of Big Bird, and LaBelle's "diva" attitude, all of which were points of consideration surrounding the qualities they found delightful and therefore beautiful, or otherwise. This intellectual weighing out of the pieces for a summative determination comprised a formative philosophical experience surrounding music, giving the children the time and space they need to "[look] closely at the constituent parts, such as the materials used or the

patterns to be seen [...] and to dwell and reflect on their experiences, either alone or with others.” (Eaude 2023, 673) Likewise, this reflection and consideration of the intersecting “constituent parts” and their greater sociocultural meaning and connections also recalls Woodford’s (2016) calls for a musical intelligence that goes beyond music’s technical properties.

Similarly, the children intellectually engaged with their own emotional experiences of the piece, as they spoke about their familial and emotional ties to either the children’s song, the gospel genre, or the children’s television show as a way of informing their senses of its beauty. As when Gertie sighed, “Ahh, the good ol’ days,” the children acknowledged that whether or not they felt the piece was beautiful was in part because of their experience of nostalgia related to the piece. This nostalgia, or the wistful longing for time and events past (especially pleasurable time and events), arose for children who had a favorable experience of the “The ABC Song” and/or the *Sesame Street* setting, as well as for children with positive personal connections to previous experiences of listening to gospel music with their grandparents. Conversely, the children who did not consider the piece to be beautiful, at least as a whole, spoke not to nostalgia, but to feelings of annoyance or discomfort that the piece was either too closely associated with the musical or television preferences of younger siblings or to not being able to look past personal negative associations with the puppets or performance attitude.

Speaking to the identities of the children in the room, our discussion also highlighted some of the differences that gender and ethnicity can highlight in discussing

beauty, as Eade likewise acknowledges. (2023, 669) The children who most often showed the greatest affinity for LaBelle's performance tended to be children of color, often girls, whereas the children who specifically did not favor the piece tended to be children who were white, and often boys. This trend in part inspired Ms. Todd's and my own discussion of gospel and Kirk Franklin as a way of providing additional context and information for the strong affinity many in the room held for the piece. In noticing the vast disparity in value some children were assigning the piece because of familial and cultural connections that others might not have personally felt, we tried to offer further context to inform the otherwise potentially insensitive comments some of the children were making without realizing it. Likewise, this was a strategy for subtly offering some observations and examples to allow the children to complicate their own beliefs and feelings, forming a gentle challenge in the same way that Eade suggested might benefit children in social, philosophical models for considering beauty.

Finally, Ms. Todd's class also acknowledged and discussed the importance of their bodies, or the ways that LaBelle's performance physically moved them in ways that other prompts had not. Though they had discussed both familiarity and intentionality as important ideas relating to their conception of beauty prior to our musical example, LaBelle's performance created an opportunity for consideration of the auditory and physical, sensory experience of music beyond ideas and context alone. Beyond physically moving, the children had immediately requested to sing along, and they did indeed join in with voices and clapping while viewing the piece, creating an even closer opportunity for consideration of the piece (Turgeon 2000). As a whole, children frequently discussed the fact that their own and peers' perceptions of the beauty of

LaBelle's *Sesame Street* performance were often rooted in both sensory and emotional experiences, as well the ways that those experiences also ultimately affected their judgements and ideas about what was and was not beautiful. Furthermore, they were able to articulate these self-aware sentiments about the complex interplay between senses, sentiments, ideas, and sound in collaborative and philosophical modes of thinking and discussing as well as musical and embodied modes of doing. Beyond a study for musical preferences or tastes, this session demonstrated children's ability to engage philosophically with the concept of beauty as it relates to music, much in the same way that adult researchers writing about beauty have done. Beyond being able to describe if they liked something and why, children demonstrated the capacity for considering, discussing, and describing beauty as an aesthetic experience of music and as a multifaceted philosophical concept structuring their musical lives, their understandings of musical works, and their relationship to music and the arts as a whole.

Conclusions

In my sessions with the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School, it became apparent that the children were both interested and eager to explore, discuss, and think deeply about the philosophical components of music. Of course, given the context of the Philosopher-in-Residence program, this was perhaps to be expected. However, what was not expected was the detail-oriented and nuanced degree to which the children showed that they were capable of considering and exploring topics related to the philosophy of music, often with great care and insight. This was particularly j To

be certain, their considerations, while relating to examples and using language common to their own children's community, were often comparable in scope and purpose to adult scholars (Bohlman 1999; Eade 2023) thinking about philosophical components of music and art, in both the types of questions and levels of intellectual care given to their consideration. Within the context of the collaborative community of philosophical inquiry focused on music demonstrated above, children displayed not only interests in the same philosophical questions relating to music as adults, but also the capacity for meaningful philosophical engagement with the questions that adult ethno/musicologists ask of the philosophical components of musical cultures.

As explored in this chapter, the two themes that surfaced repeatedly as thorough, thoughtful considerations of the philosophical components of music were musical ontology and beauty as a particular aesthetic experience of music. With regard to ontology, the children were most often concerned with questions exploring exactly what constitutes musical and non-musical sounds, as well as how to make sense of the various competing internal musical components and external ideas about music that might complicate the seemingly simple binary of musical and non-musical. As the vignette with Ms. Martino's class demonstrates, children were often very particular and descriptive in their discussions about the meaning and value of sonic structures in music. Indeed, I found that given encouragement to explore their own thinking and ideas, with support for civil dialogue within the community of philosophical inquiry, children were often rife with desire and ability to discuss deeper ideological concerns around the nature of music as a whole. They related it to their own experiences and extrapolated from unfamiliar prompts to inform their group discussions. While Ms.

Martino's class's delineation of musical "notes" and non-musical "sounds" offered an especially insightful example of the various ontological paradigms that held sway in the children's musical culture, it likewise reaffirmed the capabilities and importance of collaborating with children towards the mutual creation of knowledge, especially surrounding philosophies of music in their own musical lives.

With regard to beauty, the children in Ms. Todd's fourth- and fifth-grade class displayed a similar level of nuance and careful consideration when discussing Patti LaBelle's performance of "The ABC Song" on *Sesame Street* ((1998) 2009) as the children in Ms. Martino's class did when discussing the ontology of music through John Cage's performance of *Water Walk* on *I've Got a Secret* (1960). That is, as EAUDE (2023) outlined, the children gave close attention to identifying the the specific performance components that affected their perception of its beauty: LaBelle's vocal performance, the musical genre, the children's television show setting, the inclusion of puppets (and simultaneously, the absence of a specific puppet, Big Bird), the piano playing supposedly being performed by the puppet Little Chrissy, and the lyric content of the song. Additionally, they were able to make connections between these components to specific sensory and emotional experiences, both past and present, such as familial connections, outside musical preferences, and nostalgia. In doing so, they offered a clear demonstration of their understanding of the complicated nature of beauty as a component of a work of art that is something between an idea, a sense, and a feeling, otherwise referred to as an aesthetic experience (Määtänen 2003). That being said, as EAUDE (2023) describes, it was likewise necessary in this formative, philosophical game to offer subtle challenges and questions to some of the preconceived gendered and

ethnic biases that may have been subconsciously informing our discussion of beauty in the prompt described above. Taken as a whole, these vignettes showcasing my adaptation of the community of philosophical inquiry model towards collaborative ethno/musicological consideration and my analyses thereof present readers with two case studies of the philosophical underpinnings of the children's musical culture of Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School in Seattle, Washington. Furthermore, these case studies offer ethno/musicologists, philosophers, and other adults working with children examples in practice of effective strategies that adults can adapt to further explore children's philosophical knowledges surrounding music and the arts, which are understudies as specific topics in the field of children's musical cultures.

Chapter 4

Affect, Acoustemology, and Philosophical Music Making

While we have considered the role that philosophical inquiry plays in the processes of exploring and expanding one's intellectual understandings of music and culture, acts of music making have thus far gone unexamined as a site of potential philosophical praxis for children. In this chapter, I explore the topic of philosophical music making in earnest by drawing on two case studies using lessons I created called "Stripsody" and "What's the Vibe?". First, I will offer an ethnographic vignette of "Stripsody" with Ms. Thompson's third-grade class (mostly 8–9 year-old children). Using the vocal work *Stripsody* (1966) by Cathy Berberian as a prompt, the lesson "Stripsody" offers a window into the importance of affect, or feelings, as a way of understanding and creating music in the lives of children. Next, I offer a vignette from Ms. Terry's fifth-grade class (mostly 10–11 year-old children). Using a playlist created by the children themselves as a prompt, "What's the Vibe?" is a game that relates children's explorations of what a "vibe" is and how music can constitute a "vibe" (or the general sonic-affective atmosphere or sentiment as felt or perceived by listeners or performers (Garcia 2020)). Likewise, I offer examples of children's use of acoustemology, or sonic ways of knowing (Feld 2015) in their music making and discussing. In relating these two vignettes, I posit that children's music-making experiences, and their dialogues pertaining to these experiences, exemplify music making as both a process already rich with philosophical underpinnings and a process by which children are able to further explore philosophy through music and vice versa.

In the subsequent analyses of these vignettes, I offer overviews of the models of affect (Gill 2017) and acoustemology (Feld 2015) utilized alongside analyses of "Stripsody" and "What's the Vibe?" to examine the role of both in children's philosophizing and music making, as these were two prominent themes that arose throughout my fieldwork. Moreover, I posit that these themes and the processes that helped them emerge form the basis of important modalities of children's musicking and musical culture. I demonstrate how affect, or feelingfulness, functions as a modality, or process, of understanding and generating meaning and value in both children's philosophizing and music making. After establishing the affective basis of children's inquiry and artistry, I offer further analysis of the specific affective practices that the children utilized and performed in their philosophical music making. In doing so, I simultaneously highlight the need for further consideration of the role of affect in children's musical cultures within ethno/musicology. I also offer several concrete philosophical strategies that I have designed and employed alongside young thinkers to help future scholars examine these types of knowledge in the lives of children. Similarly, I demonstrate that children likewise often adopted a sound-first approach to making and discussing music, often favoring an acoustemological modality of demonstrating understanding and performing. In my examination of "What's the Vibe?", I demonstrate how children draw on their own acoustemological, or sonic and epistemological, knowledge of music to further describe, create, support, and explain their music thinking and creating.

Definitions of Affect and Acoustemology

Before turning to the ethnographic vignettes and analyses that will comprise the majority of this chapter, I first wish to offer some brief definitions of relevant terms that may be unfamiliar. In particular, “affect” and “acoustemology” both serve as foundational ethno/musicological frameworks, and thus, require some foregrounding. Following Gill (2017), I define “affect” here as,

[...] the appraisal and cognitive effects of emotion and feeling. [Affect is] the large-scale way that emotions—as effects of objects pressing upon us and the sensations that pressing produces—are practiced, transferred into value, and assessed by individuals and communities. In other words, affect is the subjective and conscious aspect of feelings and emotions. Affect refers to the multivalent and complex ways that feelings and emotions are produced *and generate knowledge*. (17; emphasis mine)

That is, for the purposes of this dissertation, “affect” refers to the various strands of felt, experiential knowledge and the processes in which those types of knowledge create an impact or effect in the world, specifically with regard to music making and musical culture.²⁵ Likewise, “affective” is meant to refer to and describe the often complex patchwork of understandings and practices of affect (both conscious and unconscious) that people use to make sense of, and to ascribe meaning and value to, these same types of felt, experiential knowledge and the facets of emotional culture that they intersect or undergird. Finally, “affective cultural knowledge” is meant to designate the ways of knowing and being about one’s own culture, or the cultures in which they

²⁵ Note that there is great variation (and even contradiction) within the literature on “affect” between the specificities and uses of the various terms related to studies of music’s ability to “affect” people: “feelings,” “emotions,” “affects,” “sensibilities,” “sensations,” “embodiment,” “psychic force” etc. Thus, I will follow Gill’s (2017) paradigm in focusing instead on how affect (as an umbrella term) gets used in practice, rather than on (re)defining the specific scope or meaning of each term based on their usage by children in the study.

interact, primarily through their emotional and embodied experiences. Said differently, “affective cultural knowledge” is knowledge of one’s culture drawn from one’s own emotional and embodied interactions, especially with music for the purposes of this project. For example, when one hears their own national anthem, the feelings this experience generates (and the analysis thereof) contain important knowledge about one’s culture and about one’s own understanding of their culture that led to these feelings in the first place. Likewise, such an experience itself would likewise comprise an affective example of the continual creation of culture along the lines of feelings and music.

A portmanteau of “acoustics” and “epistemology,” *acoustemology* describes forms of knowing and organizing one’s culture through sonic practices, rather than descriptive verbal practices or scientific measuring as a primary mode of understanding (Feld 2015). That is, “*acoustemology*” is an anthropological and ethno/musicological conceptualization of the ways that people know, create, understand, and operationalize knowledge about their culture through sound as an embodied practice. For example, understanding the awkward moment when someone unfamiliar with European classical art music claps during movements when they’re not supposed and stopping when no one else claps, is a concrete example of knowing and doing culture through sound. While affect attends primarily to the body by way of feelings (at least in my applications of it here), *acoustemology* likewise re-centers bodily knowledge, but does so by asserting that people can know something and/or demonstrate their knowledge entirely through listening, creating, and responding in sound. To return to the aforementioned example to elucidate *acoustemology*, the cultural knowledge that someone is able to

ascertain from listening to a national anthem is one. As such, studies of both affect and acoustemology seek to understand the complex interrelations between sound and culture, and likewise, to offer theoretical models to scholars that reaffirm the importance of forms of knowing and understanding that re-center the body and do not rely on logocentric privileging of language to consider or determine one's level of understanding.²⁶ Similarly, neither affect nor acoustemology as considered here require technical musical expertise, and as such, were accessible modalities for children. Taken together, these two modes of knowing and doing comprised the primary themes that emerged when considering music making as a site of philosophical and ethno/musicological praxis when considering children's philosophical dispositions towards music. Put simply, children's own affective and acoustemological capacities and knowledges often outstripped their formal philosophical and/or technical musical knowledges and linguistic vocabularies. As such, these modes of understanding and creating defined the core of what I observed as well as my own approach to studying these processes here, and will be elaborated more fully in the analyses following each vignette.

²⁶ In many ways, these two concepts overlap. That is, they overlap in the re-centering of bodily knowledges as ways of knowing and doing. In fact, in its broader applications, "affect" as a theoretical apparatus could incorporate much of "acoustemology" as a theoretical apparatus as I am considering them here. However, given the different theoretical applications and areas of investigation across the two terms in scholarship and their common fields of use, and in the interest of teasing out a more nuanced understanding of these themes as they arose in my fieldwork, I have chosen to treat them separately here for clarity. As such, I refer to feelings-based knowledge and practices as affect and sound-based knowledge and practices as acoustemology, even as they overlap in a bodily knowledge-cultural knowledge feedback loop.

Cathy Berberian and *Stripsody* (1966)

Cathy Berberian (1925–1983) was a U.S. American mezzo-soprano and composer, especially renowned for her virtuosic interpretations and widespread valorization of new and experimental art music throughout the twentieth century. Describing her vocal style, Berberian’s biography on her website states, “[Berberian] possessed an astonishing ‘rapid-reflex’ technique by which she shifted seamlessly between disparate music styles, invoking Marlene Dietrich, baby talk, bird call, and Sprechstimme in one musical line, and her impeccable vocal technique also lent insight to stylized trilling and ululation.” (“Biography” 2024) In her first composition *Stripsody* (1966), Berberian proceeds through a series of sonic, comic vignettes, employing mostly sounds that are typically heard outside of musical contexts as the basis for her original piece. Some examples of these non-musical sounds include mechanical noises, spoken words, animal sounds, the sounds of one’s body moving, sounds of objects or impacts, and etc. Many of her chosen sounds for *Stripsody* are also comprised of onomatopoeia, or words such as “bang,” “tik tok” and “thump” whose spoken sound is virtually the same from the sound it describes. This is a technique which one could find illustrated in a range of comics.²⁷ Finally, *Stripsody* also contains references to specific comic strips, such as *Peanuts* and *Superman*, with sonic, verbal citations of specific characters (e.g. Charlie Brown) or phrases (“Good grief!”) that were common in these original comic strips. With a graphic score illustrated by comic artist Roberto Zamarin, or

²⁷ Note that, as in many comics, the onomatopoeia in Berberian and Zamarin’s score are often rendered with close attention to visual details that further inform one’s sense of the sound being communicated in text. While I will not linger on this point, it is nonetheless another aspect of affect that presented itself in this lesson.

a musical score prioritizing visual notation beyond standard musical notation, Berberian realizes *Stripsody* with an impressive range of extended vocal techniques (both classical, or “bel canto” style, singing, and experimental vocal exploration), body movements, gestures, and facial expressions. In doing so, she creates a holistic performance of an abstracted, imagined journey through a soundscape of comic vignettes. Importantly, the video that I showed for this session was a video of Berberian performing the composition herself that lasted approximately three minutes and fifteen seconds and included not just a visual of Berberian herself, but also cuts to the relevant sections of the graphic score throughout the performance.²⁸

I developed this lesson using Berberian’s performance of her original 1966 composition *Stripsody* in response to children’s fascination with musical notation as a visual representation of music and sound. As described in the previous chapter’s exploration of *Water Walk*, children were often interested in how what they called “notes” (i.e. musical sounds, as represented by standard musical notation) could be understood and interpreted by performers, and how “notes” might be differentiated from what the children called “sounds” (i.e., non-musical sounds typically not represented by standard musical notation). Given that I wanted the children to have an opportunity to explore notation and their interests in it, *Stripsody* seemed like a reasonable choice for two reasons. First, it aligned with children’s interests in comics and graphic novels that I observed across children at the school. Second, I wanted to give children an opportunity to explore the visual representation of sound through self-directed composition and

²⁸ The exact video I used can be found at the following YouTube URL: <https://youtu.be/0dNLAhL46xM?si=3JQiYOxSaaq7B1XW>

performance within a setting that was open to both improvisation and free interpretation. As such, Berberian's performance using both a graphic score and showing the score as well as her realization seemed to be accessible in its scope and offered a visual demonstration of both the score and the performance that children would be able to use as examples for their own creations.

Viewing and Discussing “Stripsody” with Ms. Thompson’s Third-Grade Class

As I walked down the second-floor hallway of Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School to Ms. Thompson's third-grade class for our twice-monthly, forty-minute philosophy session, I found myself lost in thoughts of how this class had been a real challenge this year in terms of their focus on principal points of the session and their consequent behaviors. While I knew most of the children in this class well, having already worked with most of them the previous year, the “third grade madness” that often starts by the middle of the school year (which I sometimes also cheekily referred to as “Fifth-Grade Spring Light”) had fully begun to take root. That is, the very beginnings of early puberty that can strike around the ages of approximately 8-9 for white children and 7-8 for black and hispanic children (Cleveland Clinic 2024), and the burgeoning social-emotional developments and interests that often accompany this period, had begun to start wreaking havoc with the normally respectful ways the children chose to interact with each other and with me. It had also seemingly affected their ability to focus on our sessions rather than the inappropriate joke their friend might be making across the room (often while someone else was speaking). This was compounded by the fact that Ms. Thompson's class was a “Highly Capable Cohort,” or a

class of children who were generally academically advanced beyond grade-level material and ideas, even as their social-emotional development did not always match their intellectual acuity.²⁹ This was an experience that I myself was all-too-familiar-with as a (still) somewhat precocious, former “gifted” child.

The irony, of course, was that Ms. Thompson’s class loved philosophy, which they reminded me of almost every time I was there. In fact, it was the children themselves who had requested that we meet twice a month instead of once a month, as they specifically asked Ms. Thompson for more philosophy time. For these reasons, Ms. Thompson and I were working to focus our philosophy time towards topics that helped the young learners to consider how their actions affected those around them while still giving them opportunities to explore their own philosophical interests within these topics. I tried to plan sessions that would help with self-expression, but also, self-restraint when different forms of expression were in conflict, which had become more common in their classroom engagements. As I closed in on their classroom door, I took a deep breath as if to steel my resolve before entering her room.

As I greeted the class, I heard sharp intakes of breath interspersed with exclamations: “He’s here!”, “Hi Mr. Jack!!!”, “HIEEEEEEEEEEEEE”, “Yay, it’s time for philosophy!” and “WHAT?!!” all rang out, overlapping in the hub-bub of shuffling bodies and books being put away from the preceding quiet reading time. I noticed that several children were reading books from the *Dog Man* and *Captain Underpants* series, popular graphic novels for children by Bainbridge Island resident Dav Pilkey. The children were

²⁹ For more information about Highly Capable Cohorts, see the “Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School” section of Chapter 2.

sitting at desks collected into groups of about five or six, with each island of desks being represented by a different color emblazoned on a sign hanging over their table groups with numbers in both Arabic and Amharic numerals. Their classroom was clearly an active hub of learning and social responsibility. Among the myriad of examples of children's work showcased on the classroom walls, faces of young artists and activists with empowering slogans like, "We the future are Earth guardians" (Xiuhtezcatl Martinez), "We the future are unapologetically queer" (Lindsay "Lindz" Amer), "We the future, power to the polls" (Winter BreeAnne, "future voter") and "We the future, end gun violence" (Paul S. John) stared back, sentiments that many of the children felt just as strongly about as the people in the portraits based on our many conversations together (Amplifier 2025).³⁰ After Ms. Thompson gave the class a reminder about their behavior expectations (not talking while others are talking, remembering to be respectful of each other even when we disagree, and remembering to raise hands), I took a few moments to check in with the class as I always did before shifting to philosophy. "How are we doing today?" I asked. "Is there anything going on that we're especially excited or worried about that we'd like to share?" After several children shared recently-passed and upcoming birthdays and travels, I began our session for the day in earnest.

"Today we're going to watch a performance of a piece of music called *Stripsody*, performed by the composer herself, Cathy Berberian, but before we watch it, there are a few things I'd like to talk about first. First, I want to let you know that you're going to hear her make a gun sound and make a play-pretend finger gun motion. I know that that isn't something we would normally do at school, but since there aren't any real guns involved and because it's short, I think it will be okay.³¹ I just wanted to let you know before we

³⁰ These are some examples in the poster pack "We the Future" by the non-profit Amplifier, which is where the posters described above originated. <https://amplifier.org/campaigns/we-the-future/>

³¹ While I typically refrained from introducing materials that included guns in our sessions, there were several reasons that I felt it would be acceptable to do so in this instance. First, Berberian's use of gun sounds and motions only occurs in two short instances in the performance (five seconds total of the entire

watch it so you're not surprised, alright? Second, you're going to see the score—the written music—for the piece *in* the video, so when you see things that aren't the performer herself, you're getting a chance to see what she's looking at while she performs. Any questions so far?"

I paused. Amy asked, "Why are their guns in it?" To answer her question, I offered more context for the performance. I responded to her question by focusing our attention to the vocalized sound of a gun used in the performance, rather than the object itself which did not appear.

"That's a great question! The performance we're going to watch today has a very specific theme. Everything you're going to hear in this piece relates to that theme, so that's why she makes a *gun sound*. As you watch it, try to see if you can figure out what the theme is. Ask yourself: 'What do all the sounds have in common? Where might I hear these sounds?' After we watch, we'll talk about what we think the theme is. After that, we'll do an activity based on the video. Any other questions?" I paused to see if more questions pertaining to the piece or guns would come. "No? Okay, let's take a watch."

As I began the video of Cathy Berberian performing her composition *Stripsody*, Ms. Thompson walked over and quietly informed me that in approximately fifteen minutes, a brief school-wide dance party would happen to honor the passing of Mr. Ross, a former instructional assistant. This news struck me, not primarily because of the disruption it represented, but because I was surprised to hear of Mr. Ross's passing considering his very recent retirement. Likewise, I was momentarily reflective at the coincidental timing, as only the week before several classes of children had requested

video used). Likewise, these sounds occur without any props or representations of guns of any kind except Berberian's own hand pantomime and the written word "bang." Second, in my previous interactions with the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School, children themselves had often raised discussion points about guns and armed conflict when relevant, and these comments were always allowed in discussion by their overseeing classroom teachers when they were presented in good faith with care towards their peers. Finally, given that mainstream U.S. children's media and the lives of U.S. children themselves are certainly not free of guns (with firearms being the leading cause of death among children and teens ages 1–17 in the U.S. in recent years (Villareal et al. 2024)), I felt it was appropriate to share this piece with an advanced warning and readiness to discuss the inclusion or context of these sounds if the children wished to do so (and indeed, they did.)

lessons around the topic of death. In light of this news and how it would likely affect some of the children, I decided in that moment that our eventual activity would be individually-focused, rather than table-group-oriented. This strategy, I surmised, would give each child more individual space for self-expression given the nature of the activity we were going to do and given that the memorial dance party may generate sensitive feelings. I also surmised that allowing each child to create their own graphic score and performance would make it easier for each child to opt in or out of the dance party without pressure from their peers to get more done, and, relatedly, that it would make the eventual sharing of their pieces easier to opt in or out of without group pressure for those who were more or less interested or involved.

As the video progressed, my attention turned back to the children and their reactions to the performance of this comic-strip-themed piece of experimental vocal music (though the theme still remained a mystery to the children at this point). As they watched, there were hushed interjections among the classroom that arose sporadically throughout the video: “She is so funny!” “Is she okay?” “That was the weirdest thing I’ve ever seen.” and “That was the AWESOMEST thing I’ve ever seen.” Likewise, there were comments and vocalizations responding directly to the musical content of the piece itself: “Onomatopoeia!” said someone in recognition of the image and sound of Berberian’s dramatic imitation of a mechanical spring’s sound: “boinggggg.” A vicious animal growl, “GrrrrrrrRRRRR”, came forward from Amy in imitation of Berberian’s own animal sounds, and Becky laughed and called out “Superman!” in a timbre much like Berberian’s own child-like voice when vocalizing the name. I was reassured by the intent and engaged watching and listening of the children as they took in the organized

chaos that characterized the piece and which also conveyed the seemingly-silly-yet-serious nature of Berberian's composition that I had hoped would inspire them.

As the video concluded, the sounds of children's laughter (some natural, some forced, as if for attention) hit my ears. As I gently quieted the children from all talking over one another, I probed, "Does anyone have ideas about what they think the theme is?" Becky responded, "Was it comedy?" Amy offered an alternative: "Is it random? Like, random sounds?" After several children had offered thoughts and discussed the theme without ascertaining it, I offered the children an explanation: "Her theme was comic strips, and she wanted to figure out a way to make a musical piece that included all of the sounds that arose in comic strips." A collective "ohhhh" came forward from the class, with some children making immediate connections to the references the performer had given to *Superman* and even the quotation of Charlie Brown's "Good grief!" from *Peanuts*.

Developing Responses to "Stripsody"

Following the initial listening, I began giving the children instructions for how we would be creating and performing our own pieces with graphic scores like Berberian had for *Stripsody*, as they had seen in the video of her performance. I instructed them to choose a theme individually, any theme they wanted, and to then imagine and brainstorm all of the different sounds that they might hear for that theme. I did not offer them additional examples of themes beyond Berberian's use of comics, as I was excited to see what themes they might choose. Likewise, I knew from past experiences that

sometimes too many examples would lead to children using my ideas rather than their own as the basis of their thinking and creating. As I passed out blank, white paper, I elaborated that after they came up with lots of sounds they wanted to include in their theme, they would then figure out how they wanted to represent it visually on the score, reminding them of examples Berberian had used and the stylization of Zamarin's illustrations. The children quickly dove into the exercise, talking excitedly. I circulated the room, checking in with individuals. Sometimes I found myself prompting their thoughts if they said they felt stuck, but mostly, I found myself listening to them talk through their ideas and answering questions as they arose.

As I approached Becky, she described her theme of "Animals" in detail. Offering some of the sounds she was already thinking about using, she began purring coyly as she simultaneously imitated cleaning her face with a hand pretending to be a paw. Noticing that she had already begun drafting her score, I then saw that her score included not only the stylized word "purrr," but a smiling cat to represent her playful performance of feline sound (see Figure 4.1 below). Shortly after this, Ms. Thompson took a moment to remind the children of the memorial dance party for Mr. Ross, sharing her own memories and experiences of him before the principal's voice rang through the loud speaker, announcing the dance party, and playing "Shining Star" by Earth, Wind, and Fire.

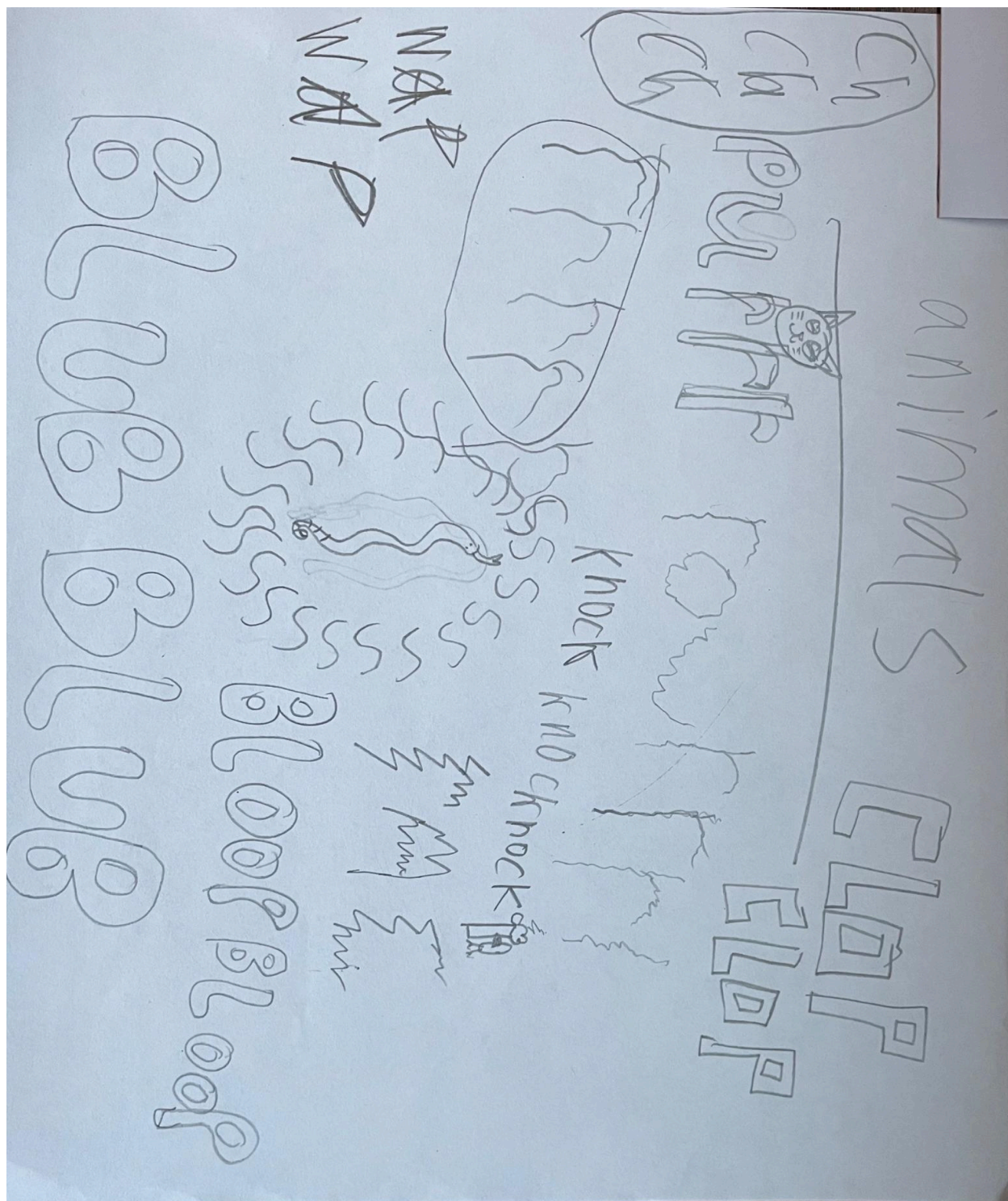


Figure 4.1 Becky's Score for "Animals"³²

³² Note: the small square of paper in the top left corner of the score (the top right corner of the figure here) is being used to redact Becky's handwritten name, which she wrote on the score. No other information is redacted, and the square of paper is not original.

After the children had concluded their dance party and had had time to finalize their scores, I transitioned the class into the final segment of the session: “If you want to perform your piece, you’ll come up to the front of the classroom, show your score, perform it, and then tell us your theme and why you made the choices you made, okay?” Several children raised their hands to perform. I saw Aubrey’s hand go up first and invited her to the front of the class. As she came to the front, there were several outbursts from children, to which Aubrey calmly responded: “I’ll just wait for quiet.” This response, however, only spurred more outbursts, some of which were microaggressive in tone towards Aubrey herself, with several children claiming she was “being bossy” among other slightly mocking comments. This criticism was not a new one, nor was the fact that Aubrey seemed to garner slightly more frequent criticism than others, especially from certain people in the room.

Over the course of the year and from conversations I had had with Ms. Thompson, it had become apparent that “being bossy” and other such veiled accusations, while not overtly transphobic or misogynistic, were often directed towards Aubrey by certain other children for setting boundaries, especially boundaries around her identity as a trans* feminine person. Moreover, as a queer person myself, I was very familiar with these types of microaggressive comments, comments that were often indirect or seemingly unrelated in *what* they criticized while still being intentional in *how they were used to criticize* certain queer individuals and not others. To be sure, these comments struck me in a personal way, as both a queer person and a concerned teacher, and I worked to temper my own complicated feelings and associations around these comments as we continued into the final segment of our session.

“What made you decide to make [the ‘oweeeeee’] that long?” “Well, mostly because... Well, because it’s kind of based on the name [of the piece], ‘Pain,’ which makes it to say, like, [pain] goes on for a long time, and it’s just like... ‘thud.’” Aubrey’s final “thud” was accompanied by a slow, deliberate fist that she firmly beat and rested on her heart. As she explained, her face had shifted from inquisitive and assured in her explanation into a seemingly-pained, resigned grimace, with her eyes meeting mine as she vocalized the final “thud” of her fist on her heart. Checking the clock, I saw that our time was unfortunately growing short, and so reluctantly, I forewent further questions from the class for Aubrey’s piece, and instead, I offered Aubrey a final comment before pressing on to additional children wishing to perform: “Well, thank you for sharing, Aubrey. I really appreciated your performance and explanation.” Aubrey nodded with an expression that seemed both appreciative and resigned, and returned to her seat as children began raising hands and calling out to be next.

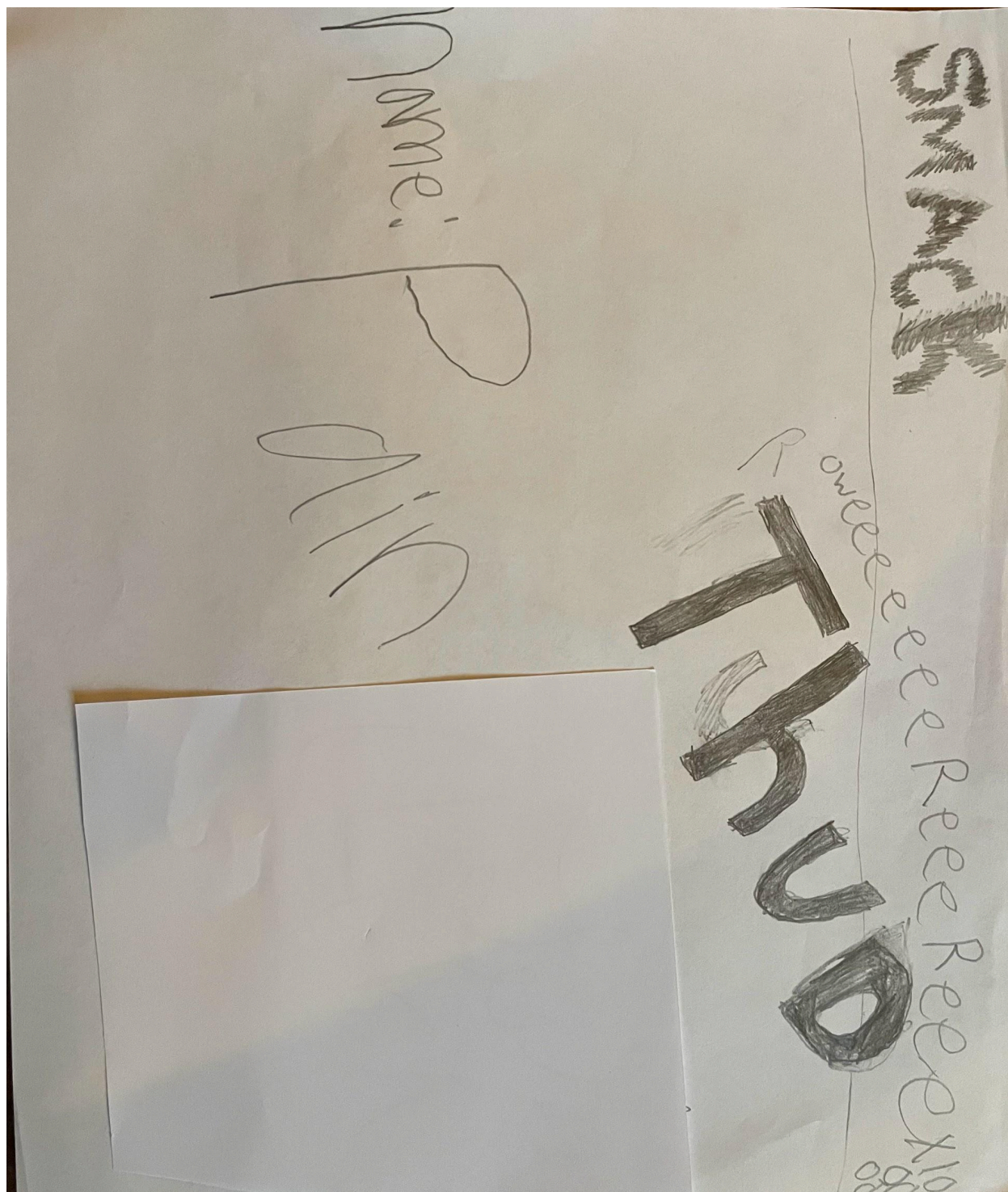


Figure 4.2 Aubrey's Score for "Pain"³³

³³ Note: the large square of paper on top of the score (in the bottom of the image) is being used to redact Aubrey's handwritten name (in both print and cursive), which she wrote on the score. No other information is redacted, and the square of paper is not original.

While the quote above accurately represents the words that I spoke to Aubrey at the end of her performance, I admit, it does not come close to accurately portraying the complicated mix of feelings our exchange ignited in me during our session. While my years of teaching experience kicked in to help fill in the words of a heartfelt and appreciative response to Aubrey's description, our exchange had flooded my mind and heart with memories of my own experiences of gender alterity and self-expression and my own pain that often resulted from my queer difference. I tried my best to give my attention to the next child, Becky, who was about to perform her composition on the theme of "Animals." Inside, however, I was reeling and doing my best not to let my feelings get the best of me while actively leading the class (an experience I felt only rarely at that point in my teaching career). To quote from my own scattered, feeling-laden field notes on this session, "It definitely hit me... you know? As a queer person, watching a trans* femme student do a performance —write about an interesting abstract score idea, and the theme is 'Pain' and thinking about what that means... [I paused for a deep sigh]. It was a Moment."

And as the somber, deep tone quality of my own voice speaking back to me from my audio field notes confirmed, it was a moment. A moment when I, a queer adult with my own histories of queer trauma, was trying to be present for Aubrey's piece while simultaneously trying not to be overcome by my own feelings that the context of her performance had triggered. A moment where I, the queer teacher in the room, was already aware of and working with my colleague against microaggressions being aimed at Aubrey for trying to enforce the same boundaries others expected for quiet while she spoke and performed, all while still supporting the needs of the very children who were

seemingly unaware of the greater context of their veiled, targeted statements. A moment when I, the queer researcher in the room, was suddenly torn between my desire to protect and honor a fellow queer person by keeping this painful moment secret and hidden, and my own desire to share this moment as one of the more personal and affectively charged instances of philosophical music making and reflexive fieldwork I experienced that could likewise help other queer scholars and queer people in the future (a moment I still return to and question even now.) A moment where I, the queer adult in the room, was doing my very best not to project my own understandings and experiences of queerness and identity onto my child collaborator, while simultaneously trying to acknowledge and honor the invisible bond that Aubrey and I shared without even speaking about it that few, if any, others in the room seemed to be aware of or party to themselves. My field notes continued: “How do we express these things? It was beautiful, and sad, but speaks again to the power music has to be an opportunity for deeper intellectual understanding and expression, and how that overlaps into philosophy, which is also an art about expression, and giving deeper meaning, or understanding, to some of the experiences we have as people.”

Indeed, in focusing our community of philosophical inquiry towards music making as a potential mode of philosophical exploration and expression, this lesson on *Stripsody* with Ms. Thompson’s class offered an example of the importance of affect, both topically and processually. Aubrey’s conception, performance, and explanation of “Pain” highlighted the importance of feelings for both philosophical and musical understanding and doing. That is, her piece showcased the ability that music has to

express and inform experiences of pain using both philosophically and affectively focused practices within the context of music making.

Prior Studies of Affect, Feelings, and Music

While the scope of studies of feeling, emotion, and/or affect outside of music studies are too numerous and their approaches are too varied to cover in a systematic way here, some foundational works within the humanities that situate affect within the same philosophical, theoretical, and practical framework as that being considered here are: Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) consideration of feelings as a way of structuring the world, Cvetkovich's (2003) explorations of feelings as public culture (even in relation to music), Sedgwick's (2003) theoretical reminders of the importance of considering feelings as a form of knowing and evidence, and Ahmed's (2004, 2006, and 2010) robust situation of affect and feelings as a crucial component of cultural politics. Within music studies specifically, several scholars have offered primary research around topics within the umbrella of affect (Feld [1982] 2012; Becker 2004; Hahn 2007; Gill 2017; Wong 2008, 2015, and 2019) considering various musical cultures and their engagements in or structuring through feeling, and several have offered overviews of the trends in approaches to studying affect and music, such as Thompson and Biddle (2013), Atanasovski (2015), and Hofman (2015). Finally, while scholars in ethno/musicology and music education have likewise given attention to children's feelings and their emotional responses to music (Marsh 2008; Emberly 2009, 2014; Campbell 2010; Koops 2017, 2019; Downing 2019; Cantarelli Vita 2021), as well as social and emotional learning through music (Koops 2017, 2019), much of this work has been descriptive rather than formative. I.e., these works often attend to recording

children's responses and reactions and with subsequent adult categorization and analysis, rather than engaging feelings as a modality of research or music making as I have done here. While they attend to considerations of how emotions affect children's lives as they relate to music, they do not address feeling-first musical practices engaged by children as I do subsequently.

Affect as a Modality of Philosophical Music Making

As (re)defining an entire approach to studies of affect in ethno/musicological discourse is beyond the scope of this project, Denise Gill's framework of affect from *Melancholic Modalities: Affect, Islam, and Turkish Classical Musicians* (2017) will serve as the basis of my own framework for analysis of feelings-laden expressions and understandings of music in the above vignettes, as well in the lives of the children with whom I worked at large. It is worth noting, however, that Gill's work focuses exclusively on the lives and culture of adult Turkish classical musicians within the context of "melancholy" as a singular affective lens. Thus, her work represents a very different cultural context from that of the children with whom I worked in Seattle, WA. That said, while the impressive cultural situating of Gill's work in Turkish culture and scholarship is not germane to my fieldwork or analysis, her broader situating of affect as a modality, "in the true sense of modality, as a method, way, and process," is remarkably well-suited to these cases. (22) In particular, her situating of affect "as a practice" in the lives of people "to evaluate and give meaning to their music and sonic productions" will be useful here as a basis for considering the above vignettes as characteristic of the

understandings, importance, and uses of feelings that I observed during fieldwork surrounding the musical lives of children. (16)

As described at the outset of this chapter, Gill (2017, 17) defines affect expansively as “the large-scale way that emotions—as effects of objects pressing upon us and the sensations that pressing produces—are practiced, transferred into value, and assessed by individuals and communities[...] Affect refers to the multivalent and complex ways that feelings and emotions are produced and generate knowledge.” As such, feelings matter because they “affect” individuals and the world around us, often through sonic and musical practices laden with emotional meaning, shared values, and embodied cultural knowledge that are transmitted when feelings are expressed or received/understood through music and otherwise. Moreover, while the children with whom I worked were often creative, thoughtful, and frankly, impressive in their ability to logically explore a topic and explain and support their thinking (as in Chapter 3), their capabilities in drawing on and analyzing affective cultural knowledge about music and sound in our sessions and their intentional, musical applications of affect offered a wealth of new understandings of children’s interests and ability to engage in reflexive, expressive music making around philosophical interests. As such, Gill’s framework for affect offers an effective way to contextualize both the context and composition/performance of Aubrey’s piece “Pain” by situating affect as a way of understanding feelings-laden cultural processes and products, and also, by situating affect as a way of creating original cultural knowledge in the lives of children in the first place.

Affect and “Stripsody”

In considering “Stripsody” in Ms. Thompson’s class, this session especially showcases the importance of feelings as an intellectual and musical modality, or way of understanding, in the lives of children. While children were encouraged to choose any theme they wished in this session, and indeed, while there were many wide-ranging topics that children chose to focus on across the classes who used this prompt, most children chose topics that were in some way reliant on, or at least related to, shared sociocultural understandings and practices of both emotions and sounds. This was true even in cases that were not as overtly affectively marked as Aubrey’s piece “Pain,” to which we shall return momentarily. Even in instances where children chose more easily tangible or concrete themes that might not *require* appeals to affect to communicate their ideas or musical visions, their compositions, performances, and discussions of their pieces were still often marked by the shared sociocultural understandings and experiences of emotions and sounds as a primary process of knowing and communicating important features of a theme.

For example, after surveying her sonic knowledge of animals, Becky chose several sounds that would have effectively conveyed the basic knowledge of the “animal” as a theme. That is, Becky could simply have said “purrr” in a deadpan voice with no bodily motions or discernable vocal expression of emotion, and it likely would have been just as telling of her theme of “Animals” in conversation with me and during her performance. Nonetheless, she instead chose to characterize her cat sounds with specific affective qualities like facial expressions, bodily motions and tone of voice in

both performance and notation to communicate what she felt was the most accurate and appropriate sonic and affective representation of “cat” for her piece as she understood it. In other words, it was the ineffable, affective qualities that Becky associated with cats that held weight in her musical composition and performance of “Animals” more than an intellectual knowledge of the theme. Not only did she consciously consider affect as part of her composition, but she effectively realized them in sonic performance in her efforts to get others to understand and experience the theme of her piece as she herself understood it and wanted others to understand it as well.

The Affect of “Pain”: Ambiguity and Queerness

Given its overt topical focus on a feeling, Aubrey’s composition “Pain” offers perhaps an even more clear illustration of the importance of affect in both philosophy and music making as a mode of understanding and doing. In focusing on pain, Aubrey offers a multivalent theme that occupies a range of both physical and psychological experiences, to say nothing of the greater shared cultural or societal sentiments and understandings that may accompany pain as a topic. While the internal pieces of the composition itself seem to recount an experience of physical pain in her word choices, Aubrey’s performance and description of the piece indicated deeper sentiments of psychological or cultural pain relevant to her own lived experiences, even as no specific lived experiences were described as examples. In doing so, Aubrey created a level of ambiguity, both surrounding her own creation and performance of the piece, and

surrounding pain as a sonically realized example of affect as a modality of understanding lent itself to for the theme she chose.

As Christi-Anne Castro (2020) describes in her chapter “Queerness, Ambiguity, Ethnography” in *Queering the Field: Sounding Out Ethnomusicology*, just as ambiguity surrounding gender can be both a state of being and an active strategy for queering gender, so too can ambiguity in musical performance be an act of queerness for musicians, especially when musical topics and identities overlap. In creating an ambiguous affective performance, Aubrey was able to communicate variously to different people in the room at the same time, depending on their frame(s) of reference for pain. Beyond merely recounting a physically painful experience, her vocal characterizations (“SSSSSMACK!”), her insistence on the long-term, ongoing nature of the experience of pain after its initial causation (“Oweeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee x 100,000”), her description of the reasoning behind her piece (“it’s the only thing that makes sense”), and her own affectively-charged explanation of the meaning and psychic weight of the final “thud” all highlight the polysemic nature of the piece across pain as an affective modality for Aubrey’s composition and lived experience. Indeed, while Aubrey’s sonic realizations of “smack” and “thud” might seem to undermine a sonic fluency with these sounds (since she chose to vocalize them with words rather than, say, perform them physically with no words), her performance instead highlighted an awareness of how to effectively communicate the affective, emotional components of “pain” using the voice instead. By foregoing physical noises of the body in favor of an affectively charged vocal performance, Aubrey highlights the ambiguity or queerness between expectation and realization. Her ambiguous performance of the otherwise sonically recognizable sounds

of physical pain created a musical blurring that instead highlighted her own awareness and intentional practice of affective music making by giving literal voice to her pain. However, rather than focus exactly on the meaning or source of pain within the context of Aubrey's piece, here I wish to focus instead on the ways that Aubrey operationalizes the affect of pain towards a deeper understanding of children's lives and musical culture.

Understanding the Affective Musical Process of "Pain"

As Gill (2017) writes with regard to melancholy, "Melancholy-as-sonic-object is culturally heard, shared, and understood, and can circulate through a variety of texts. Yet melancholy-as-process is a lived sense experience, and that experience is itself dependent on and constructed by social contexts and the ways melancholies are learned, embodied, and practiced." In explaining her focus, she further offers, "I am explicitly interested in studying how *particular people* claim that they actively *use* processes of music making, performance, and teaching to make themselves, and potentially their listeners, 'feel melancholy.'" (17, emphasis original) While Gill acknowledges the shared cultural meanings and values that the actual affective "sonic objects" (performances, recordings, and scores, among others) that circulate within one's culture may hold, she focuses her attentions towards the dynamic processes and practices of people and the flow of social contexts around them to understand *how* affect is "learned, embodied, and practiced" within the context of music. To put this into the context of Aubrey's performance, "pain-as-sonic-object" (i.e., the performance itself, the recording of the performance, or the score representing it) does reflect what Aubrey

and children like her think and feel pain is as well as how it sounds across understandings of pain, which is valuable cultural knowledge about the lives of young, trans* people in the world. However, “pain-as-process” can help open our understanding of pain further to Aubrey’s specific lived sense experience of pain as well as the social contexts that shape it. “Pain-as-process” can help us to understand the musical and sonic practices Aubrey and children like her operationalize to feel and express pain, and how those practices shape the musical culture around such children. Finally, within the scope of this reflexive research process alongside children, understanding the musical research processes that shaped this session can offer new strategies for adult ethno/musicologists seeking to explore the affective and philosophical layers of children’s musical lives, an otherwise understudied aspect of studies of children’s musical cultures.

In turning our attention then to the contexts and processes surrounding Aubrey’s creation of “Pain,” this piece came to be within the context of our collective music-making session where children had established time and again the importance of feelings as a modality of philosophizing as our sessions became increasingly oriented around music. “Pain” occurred within the context of a philosophy session where children were encouraged to critically examine a theme of their own choosing, to explore the sounds that might best represent that theme, to consider how best to represent those sounds in graphic notation, and to perform their composition in a way that expressed their chosen theme. This process was introduced by a queer ethno/musicologist, philosopher, and teacher, and it was introduced in a prompt showing a professional composer and musician that acted as an example of the execution of this concept. The

prompt itself was likewise within the scope of a topic of interest for the graphic-novel-loving children in Ms. Thompson's class. Finally, within the context of this process, *children were always given the option to choose not to share, or to share in a way, or to the extent, that they felt comfortable*. I'll say it again (and break the formal/informal dissertation writing-style boundary to acknowledge that I'm saying it again here for emphasis): throughout my time with the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School, they were always given the option to opt out of performing for their peers or me, and/or to opt out of sharing personal feelings or information. In creating this safe space for voluntary self-expression, I found that many, if not most, children who initially chose not to perform or share at the beginning of a session might share later in that same session, or perhaps in a subsequent session. Put simply, the research process reflected more robust participation and observation within the context of a safe space where children knew they were always invited, but never pressured, to perform.

Simultaneously, "Pain" was created in the context of a classroom with an ongoing pattern of struggling to maintain focus and civility among its classroom community. It came to be within a context of microaggressive comments and behaviors that targeted Aubrey for enforcing boundaries of respect surrounding both her gender identity and her insistence upon being seen and heard without being interrupted while she performed and explained "Pain" for her classmates. Beyond this, it was born out of a session that entailed an unexpected music-and-dance-focused memorialization of a member of the school community who had recently passed, where both Ms. Thompson and the Principal expressed their own thoughts and feelings surrounding the "painful" loss of a colleague and the bittersweet celebration of his life. Finally, it transpired within the

context of a classroom structure that supported queer identities, with an openly queer researcher leading the session, with clear differences in disposition towards this structure. While I do not wish to center myself to the detriment of considering Aubrey and the other children's contributions to this research, it is worth noting how significant the unspoken understanding of queerness was in this session. For just as Aubrey effectively transmitted both her affective knowledge surrounding the production of "Pain," it was likewise important for this musical and cultural information to be received by an audience who could understand and validate its existence across the various layers of meaning that she had packed into it. That is, within the polysemic, ambiguous performance of pain that Aubrey created, it was necessary for someone with the ability to hear, feel, and understand pain across the various ways she was performing to be able to understand its significance. As such, "Stripsody" and this research at large gave us an opportunity to do that.

For her own affective musical practices, Aubrey employed vocal techniques, facial expressions, and motions to express "Pain" for herself and her class. Using a wide vocal range, her initial "smack" sound emphasized a guttural, deep, forceful, and possibly angry tone, with intentionally over-enunciated consonants that reinforced the sound and sentiment behind the idea of literal, physical smack, even as no such physical smack materialized. In contrast, her "oweee" sound utilized a much higher, thinner, held tone, that fell ever so slowly in pitch over the long course of its duration, itself interspersed with a breath and re-entry to emphasize its continuous nature. Finally, Aubrey's "thud" was delivered with much more of a straightforward speaking tone, effecting an almost anticlimactic sense of ending in its abrupt execution and less

emotionally-inflected tone. In describing her piece, Aubrey highlighted the fact that pain is perhaps one of the only things that really made sense to her in our session, and as such, she chose to express that sense across various meanings of “pain.”

While it would be simple to overemphasize Aubrey’s pain as an object representative of singular or conglomerate understanding of the feeling of pain (in effect, describing what pain is for Aubrey), here instead I highlight Aubrey’s own emphasis on pain as her choice of a theme for the fact that it made sense to *her* more than anything else. That is, Aubrey’s conception, notation, performance, and explanation of “Pain” can be understood not just as indicative of her own specific experience(s) of pain, but it can also be understood as indicative of the greater cultural processes of pain in Aubrey’s life and how those processes both inform and are informed by her own experiences and understandings of pain as a young trans* person in her community. Moreover, in considering her own iteration of these sonic sentiments, the importance of sociocultural context in the sonic and affective lives of children likewise presents itself. In exploring these processes of pain through music making, Aubrey’s “Pain” likewise creates an opportunity to consider the affective processes that underlie abstract sonifications or musicalizations of felt experiences like pain and the ways that such sentiments may become part of the musical lives of children.

“What’s the Vibe?”: A Game of Music and Sentiments

“What’s the Vibe?” is a game that I developed in response to children’s frequent use and discussion of the term “vibe,” both in and out of sessions pertaining to music. “Vibe” was one of the primary discussion points across many sessions, and represented

a strong emerging theme of the importance of affect (Gill 2017) and acoustemology (Feld 2015). While the vignette below will offer children's own definitions of the term both broadly and pertaining to music, as Luis-Manuel Garcia (2020, 27) defines in his own affective ethnomusicological research, a musical "vibe" is a "collectively experienced affective tone that is shaped by sonic experience." As such, a vibe is the general sonic-affective atmosphere felt or perceived by listeners and performers, and in this case, child listeners and performers. An experience of a vibe can be both an embodied and intellectual experience, comprising both bodily feelings of emotions and intellectual awareness of perceived social sensibilities. For the purposes of this dissertation then, a musical "vibe" can be understood as the experience of sound and sentiment meeting within a specific person, place, or thing, and/or *surrounding a* specific person, place, or thing.

Likewise, I developed this game to give children an opportunity to explore the music that was most meaningful to them. Inspired by others' considerations of children and popular music listenership (Bickford 2017, 2020) as well as child-centered approaches to engaging with playlists and recorded music (Cantarelli Vita 2021), I first asked children across my classes to voluntarily submit 1–2 songs each that they would want to include on a class playlist for us to use in philosophy at school. That is, I told the children that their songs could not include any topics or language that they would not otherwise be able to discuss in their classes at school, but that they were otherwise free to choose what they liked. After collecting submissions for each class, I would systematically review and listen to all of the songs submitted, reading lyrics if they were present and doing background research on artists with whom I was unfamiliar. This

sometimes also included translation of lyrics, especially from Korean and Spanish. Of all the songs submitted, the only songs that were ultimately rejected were songs that: 1.) had overt lyric discussions of sex or graphic violence, 2.) contained excessive swearing, and/or 3.) could not be found across various music platforms.³⁴ After this, I created Spotify playlists for each class, and used the same basic Google Slides presentation to play the game (see Table 4.1 below for the playlist, and Appendix I for the slides from Ms. Terry's class).

³⁴ With regard to "could not be found," this only happened in cases where a child requested a "clean version" of a song that I was not able to find on Spotify, Apple Music, YouTube, or Google. I surmise that this happened because I said, "If you know that there's a clean version, you can write that, and I'll try to find it if I can." In a few cases across classes this was possible (in particular, a couple songs with the addendum "radio edit" rather than "clean" or "clean version" were found); however, there were a few songs for which this wasn't possible, and as such, they were not included.

Song Title	Artist(s)
Crunchy Taco	Parry Gripp
Octopus's Garden	The Beatles
MEGAVERSE	Stray Kids
From The Start	Laufey
Green Onions	Booker T. & the M.G.'s
Day 1	Red Velvet
Paradise	Coldplay
The Star-Spangled Banner	United States Marine Band
Like a Rolling Stone	Bob Dylan
Love Story	Taylor Swift
Water	Tyla
It Is What It Is	Jenna Raine
Astronaut In the Ocean	Masked Wolf
Magnetic	Illit
T.N.T.	AC/DC
At the Speed of Light	Dimrain47
At the Speed of Light	Sheet Music Boss
Pompeii	Bastille
Little Miss Perfect (feat. Jorjah Kwamé and Taylor Louderman)	Writing Out Loud, Jorjah Kwamé, and Taylor Louderman
Dark Horse	Katy Perry and Juicy J
Yellow Submarine	The Beatles

Table 4.1: Children's playlist from Ms. Terry's fifth-grade class³⁵

³⁵ The only songs excluded from above were: "Godzilla (feat. Juice WRLD)" by Eminem and Juice WRLD, "The Real Slim Shady" by Eminem, "Passionfruit" by Drake, and "Confident" by Demi Lovato.

As a game, “What’s the Vibe?” has four segments. Segment 1 is a brief warm-up with the following questions: “What is a vibe?”, “How do you know what the vibe is?”, and “Does music have a vibe?” Segment 2 utilizes the playlists the children created by submitting songs of their choice. Using randomly selected/ordered songs from this list, children answer the same question about each song, that question being “In one word: what’s the vibe?” After compiling a list of (mostly) one-word suggestions, I would open up discussion of the list among the children with the question: “Why do we feel this way?” After the children had discussed for a time, we would move on to another example, usually for a total of 3–4 song examples in this segment. Segment 3 consists of children collectively imagining how philosophically-inspired topics could be realized in sound as a “vibe.” That is, rather than using a song submitted by the children and asking what the vibe is, I prompted children with single-word philosophical topics like “freedom,” “justice,” and “luck” that we had covered previously in philosophy sessions and asked, “What should _____’s vibe sound like?” After discussing one philosophical vibe, we would move on to the next, usually for a total of 1–2 philosophical vibes for this segment. Finally, Segment 4 consists of children working together in groups to choose a vibe of their own and to decide how they would want it to sound before explaining, and often performing, their vibe for the class. This last segment was often done on a subsequent day as a “Part 2” to the initial three-segment lesson, often after a brief review of Segments 2 and 3 on the second day prior to beginning Segment 4.

It is worth noting that Ms. Terry’s class, as described below, was unique in completing this game in a singular session. This was in part because the children in Ms. Terry’s class made the leap to music making and sonic exploration as part of their

process in Segment 4 with much more haste and enthusiasm than most other classes, needing no direction or encouragement whatsoever from me to begin making sound. This was also in part because their hour-long sessions lasted longer than most other classes (whose sessions more commonly ran thirty to forty-five minutes).

“What’s the Vibe?” with Ms. Terry’s Fifth-Grade Class

Segment 1

As I walked from the Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School main school building and up the metal ramp to Ms. Terry’s fifth-grade classroom in the metal portable building just twenty feet away, I was met with familiar, excited words: “We have philosophy today?!” Ms. Terry’s voice rang out excitedly from across the room as she saw me enter the classroom door. Exemplifying the maximally-decorated and creatively chaotic classroom atmosphere around her, Ms. Terry was often just as surprised as the children in her class at my arrival for our somewhat regular bi-weekly sessions. Of course, the surface-level disorganization of the classroom and schedule belied the true nature of the engaged learning brewing on every surface and at every child’s table under her unselfconscious and imaginative leadership. In fact, it was not uncommon for the children in this class to have some of the most well-considered and unique perspectives across the school in our sessions together, a trend that had proven true since the year before when I had worked with most of them in fourth grade. “Are we going to listen to our songs today?” someone asked, drawing my attention back to the children. “We are!” I said, as they began to clear their laptops for philosophy. After catching up briefly with the children, I began our session for the day in earnest.

What's a vibe?" I asked the class. Margaret raised her hand and offered: "A vibe is the feeling or energy something gives off. Like, a fan might give off a noisy vibe, or like, one person might give off a really happy vibe and another person might give off a really sad vibe." This first answer was a pleasant surprise to me, as I was not expecting the children to make a connection between vibe and sound quite so immediately. As I typed notes of her words on the slide projected on the screen at the front of the class, I asked, "Other thoughts?" After discussing both "the energy" something has and "how you're feeling" as evidence of the emotional tone of a vibe, we pivot to the question: "how do you know what the vibe is?" At first, the children offered descriptive, observational answers, answers reminiscent of the social-emotional learning skills utilized at the school: you can "sense if something is positive" and then decide "how you feel" or you can "see someone's expression or body language." Calling on Marion, she further suggested that, "if it's not a good vibe, you'll notice it. Probably mostly everyone around you is going to be down or angry or something that's negative. And you'll feel like some of the energy that's around." David, on the other hand, posited a more complicated explanation not based solely on interpreting the feelings of those around you or even just one's own feelings: "A vibe can also be something, you know, that happened in history that you can feel without anyone around. If you went someplace where a lot of people lost their lives in a massive fire or like... a catacomb, it would have a vibe." Someone blurted in support-- "You can read the room!"--to which I agreed and typed their sentiment on the Google Slide for the class to see.

Next, I drew our attention to music specifically: "Does music have a vibe?" "Yes, it does." said Wendy. Relating music to specific social events, Wendy went on to describe

how music could have a vibe, saying, “Cause if you were playing something at a birthday, it’s most likely happy. A wedding: it’s probably...” She paused to consider what vibe may be most appropriate to a wedding. “Maybe a little bit emotional, mostly joy and happy. However, if you’re going to a funeral, don’t expect it to be happy. It’s most likely sad.” As the children discussed further, one child offered an explanation in more technical musical terms: “Depending on the scale of the music, there is a major and a minor. The minor is for a sad song and the major is for a happy song.” I offered both validation and my own cultural situating of this point: “Yes, we definitely think about that. Sometimes, at least in our musical system, we think about two—major and minor—scales. And sometimes people use those in specific ways, and a lot of times major scales can make us feel happy and the minor scales can make us feel sad.”

Segment 2

Drawing no further thoughts, we moved to the next segment of the lesson. As I opened the Spotify playlist for the game, I heard excitement boil over as snippets of quiet conversations about whether or not it was going to be “their song” hit my ears. This was somewhat rare for this class, who was often very exceptionally polite in their engagements with each other and with me in our sessions. And while I certainly did not consider the chatter to be disrespectful whatsoever, it was a rare excited moment for the usually quiet class. A self-described “nerdy” bunch with deep interests in a myriad of niche media topics and a years-long digital presence, they were especially pumped, it seemed, to listen to their own curated musical selections as part of philosophy.

I instructed, “As you listen, think about these two questions. In one word: what’s the vibe? And, why do we feel that way?” After a first, short example called “Crunchy Taco” by Parry Gripp³⁶ (a piece whose genre the children referred to affectionately and epithetically as “meme music” because of the song’s origins as a YouTube video with a still, humorous image), we began listening to our second selection “Octopus’s Garden” by the Beatles. Despite requiring one reminder to listen and not chat over the music, most children seemed very engaged while listening to the song with many bodies swaying to the tune or keeping time in some way with their bodies like tapping a finger or foot to the beat, or even a short rhythm beat against a leg. After the song concluded, I instructed them to take 2–3 minutes to talk to their table group about what the vibe was and why they felt that way. After chatting animatedly with the peers, I refocused the children with a countdown from 10, coming together as a whole, quiet group by 1. “What’s the vibe?” I asked. After an initial suggestion of, “sappy” (i.e., “sad and happy at the same time”), Chris elaborated on this duality, stating that it sounded, “free, but trapped at the same time.” Likewise, Destiny suggested that, “it’s kind of giving like, when you’re laying alone—in a movie specifically—and then that background music plays, and it’s flashback, like, ‘Pyewwww.’” She gestured dramatically, using her hands to mimic the rippling, visual overlay effects a film might use to signal the beginning of a flashback scene to the audience.

After also discussing the word “reminiscent,” I prompted the children to discuss their thoughts. “Why do we feel this way?” After receiving no comments, I suggested

³⁶ The following link is the original video for “Crunchy Taco;” however, I did not use the video with Ms. Terry’s fifth-grade class.
<https://youtu.be/51a5q93L1yA?si=Of02ojEPQ3tV2D6R>

that we listen once more to jog our memories. After relistening to the initial verse and chorus, I re-prompted the young thinkers to offer their thoughts. “What makes it feel that way? Is there a specific thing?” Immediately, Amelia offered, “The tempo. The tempo is not too fast, like, to be energetic, but not too slow to be like a romance song. Like a good example is ‘Perfect’ by Ed Sheeran.” Offering her own comparative analysis between the Beatles and Ed Sheeran, Amelia garnered several agreements, with lots of children nodding or signing “same” in American Sign Language.

After some discussion about the aspirational nature of the lyrics (focusing on the nature of the words “*would like to be*”), Marion offered her own thoughts on the melodic and harmonic contexts surrounding the lyrics: “If you don’t listen enough to what he’s saying exactly, it kind of sounds sad, because like, [singing and using her hands to show downward motion,] ‘I’d like to be / *Under the sea.*’ That kind of thing just makes you feel sad.” Responding to both the falling melodic contour and the underlying E-to-C#m, or I-vi, chord progression of this part of the song, Marion’s sung example had slightly altered the original. Rather than singing the phrase as 5-5-6-5 / 3-3-4-3 (or *sol-sol-la-sol / mi-mi-fa-mi*) as in the original, she sang it as 5-5-6-5 / 1-1-2-1 (or *sol-sol-la-sol / do-do-re-do*), exaggerating both the tonic note acting as the minor third of the vi chord harmony underlying the phrase as well as the effect of the downward motion she heard in the original (see Figures 4.3 and 4.4 below).³⁷ Whether she was conscious of her alterations or whether they were intentional, I didn’t know, but as she finished her thought, I felt my own heart and mind skip a beat: this piece had often

³⁷ The numbers here are used to indicate scale degrees, which are mirrored in the moveable-do solfège in parenthesis that follows.

made me feel a sense of sad longing at exactly that moment as well, and I couldn't help but smile at her similar observation and her ability to remain tightly in key, even if her melody had been shifted down by a third. As I acknowledged Marion's exemplary point, someone else offered a final thought that it's "the way [the artist] says it too" and not just the notes or words he used, focusing again on the affective sensibilities they perceived in the music.

Octopus's Garden (Opening)

the Beatles

Richard Starkey

I'd like to be ___ Un - der the sea ___

Figure 4.3: the Beatles' original opening to "Octopus's Garden"

Octopus's Garden (Opening)

Marion - Ms. Terry's fifth-grade class

Richard Starkey; Adapted by Marion

I'd like to be ___ Un - der the sea ___

Figure 4.4: Marion's adaptation of the opening of "Octopus's Garden"

Segments 3 and 4

After several more fruitful discussions of songs from their playlist,³⁸ I asked the children to consider taking a different direction. “We’re going to switch gears a little bit. If we had a song whose vibe was ‘freedom,’ what would it need to sound like?” Following our former segment, the children offered mostly one-word responses at first: “Joyful.” “Victorious.” “Louder.” “The Star-Spangled Banner.” “Any other thoughts?” I asked. Marion once again offered a well-considered philosophical opinion, this time focusing on genre and its impact on music making: “I don’t think [freedom’s vibe] should have any strict set of rules. I guess you could call it a pop song, but I don’t think I probably would... Or... I don’t think it should fit within any type of song type, cause then it wouldn’t really be free.” This reminded me of the class’s discussions of freedom in previous sessions, where children had questioned whether or not freedom could entail any limitations or not. As such, Marion had extended these considerations towards our musical subject, suggesting that a “free” song would need to sound like whatever an individual might want it to sound like to be truly free. After some brief discussion about the nature of freedom as a topic and freedom as an approach to making music, we shifted our focus back to the final, learner-driven segment of the lesson where the children worked in groups to create their own vibes.

“As a group, think about a vibe that you would want to create. It could be anything, right? [In our earlier examples], some of us said vibes like ‘energetic,’ ‘romantic.’ Some of us said things like, ‘the 1930s.’ Some of us said specific places like

³⁸ The subsequent songs were, “MEGAVERSE” by Stray Kids, “From the Start” by Laufey, and “Green Onions” by Booker T. and the M.G.’s.

‘Hawaii’ or a specific movie like *‘Ratatouille.’* The vibe can be anything you want it to be, but if you were going to make a song about that vibe, what would you want it to sound like and why would you want it to sound that way?”

The children immediately began talking to each other at their tables, and after a moment, I began circulating around the room to offer assistance and check in with groups. As I approached one group asking, “What are we thinking about?” Margaret informed me that their vibe was going to be “Romantic Elevator.” While I was not sure whether this meant a romantic interpretation of “elevator music” or something else entirely, they began to describe the qualities they wanted it to have, like “humming and a shifting beat.” As they described their vibe, my attention was pulled to the sounds of tentative, quiet pencils experimenting with rhythms on desks and water bottles coming from David’s group. Starting off experimentally before settling into a syncopated, eight-beat pattern, I was pleasantly surprised, as I had not expected the children to immediately begin realizing their ideas with musical performance (see Figure 4.5 below). While the pencil rhythms faded in and out and shifted to different rhythms, I continued to walk around and discuss ideas with each group before I also began to hear the sounds of voices singing. They were tentative, isolated utterances at first, but soon multiple voices joined in as the melody coalesced into the theme-song to the game show *Jeopardy!*, which was emanating from the table group creating “Romantic Elevator.” As this initial burst of singing faded, I made my way to my phone sitting at the front of the room recording our session. In the midst of two spontaneous music-making moments without adult direction, the ethno/musicologist inside of me wanted to have my phone firmly planted in my shirt pocket as I circulated to be able to catch the musical

snippets arising from the children more easily amidst the growing number of sounds and the ongoing conversations.



Figure 4.5: The initial rhythmic pattern explored in David’s group

After retrieving my phone from the front of the room, I made my way back to the table working on “Romantic Elevator” to check in again. “I heard some singing over here! Do we have a melody in mind?” When the children offered a slightly self-conscious “Yeah...” I inquired further. “Yeah? What is it? ...Can I hear it?” After an initial soft refusal of “it’s not the *actual* melody...” I pivoted, offering support and validation, as well as a refocusing of my request: “That’s okay! Can you give me the vibe? You have a sense of it, right?” After this pivot, the children read me the list of qualities they had decided they wanted “Romantic Elevator” to have, including “humming, a shifting beat, and to be slower, but not like super slow.” I nodded vigorously without prompting them further for performance as they resumed their discussion, and I proceeded to the table that had just resumed rhythmicking on their desks and bottles with pencils. “What’s the vibe we’re going for?” I asked, to which they exuberantly cried back in overlapping voices, “Happy and high-energy!” Ms. Terry, who had since joined this table group comprised of mostly rambunctious fifth-grade boys, gave me a knowing look, as she offered her own constructive energy to the boisterousness of the table. David further informed me that they also wanted their piece

to have a “shifting beat,” a characteristic I was beginning to realize might signal a syncopated, repeating ostinato or underlying groove, rather than a changing or transforming meter, at least based on what I was hearing around the room. As I encouraged this group to keep playing and exploring their high-energy vibe on found objects, I also decided to begin letting them know that they would be more than welcome to perform their piece if they wanted, hoping that it would further focus their explorations.

As the sounds of whistling, tapping, and singing began to increase around me, my own excitement for the session also increased. Not only were many of the children’s groups deciding of their own accord that music making was the most appropriate strategy for exploring and considering their vibes, a direction I had hoped to take us subsequently, but I was also pleasantly surprised with the diversity of approaches they were taking in their philosophical music making. In terms of genre, I was hearing a range of inspirations. Besides “Romantic Elevator” and “happy and high-energy,” these ranged from the children’s own designations in one group of “pop, rap, and a steady drum beat” as part of their vibe, to Marion’s group who was edging closer to an impasse as they grappled with how they wanted to reconcile half of the group wanting a “1960s teenager music” vibe and the other half wanting a “teenager rap” vibe. Seeking to help them find compromise, I suggested, “Could we somehow fuse those two? Could we somehow make a 1960s teenager rap song? How would that sound?” “Did they have rap in the 1960s?” Marion asked me with polite incredulity verging on skepticism. “You know, we didn’t have rap in quite the same way that we think about it now in the 1960s, but that doesn’t mean that you couldn’t make that song now, right?” I offered. As

Marion’s group continued to clarify with each other, I also overheard the sounds of further philosophical digging in at the next table, as Sally challenged her group, asking, “How much are we focusing on the ‘romantic’ part, and how much are we focusing on the ‘elevator’ part?”

Noticing the time, I gave the children a two-minute warning to finalize their thoughts and music making before they would have a chance to share their vibes with the class. As the children took this time warning in, I felt the vibe of the room shift, as the sounds from groups began to coalesce into the sounds of rehearsal and practicing, rather than free exploration and consideration. The eight-beat rhythm pattern that David’s group had initially explored had transformed and shortened. I now heard a syncopated, interlocking rhythm with one child playing a duple beat and another playing a tresillo rhythm, a rhythm originating from sub-Saharan Africa and spread widely by the transatlantic slave trade (Floyd 1999, 7-8). Margaret and Sally’s “Romantic Elevator” group had begun singing a short, pentatonic melodic loop all together, having settled on a melody that seems to interpolate, if not outright sample, the McDonald’s restaurant “I’m lovin’ it!” theme that had also reached my ears (*do-re-mi-la-sol / mi-re-do-do*) (see Figure 4.6 below). As the groups practiced and discussed their final points, I resituated myself for the final sequence of sharing and performances.



Figure 4.6: The McDonald’s “I’m Lovin’ It!” theme as performed by the children

After getting the class's attention, I refocused the children and explained our final goals. "So remember: tell us what your vibe is; if you want to perform what you're doing for us, that would be great, but you don't have to. Describe it to us, and tell us why you chose what you chose." As I finished speaking, the hands of the "Romantic Elevator" group shot into the air. "Do you want to go first?" I asked. Immediately, Wendy's hand shot up as she asked, "Do we all have to perform?" "You don't, no. I'm not going to force anyone to perform." I offered, much to her relief, as the rest of her group stood up to perform and she stayed seated. Sally began explaining, "So basically, our theme is 'Romantic Elevator.' Don't ask questions." Margaret followed up, adding, "So we are going to have a lot of humming, a shifting beat, it's going to be sort of slow but not depressing, and we're going to repeat. A lot." The others reiterated the repetitious nature of the piece. As I asked if they'd like to perform it, amidst giggles, they counted themselves in, "3-2-1."

As they began singing on vocables "ba" and "da" (rather than humming as indicated), an upbeat, confident melody emerged among the group, mostly in the same key of B-major. The melody lasted 16-beats in total, which they repeated once, and was composed of two internal, 8-beat phrases. Each phrase was likewise characterized by repeated, sequential melodic and rhythmic figures. Beginning with an anacrusis, the first phrase, notated in solfège, was *do-mi-sol, la-sol-fa, sol-fa-mi, fa-mi-re*. A rising tonic arpeggio, followed by sequential falling figures outlining the diatonic scale, implying the possibility of a common practice, shifting I-V underlying harmonic structure. The second phrase began similarly, notated in solfège as *do-mi-sol, la-sol-fa*; however, the last four beats offered surprise as the children sang *re-fa-la-sol, re-fa-la-sol* in syncopated,

upwardly surging arpeggios. This variation created interest and an unexpected implication of greater harmonic tension seeking resolution than the first phrase. This also lent itself well to the intentionally repetitive nature of the piece, as it created an easily looping harmonic sequence. Just as their second iteration of the entire melody drew to a close, Sally quickly whispered to Margaret, "Now say it!" to which Margaret confidently and coolly added the final spoken phrase, "I'm lovin' it!" as if to drop an imaginary mic at the end of their performance. As they finished, the children proudly accepted their applause, with a hearty dose of giggles and the release of positive nerves. Though they declined to say more about their piece, they did humorously acknowledge the influence of McDonald's as they returned to their table.

Romantic Elevator

$\text{♩} = 80$

"3 - 2 - 1" Ba-da - ba - a ba-da - ba - a ba-da - ba - a ba-da - ba - a. Ba-da - ba -

4 a ba-da-ba-a ba-da ba - a ba! Ba-da ba-a ba! Ba-da-ba - a ba-da-ba-a ba-da-ba-

7 a ba-da-ba-a. Ba-da-ba - a ba-da-ba-a ba-da ba - a ba! Ba-da ba-a ba! "I'm lovin' it!"

Figure 4.7 Transcription of "Romantic Elevator."

As “Romantic Elevator” returned to their seats, David’s rhythmicking group raised their hands quickly, excited to perform next. Amidst giggles that almost overtook them, they began a stilted description of their seemingly complex and chaotic vibe with the help of their teacher who had kept their notes. After the children haltingly offered the names of several inspiring artists and internet personalities through their laughter: “Lil Drake,” “Baby Kia,” and “Lil Maceeee.” Ms. Terry read the list of notes she had kept for them. “Cool, aggressive, yelling, rap, rizzler, mad.” Saying little more, the boys began playing their energetic interlocking, two-beat rhythm pattern on their metal water bottles: a tresillo on one metal water bottle that interlocked with a simple, duple beat on another. They played this repeatedly, jamming at an energetic but easily danceable tempo of approximately 108 beats per minute for about 15 seconds. While simple, their vibe was nevertheless effective and well-performed, as many people immediately began nodding heads angularly, dancing in their seats, and even standing and making arm and hand gestures in time to the boys’ rhythmicking. Likewise, several children interjected with comments like, “wait, that’s fire,” and “sick!” Ms. Terry nodded and smiled, mildly impressed, it seemed, that this group had managed to keep it together and perform so solidly despite their seeming silliness and inattention to the task at hand throughout segments 3 and 4.

♩ = 108



Tresillo	2 4	
Beat	2 4	

Figure 4.8 Transcription of David’s group’s rhythm vibe

While the final groups declined musical performances, they offered verbal descriptions of their imagined pieces, including descriptions of body language, specific phrases that they might include, and even musical characteristics like swing. As the lesson drew to a close, the children requested to listen to more of their class playlist as they packed their things and prepared to go home. As I put on “Green Onions” by Booker T. and the M.G.s, I was struck by the degree to which they were able to suture their philosophical interest in affect or “vibe” to the music-making process so seamlessly, needing no guidance to turn their ideas into musical sound for consideration within the community of philosophical inquiry.

Acoustemology as a Modality of Music Making in “What’s the Vibe?”

Turning our attention to “What’s the Vibe?” with Ms. Terry’s fifth-grade class, we find several examples of children directly employing a sound-first approach within a context of philosophical music making, or using acoustemology to create and understand music. As described earlier in this chapter, Feld (2015, 12) defines acoustemology as “sound as a way of knowing.” Elaborating on this, Feld (2012, 12) claims that acoustemology situates, “what is knowable, and how it becomes known, through sounding and listening.” As such, the children of Ms. Terry’s fifth-grade class demonstrated acoustemology as a modality of music making through several strategies within the self-guided philosophical brainstorming portion (Segment 4) of “What’s the Vibe?” where sounding and listening were central to their processes. Unlike “Stripsody,” where children were given a robust guiding example of how to take an abstract idea and turn it into music (both iconic representation and live performance) using a specific adult-suggested prompt (albeit based on children’s interests), “What’s the Vibe?” created opportunities for children to explore their own preferred musics and sounds, with their own preferred frame of reference and discussion (“vibes”). Likewise, it created an open group brainstorming framework to explore and ultimately perform a sonic vibe of the children’s own collective choosing. As such, “What’s the Vibe?” offers perhaps even more focused demonstrations of children’s deep consideration and utilization of cultural knowledge through sound within a philosophical setting; moreover, “What’s the vibe?” demonstrates children’s abilities to utilize acoustemology intentionally in music making, regardless of their technical musical knowledge or language. Finally, while it is worth noting that there is significant overlap between acoustemology and affect (in part

because of the “vibe”-focused nature of this game), here I will focus primarily on acoustemology, with only occasional relevant discussions of affect.

For example, while David’s group was perhaps one of the least verbally expressive groups, requiring assistance from their teacher to create a written list of their intentions for the piece, they were also the first group to begin making music, which they did almost immediately upon entering the final segment of the lesson. While they did not describe their performance as clearly as other groups, their explored and chosen rhythmic patterns demonstrated their vibe in sonic practice: as the majority of children responded immediately to their vibe with body movements that reflected their embodied sensibilities of hip-hop as listeners. Likewise, David’s group’s vibe sonically reflected the influences they cited, in that it was beat-focused music making suitable for hip-hop and freestyle rapping, and likewise, was the product of questionably gregarious boys.

David’s group’s own attitudes expressed in performance and description seem to offer little on the surface. This seemingly stemmed from two aspects of their performance. First, the inclusion of Ms. Terry in their group functioned as a necessary curtailment force for some of the “aggressive, yelling, and mad” aspects of their vibe. Indeed, all of the artists they cited were artists with notably violent themes in some of their lyrics. In this sense, it was apparent that this group was striking a balance between brevity and transparency in their discussion so as to avoid addressing aspects of their vibe their teacher or myself may have found inappropriate. Second, their choice to say little seemed an apt fit for the “cool, rizzler,” or charismatic, tell-it-like-it-is with few words, vibe they were creating. That is, their choice to say little and simply let the music

do the talking for them was an attitude that would have been in line with the artists and genres they cited, and was an apt display of an appreciation for shared acoustemology. Said differently, they didn't need to say everything they expressed sonically and only needed to play for their point to be made in the expression of their vibe. Finally, beyond matching the vibe of the artists they cited in their choice of tempo and brat-focused musical attitude, their strategy of saying little and focusing instead on finding a solid beat also helped find sonic compromise between some members who were not as into the vibe as some others. That is, offering a beat-focused vibe with little else said or combined allowed for those not as interested in the vibe being explored to find some space from them in the abstract nature of music as a mode of philosophizing and acoustemology as a way of transmitting less specific, more encompassing, cultural knowledge.

The Acoustemological Process of “Romantic Elevator”

“Romantic Elevator” similarly offered several examples of children exploring and deploying acoustemological practices in the pursuit of generating philosophical and musical knowledge around a vibe. In particular, the children in the “Romantic Elevator” group sampled the most widely in their pursuit of the right musical vibe. Drawing on several examples of music for commercials, “Romantic Elevator” sampled both the *Jeopardy!* And McDonald's themes. While the former is background music for a gameshow, the latter comes from the world of jingles, yet both share short and repetitive forms much like that of “Romantic Elevator.” Interestingly, both of these samples relate to many musical qualities of “Muzak,” a specific brand of background music often

associated broadly as “elevator music” in a way similar to how all tissues may be referred to as “Kleenex” (Lanza 2004). One such quality is that of being able to accompany a scene, literally or psychologically, for listeners.

As described by Lanza (2004), “elevator music” is often comprised of emotional content or “moods.” Sometimes referred to as “moodsongs,” Lanza describes how this music is often, as in the background of a movie, meant to express sentiments and moods in short periods of time. As such, it was apropos that this group chose this genre given the scope and goal of our session that day: to explore vibes and music and to create a vibe of their own to share with the class within an hour. Moreover, the musical choices that they made were effective at encapsulating the musical (and affective) qualities necessary for communicating their ideas. In their exploration of their vibe, the group who composed “Romantic Elevator” displayed a robust acoustemological knowledge of this genre, despite not having the words or technical musical vocabulary to describe it. That is, in their exploration of various pieces of music they sonically recognized as belonging to the genre of “elevator music” (or musically-related genres), “Romantic Elevator” effectively explored and interpolated the very musical structures they were seeking for their “elevator” vibe, without ever needing to resort to verbal description or notation.

For example, while slightly shorter given its quicker tempo, “Romantic Elevator” utilizes the same form as the *Jeopardy!* Theme, with an antecedent (A) and consequent (B) phrase structure, that is then repeated for a larger binary form, with only slight variation in its ending. Likewise, the arpeggiated, or skip-heavy, melodic patterns

chosen reflect the same arpeggiated nature of both the McDonald's theme and the *Jeopardy!* theme. The jazzy vocable-forward nature of their lyrics, singing, and vocal timbre reflects similarity to both the McDonald's theme (which uses the same vocables) and to the song "From the Start" by Laufey, which was a track the children added to their list and which we had listened to earlier in the session. Moreover, this song had been added in the first place by Margaret, as she reminded me during this session. Simultaneously, these same musical elements helped to reflect the "romantic" quality of the song in the timbre of their voices and the emotionally expressive way with which they sang, as well as the quoted phrase "I'm lovin' it!" which was recontextualized for their piece. While the piece did end with a direct quotation or sample of "I'm lovin' it!", it was the only instance of this, and the rest of the piece was a new composition effectively blending musical elements of the influencing pieces for the desired vibe of their performance. Taken all together then, "Romantic Elevator" was a successful acoustemological exploration of music the children knew through sound rather than verbal, technical musical knowledge. "Romantic Elevator" likewise effectively rendered several feelings-laden musical elements towards the purpose of offering a new piece to communicate shared cultural knowledge about how music needs to sound and feel to meaningfully communicate musical ideas with intention.

Conclusions

In opening our philosophical community towards music making as a potential mode of philosophical exploration and expression, two particular, interconnected themes surfaced throughout my fieldwork at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School:

the importance of “affect,” or feelings-based ways of knowing and understanding, and “acoustemology,” or sound-based ways of knowing and understanding. While these terms are drawn from adult scholarship in the humanities and music studies, their weight in both philosophical and musical endeavors in children’s lives was palpable throughout my time at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School. As exemplified in the previously described sessions, “Stripsody” with Ms. Thompson’s third-grade class and “What’s the Vibe?” with Ms. Terry’s fifth-grade class, feelings- and sound-based knowledges and ways of knowing surfaced as worthy areas of consideration for children both topically and practically. That is, children not only inspired the prompts of these sessions through their own interests in and considerations of feelings and sounds, but they likewise brought their own philosophical dispositions towards feelings and sound-first approaches to understanding and creating music into the community of philosophical inquiry as ways of knowing and understanding worthy of serious consideration. Moreover, these themes were not only emphasized directly by the children themselves in their discussions, but they also often reiterated their importance in practice through their own extensive uses of affect and acoustemology, which materialized as both general modalities, or ways, of understanding and knowing, and in specific, musical practices that they themselves realized through music making in our sessions together. Taken together, these two themes are both philosophical interests in and philosophical dispositions towards understanding musical culture. While children were also very good at engaging in robust, intellectual discussions around the ontology or beauty of music (as in Chapter 3), I often found that much of our time focusing on music was spent considering its affective qualities or appealing directly to sound and

sentiment without the need for verbal descriptions to anchor their understanding or music making.

Similarly, In adapting the community of philosophical inquiry model towards music, music making became an equally important modality for understanding and communicating philosophical knowledge about music. For example, as “Stripsody” demonstrated, children often found affect to be a crucial aspect of the ideas they wished to communicate through sound. Beyond their insistence on and inclusion of affective elements of sound and performance in the composition and performance of their graphic scores, “Stripsody” demonstrated the importance of music making as a means of exploration and self-expression in creating opportunities for children to explore abstract philosophical concepts like pain through sound. Finally, “Stripsody” as a case study further reinforces the importance of affect within the research process, in that affect touches all areas of our lives, even when the topic is not specifically feelings-focused. That is, my own grappling with the moments of shared “pain” in Aubrey’s performance reminds us of the ways that our feelings can and do affect the way that we carry out research, whether or not our research is topically focused on feelings, and whether or not our research is reflexive and self-inclusive.

Not only do these examples show the importance of affect as a modality or way of considering and thinking about music, but indeed, the examples from “What’s the Vibe?” further demonstrate that the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School were likewise capable of actively engaging with, sampling, and reinventing their own musical sentiments and sonic cultural knowledge to express philosophical ideas

using acoustemology as a philosophical entryway to music making. Using a sound-first approach, the children were able to explore and demonstrate chosen dimensions of music and to innovate within the realm of their own preferred musical styles and examples with levels of expressivity and originality on par to adult performers and researchers. Drawing on their own pre-existing musical knowledge and abilities, children were able to operationalize their ideas in sound through shared acoustemology, or understanding sonic culture. A dynamic process, they likewise utilized their philosophical knowledge and practice to critique and further expand their music making, as when Sally asked her group, “How much are we focusing on the ‘romantic’ part, and how much are we focusing on the “elevator’ part?” Blending the musical and philosophical together, affect and acoustemology functioned as dual modes for the exploration and consideration of music throughout my fieldwork with children.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Further Considerations

This research has responded to the growing trends in ethno/musicology calling for collaborative and mutually beneficial research within the understudied realm of children's musical cultures (Marsh 2008; Campbell 2010; Campbell and Wiggins 2013; Emberly 2014). Likewise, this project has responded to the need to consider the under-examined philosophical underpinnings within children's musical lives in a holistic way, drawing on the work of philosophers considering music with children (Turgeon 2000; Mohr Lone and Burroughs 2016; Tan 2017; Santi 2017; EAUDE 2023; Mohr Lone 2024) and music educators considering direct applications of philosophical methods (Gould 2006 and Kanellopoulos 2007) as they relate to music. Finally, it has greatly expanded thought and research methods in ethno/musicology among scholars considering thought and feeling in children's musical lives as they relate to musical culture (Campbell 2002, 2010; Gaunt 2006; Marsh 2008; Campbell and Wiggins 2013; Emberly 2009, 2014, 2015; Emberly and Davhula 2019; Downing 2019; Bickford 2017, 2020; Cantarelli Vita 2021).

However, across the three fields of ethno/musicology, music education, and Philosophy for Children there has not been much meaningful probing of ways in which children think about music, including defining the boundaries of its definition, its elemental features that qualify it as music, or its impact on emotion and affect such as those displayed here. Relatedly, there has been little attention given towards molding field methods of working with children towards philosophical considerations specifically,

as I have demonstrated throughout the ethnographic descriptions of this research (and will address more fully in a subsequent section in this chapter.) As such, the primary purposes for this research were twofold: 1) To explore and to describe the philosophical elements of children's musical lives and musical cultures that have, so far, gone mostly unexamined in ethno/musicology, and, relatedly, 2) To develop new collaborative, philosophical, and ethno/musicological techniques to utilize alongside children to assist in exploring and describing their own philosophical interests and engagements with music.

During my time at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School, the young people with whom I was lucky enough to work showed me time and again that children have lots of "big ideas" and "big feelings" about music that often go unnoticed (or at least, unacknowledged) by adults and researchers in a meaningful or focused way. Simultaneously, they also showed me that children were capable collaborators within a community-based, child-centered research model. Using a community of philosophical inquiry model (Mohr Lone and Burroughs 2016) that was focused on both discussions of music and music-making practices, the children and I thought, felt, discussed, and musicked together in our sessions to examine and identify their own specific philosophical interests and queries related to their musical lives and culture. As such, this study explored and described previously unconsidered aspects of children's musical culture within the field of ethno/musicology that emerged as prominent themes as well several novel methodological incorporations and adaptations for engaging the philosophical elements of children's musical cultures that were developed and utilized.

The Philosophical and Musical Culture at Dorothy Hollingsworth

In returning to the first guiding research question, “What are children’s philosophical interests in, or philosophical dispositions surrounding, music?”, four themes emerged in the course of this study relevant to ethno/musicology and the study of children. These themes were: musical ontology (Bohlman 1999), beauty as an aesthetic experiences of music (Eaude 2023), affect as a modality and a practice for music making (Gill 2017), and acoustemology as a modality of knowing and doing sound as culture (Feld 2015). While these were by no means the only philosophical components of music that children addressed during our sessions, these four themes represented the core set of interests and dispositions that arose throughout the fieldwork period at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School.

Theme 1: Ontologies of Music

Children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School appeared keen to explore the very nature of music’s existence, or the ontology of music. Specifically, Ms. Martino’s fourth-grade class demonstrated a robust discussion of the democratically-chosen ontological question, “What is music?” They did so as a result of their experience with John Cage’s creation and performance of *Water Walk* (1959). In their ensuing discussion of the experience, children paid particularly close attention to the differentiation of what they considered to be musical sounds and what they considered to be non-musical sounds. These sounds motivated them to consider abstract ontological guidelines for themselves in deciding what music “is” and “is not,” as well as what “counts” as music based on its organization or component parts. Most of the children had begun with the broad implicit premise that not all sound is music,

and that some defining characteristics denote certain sounds as more musical than others. Some children pursued a “notes”-driven understanding of music, that if sounds were already notated, or could be notated for their pitched and rhythmic features, then these sounds qualified as music. This view was informed by children’s familiarity with music through their formal musical instruction, typically as a result of instrumental music classes and lessons in and out of school. Other children took a “sounds”-based approach that was informed by their broader listening experience to specific musical practices that were orally-based, like beatboxing. Within this paradigm, children were especially interested in testing the boundaries of what constituted “music”, pushing their classmates towards questions, examples, and tests that problematized the binary of music/not-music in the first place.

Furthermore, the children were similarly attuned to the necessities of defining additional types of musical elements or structures to shore up their own ideas around ontology, such as the following topics that arose in *Water Walk* with Ms. Martino’s class. They explored the question of what exactly constituted a musical “instrument”, with some children like Ian offering that anything that makes music gets to be an instrument. They wondered aloud about music’s relationship to time (or beat and rhythm), such as James’ considerations around whether or not music needed to be repeatable. They imagined whether music might exist beyond human invention alone, with Harmony considering the musicality of whales and asking questions of interspecies musical understanding. Moreover, even children whose thoughtful discussions were firmly rooted in considering the qualifications of musical practices as they related to notation, or to conventional instruments, or to syntactic relationships in music (specifically beat,

rhythm, and pitch), they often made connections to other ontological paradigms. This occurred both of their own accord, as in the insistence that a song needed to personally “resonate” with them to qualify as music in Harmony’s case, or that music could only be defined as it occurred in community and collaboration with their peers, and not in a comprehensive, exhaustive way.

In their puzzling and probing of the ontologies of music, the children of Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School were considering similar questions and lines of thinking as that that have drawn the attention and study of professional ethno/musicologists within the theoretical canon of the field, such as Bohlman’s (1999) own considerations of the same paradigms of musical ontology that their discussion mirrored on several fronts. Of course, the children were unaware of previous ethno/musicological considerations of musical ontologies, and yet they demonstrated both intellectual finesse and respectful civil engagement with one another in ways that offered nuanced layers of understanding similar to those Bohlman provided in his own writing and examples. As such, they demonstrated a keen capacity or disposition towards collaborative ethno/musicological consideration of the philosophical elements of musical culture in their lives. Notably, children also demonstrated the capability of offering various examples of different relevant considerations on the question of music’s features and functions whether or not they personally espoused those ideas, and they similarly demonstrated a propensity to incorporate the multiple considerations of their peers in their own thinking about the topic.

Theme 2: Beauty as an Aesthetic Experience of Music

Past research indicates that children are capable of making decisions about the aesthetic qualities of music (Winston 2010). They demonstrate an appreciation for musical beauty, and an understanding of the aesthetic qualities of music (Nieminen, Istók, Brattico, and Tervaniemi 2012). Yet much less is known about the processes of aesthetic development of beauty as a philosophical concern in the lives of children (Eaude 2023; Mohr Lone 2024), especially relating to music. In philosophy sessions involving art and music like “Is It Beautiful?”, ideas and feelings surrounding beauty, or delight of the senses in response to art, arose often as a type of evidence or reason regarding a child’s other philosophical beliefs or concerns about music or art. However, in these cases it was often treated by the children themselves as an aside or something that was “just an opinion,” meaning that they would understand if we did not focus on that topic as seriously or with as much rigor as others. Yet, given the frequency with which these types of reasons or discussions came up, and the fact that in our sessions children often expressed joy surrounding the ability to freely discuss their subjective, aesthetic experience of beauty (rather than the more objective, empirical forms of evidence), it seemed necessary to explore this topic in earnest with the game I created “Is It Beautiful?”

As demonstrated by the discussion of Patti Labelle’s “ABC Song” in the game “Is It Beautiful? In Ms. Todd’s fourth- and fifth-grade class in Chapter 3, children were very capable of thinking through and discussing the greater stakes and meaning of beauty as a philosophical element of music. That is, in turning their combined intellectual attentions to beauty in art and music, it became clear that children were able to

articulate very specific types of ideas, reasons, and evidence for why they found something beautiful beyond simply having “just an opinion” or the ability to make judgments based on those opinions. Moreover, it became clear that, even as the children were clearly not used to discussing beauty or treating aesthetic experiences as a whole with the same serious level of intellectual focus as other topics, when given the time and space to do consider beauty at length (Eaude 2023; Mohr Lone 2024), they were extremely capable of offering a whole host of ideas and approaches to beauty and music with detailed and well-considered explanations of their beliefs and an appreciation for how much weight one’s aesthetic experience should hold in relation the example being considered.

For example, while most children appreciated the technical musical qualities of LaBelle’s impeccable vocal performance and either found her performance to be beautiful, or conceded that they understood why others would find it beautiful even if they themselves did not, they still very much cared about the context of the performance. Many children across classes spoke to “the puppets” or the *Sesame Street* setting in making their determinations of the example’s beauty. For some, these features were a dealbreaker for considering the piece beautiful, whereas for others, these features enhanced or even confirmed the piece’s beauty because of the children’s own previous or ongoing relationship to children’s media and puppets. As Gertie’s comment “Ah, the good ol’ days” informs us, “The ABC Song” served as a bridge between beauty and nostalgia for many children who reflected fondly on their own prior relationships to *Sesame Street* and the children’s music, albeit in a new gospel context.

Of course, that music is an aesthetic and/or affective experience, even in the lives of children, is not groundbreaking.

However, what is noteworthy is the degree to which children were able to describe, in detail, the components of music that they found beautiful across a whole range of types of reasons and evidence, both personal and cultural, both individual and relational. Likewise, it is notable that children were able to meaningfully engage these thoughts and experiences towards greater philosophical and musical understanding of the concept and experience of beauty itself. This was demonstrated in children's considerations of LaBelle's vocal technique, their own emotional and personal connections, the use of puppets, the recontextualization of the song to a new genre, the "diva" persona they perceived LaBelle to have, and finally, in their demonstrations of appreciation for peers who held different views of the piece and different reasons for their views. And indeed, even as the children were practiced at accepting and tolerating ideas, beliefs, and tastes that were different than their own, their philosophical discussions surrounding beauty as an aesthetic experience in music demonstrated a level of intellectual acuity and nuance that enriched our understanding of the unexplored philosophical underpinnings of children's musical cultures in ways that have, as of yet not been demonstrated in ethno/musicology or music education.

Theme 3: Affect as a Musical Modality in the Lives of Children

Perhaps the most significant finding of this research has been the degree to which children operationalize affect, both as a primary modality of music; or way of knowing, understanding, or doing music; and as an active, intentional practice in their music making (Gill 2017). While some researchers in ethno/musicology and music

education have explored music's impact on children's emotions and feelings (Marsh 2008; Emberly 2009, 2014; Campbell 2010; Koops 2017; Downing 2019; Cantarelli Vita 2021), it has often been either within the framework of the researcher (rather than allowing for children's own expression and explanation) or focused not towards the consideration of affect as a modality of understanding or doing musical life, but rather, as towards affect as a fact or detail of experience or response. During my fieldwork at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School, children across classes and age-groups displayed fluency in and engagement of the affective time and again, both in topic and in the way they engaged music. Children demonstrated a wealth of affective cultural knowledge surrounding sound, or emotional and embodied knowledge that informed their understanding and analysis of the philosophical components of their own musical culture. Said differently, children engaged the embodied, emotional, or intangible dimensions of music, both in their discussions and in their philosophical music-making processes, towards deeper understanding of musical culture. However, beyond demonstrating *only* an intellectual understanding or appreciation for the affective experiences or surface-level affective details that music may entail, children demonstrated their capability of responding to and directly deploying affect as an embodied experience in their own music making. They also engaged affect directly as a musical practice rather than only relying on logocentric, verbal descriptions or understandings (even as these types of engagements with affect were also observed and encouraged). Finally, the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School demonstrated that their understanding and engagement of affect was more than just an intellectual, verbal knowledge of the social-emotional aspects of music as described in

previous research, and instead, demonstrated that affect functioned as a fundamental approach to understanding and doing music and philosophy in our sessions together.

As described in great depth in Chapter 4, children often turned to the affective dimensions of music in both their interpretation and discussion of performances, as demonstrated by the children of Ms. Thompson's third-grade class when prompted with *Stripsody* by Cathy Berberian. In choosing their themes for the creation and voluntary performance of their graphic scores, children were especially attuned to the embodied or emotional components of sound, either for what they deemed accurate representation of their chosen theme or accurate representation of a specific sound in graphic or iconic notation for performance. For example, the composition and performances of both Becky and Aubrey's pieces demonstrated their sensitivity to the shared understandings of affective experiences that they felt characterized their themes, even as they were also effective demonstrations of individual self-expression in music. In particular, Aubrey's polysemic deployment of pain, both as a sonic physical experience (a shared experience that everyone in her class could relate to in some way) and as a social and emotional pain expressed in musical interpretation (relating to her specific experiences as a trans* child in her class as well as her subsequent descriptions of pain to me as a queer researcher), demonstrates both a nuanced understanding and an intentional utilization of philosophical and embodied affect as a primary modality of music previously undescribed in studies of children's musical cultures in ethno/musicology.

Turning towards considering the affective implications of "What's The Vibe?" in Ms. Terry's fifth-grade class, children were often capable of connecting their own

original understandings of “vibe” or affect to specific musical structures, such as tempo, phrase, or harmony. In this instance, their own understanding and utilization of “vibe,” their connection of this affective knowledge to musical structures, and their knowledge of the musical structures they describe and discuss in the first place, all form aspects of philosophical and culture-specific knowledge. Taken together, these comprise the affective cultural knowledge of music and sound that children deployed through an affective modality of music making. As Marion’s musical example and discussion of the opening lyrics “I’d like to be / *under the sea*” from “Octopus’s Garden” by the Beatles especially reinforced, children were extremely adept at verbally describing the affect of music that they perceived and locating it in specific musical structures or components, regardless of whether or not they had the technical musical knowledge or technical vocabulary to verbally describe the particular musical structures to which they were referring.

Yet, more than simply an individual process, the children’s collective, community-based discussions and performances demonstrated that they were not offering only personal interpretations or opinions about how a piece made them feel (or how it could make someone feel), but rather, the children precisely and specifically deployed shared cultural knowledge around the affective dimensions of music that were received and understood by their peers as well as shared cultural knowledge around musical structures and their significance or meaning. That is, in being able to explain their feeling and thinking surrounding the affective dimensions of music, and then refining their ideas and music-making experiences using their community of philosophical inquiry, children demonstrated keen awareness of and value for the

collective cultural politics of emotion that relate to their own lives and communities (Ahmed 2004; Flatley 2008) and to music as cultural practice (Gill 2017).

Theme 4: Acoustemology as a Modality in Philosophical Music Making

In combination with affect as a modality of musical understanding, the children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School demonstrated that acoustemology, or knowing and understanding one's own culture through sound (Feld 2015), was a similarly defining feature of the musical culture of children in philosophy sessions at the school. While children often focused the subject matter of their compositions through the affective modality described above, they simultaneously focused their sonic subject matter through their acoustemological understanding of music and its structural and affective qualities. Just as they demonstrated an adept understanding and use of affective cultural knowledge around music in our discussions and music making, they likewise often used sonic and musical examples, both specific and general. They did this in verbal discussion and by making sounds, singing, playing, and rhythmicking with their bodies and classroom objects in our sessions. In doing so, they demonstrated that children have a capacity and propensity for both the expression of original philosophical ideas and shared cultural knowledge *through sound and music* and in the absence of technical musical or historical vocabularies. Said differently, children demonstrated a sound-first approach to understanding and communicating cultural knowledge in music making, as demonstrated in Chapter 4. In doing so, they highlighted acoustemology as a modality of philosophical music making that has not been previously discussed in the field of ethno/musicology.

These practices of appealing to shared cultural knowledge of music and affect as a way of understanding and performing was especially well-represented in my session “What’s the Vibe?” with Ms. Terry’s fourth- and fifth-grade class. For example, Marion’s musical comment described above regarding “Octopus’s Garden” demonstrated her understanding of the cultural origins of the sadness she felt despite the lyrics. In demonstrating her understanding of the vibe of the song musically, she also showed her sonic understanding of the concepts of melody, harmony, and affect in music. Likewise, she demonstrated her awareness of and fluency in the embodied, sonic history of previous popular songs that, in part, helped forge the musical and affective cultural connections that made “Octopus’s Garden” feel sad to her in the first place. Put simply, Marion and other children were able to demonstrate and analyze their musical and philosophical culture by determining both musical structures and the emotional contexts of those structures that made them feel as they did in response to music using a sound-first approach and without ever needing to appeal to verbal descriptions of the meanings of the sounds they were engaging. Even more to the point that the children embraced this type of understanding in their philosophical processes, at no point in the session did I actively instruct the children in Ms. Terry’s class to begin making sounds or music. While this was the direction I had intended to go, the children themselves moved immediately to sound via music making as a modality for creating their vibes much sooner than I had anticipated (to the delighted surprise of the ethno/musicologist and music teacher leading them, to be sure.)

While David and his group were the first to use sound as a way to explore their vibe, tapping and rhythmicking on their desks and water bottles with pencils, the

“Romantic Elevator” group perhaps more than any other example explored in Chapter 4 demonstrated the depth of the acoustemological musical knowledge the children held to create their original composition. While I did not overhear every part of this group’s discussions, the exploration of specific pre-existing examples of commercial music similar in some ways to the “Muzak”-style of “elevator music” they were trying to emulate (Lanza 2004) showed their sonic understanding of the musical elements they felt created the vibe they were trying to express, without the need to appeal to verbal descriptions (even as their discussions did, of course, enrich the process). The children’s process of sonically exploring the sounds of commercials (the McDonald’s theme and phrases) and television music specifically designed for the passing time (the theme from *Jeopardy!*) that also incorporating some of the elements of a previous musical example suggested by Margaret (“From the Start” by Laufey) demonstrated the ability children have to abstract important sonic and musical components aurally in connection to their understanding of shared affective and cultural knowledge about music. In keeping some aspects of each of their samples without directly copying anything but the phrase “I’m lovin’ it” as a tag-on, they were able to produce an original piece of music accomplishing the goal of creating a “Romantic Elevator” vibe, which was well-received and applauded by their peers and teachers, despite not doing any sort of formal musical analyses or notation, and despite giving very little verbal description as to which components of the performance were supposed to relate these types of information.

Methodological Considerations for the Study of Children’s Musical Cultures

Turning our attention to the second research question described at the outset of this dissertation, “What collaborative strategies can ethno/musicologists and philosophers use alongside children to better understand and describe the philosophical elements of music and musical culture in their lives?”, several examples of my own original adaptations of methods drawn from music studies and Philosophy for Children arose from this study. In particular, my research offers an original adaptation of the community of philosophical inquiry model of Philosophy for Children (Mohr Lone and Burrough 2016) towards the aim of collaborative ethno/musicological research on the musical lives and culture of children at Dorothy Hollingsworth Elementary School. In doing so, I have expanded the strategies for child-centered models of ethno/musicological and humanistic inquiry (Campbell 2002, 2010; Gaunt 2006; Marsh 2008; Campbell and Wiggins 2013; Emberly 2009, 2014, 2015; Emberly and Davhula 2019; Downing 2019; Bickford 2017, 2020; Cantarelli Vita 2021), collaborative models of research with children (Montgomery 2009), and new examples of philosophical music making as a research method developed within this model (Gould 2006 and Kanellopoulos 2007). Taken together, this dissertation offers the fields of ethno/musicology, music education, and Philosophy for Children new insights towards the study of children’s musical cultures from collaborative, philosophical perspectives. For a breakdown of some of my original adaptations and methodological contributions, please see Table 5.1 below.

Strategies drawn from Music Studies	Strategies drawn from Philosophy for Children (Mohr Lone and Burroughs 2016)	Original Adaptations for this Research
Allowing child collaborators to determine the important themes and foci of our inquiry (Downing 2019)	Children's own questioning and philosophical wondering is used to guide inquiry	Children's own philosophical questions and ways of thinking and doing music and philosophy defined the themes of this study
Addressing popular music and listening strategies as ethno/musicological research (Bickford 2017, 2020; Cantarelli Vita 2021)	Following a learner-centered model, Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) sessions follow the specific interests (and media) within children's lives	Within the scope of my role as a facilitating teacher and researcher, I strived to make sure all of our sessions included materials of direct interest to children, or at least responded to the interests and curiosities of my child collaborators.
Considering the musical thinking and feeling of children as a starting point for children's musical cultures (Campbell 2010; Emberly 2009; Cantarelli Vita 2021)	Philosophy sessions with children are focused towards facilitated and self-guided inquiry sessions within a collaborative, community setting	I adapted the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) model towards a collaborative research framework. Rather than just a space for free philosophical thinking, it was focused towards musical considerations and ongoing, collaborative philosophical investigation and research
Giving children individual agency in completing research methods (Emberly 2009, 2014, and 2015; Emberly and	Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) sessions often include portions of individual or group-driven exercises that	Beyond developing their own questions and leading their own discussions, children were given opportunities for facilitated

Davuhla 2019)	allow children the freedom to demonstrate their own thinking through creative completion of exercises for discussion	and self-directed creation of musical scores and musical performances as methods of inquiry and research
Using musical games as a starting point for musical research about children (Gaunt 2006; Marsh 2008)	Using games to structure consideration of relevant philosophical topics (e.g., prisoner’s dilemmas, “Would you rather...?”, and etc.	I created original games like “Is It Beautiful?” and “What’s the Vibe?” to incorporate playful and child-centered ways of thinking and doing into the collaborative research process
Considering music making as a site for children’s philosophical inquiry (Gould 2006; Kanellopoulos 2007)	Using authentic engagements with music and art to consider their underlying philosophical components (Turgeon 2000)	In my research, I created several opportunities for children’s engagement with original music making and performance as primary strategies for collaborative, community-based philosophical inquiry around music and culture.

Table 5.1: Strategies drawn from Music Studies, Philosophy for Children, and my Original Adaptations for this Research

Above I have offered some key highlights of the strategies developed and described here that both informed this research and that were developed within this project. In particular, the original adaptation across each strategy drawn from music studies and Philosophy for Children can be summarized with three primary lenses for considering my original adaptation. (1) whereas children’s own questions, interests, and capacities for action often informed research practices in music studies and formed the basis for philosophizing in the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) model (described in Chapter 2), these facets of children’s musical lives and culture formed the

backbone of my own ethno/musicological inquiry. Children's own curiosities and proclivities drove the research process itself at all times, whether it was using their own questions as the basis for musical research on philosophy in their lives or simply structuring our sessions to consider the topics they themselves deemed relevant to their lives. These aspects of children's lives and working with children did not merely inform my own subsequent understanding and design, but rather, were formative in the process of collaboratively examining the philosophical components of the children's musical culture. (2) While practitioners using the CPI model of Philosophy for Children emphasize the importance of engaging in music and art in sessions focusing topically on these areas, I have expanded this area into original music making and the consideration thereof. Children did not merely engage alongside the musical prompts and games we used; rather, children were given opportunities for original musical composition and expression through *voluntary* performance of their musical and philosophical explorations. (3) Perhaps the most simply described lens for considering my original adaptations of these strategies has been, simply, to create more space for focused and intensive collaborative consideration of the intersections of music and philosophy. While researchers in music studies described above have given tangential or surface-level attention to the philosophical interests and dispositions of children, and while the practitioners and researchers in Philosophy for Children cited above have offered exploratory and introductory examples of philosophy sessions focused on art and music, this is the first research project to give significant and in depth focus to the ways that these areas of children's lives overlap and intersect. Moreover, this is the first

research project to adapt a CPI model of Philosophy for Children towards ethno/musicological or holistic musical consideration.

While my original adaptation of the community of philosophical inquiry model of Philosophy for Children represents one possible strategy for addressing these needs and the greater purpose of this study, it has represented an effective one. In particular, the use of a child-centered, community-based approach that let children ask their own questions, explore their own philosophical interests in music, and consider common philosophical questions within the context of musical performances, examples, discussions, games, and exercises offers ethno/musicologists and other scholars working with children in the arts concrete examples of useful strategies for studying the philosophical components of children's musical cultures, as demonstrated by the findings of chapters 3 and 4. Within this model, I found that children were capable, in many cases, of asking philosophical questions of the same nature as adult music scholars, and also capable of holding sustained, open dialogues, tracking multiple threads of interest and reasoning in their own community thinking about music.

Furthermore, my original lessons combining music-making experiences within a philosophical setting to consider music making as a potential site for philosophical knowledge delivers original contributions to the fields within music studies, building on the work of only a few scholars who have explored philosophy and music with children directly prior to this (Gould 2006; Kanellopoulos 2007). Within these sessions, children were capable of using philosophical, affective, acoustemological, and musical knowledge to create original musical compositions, both with and without graphic representation. In doing so, children demonstrated both the power that philosophy has

to enrich music making, as well as the power music holds as a modality for expanding one's own understanding of music and sound and their philosophical underpinnings. That is, they demonstrated new ways of showing their interests and dispositions towards the philosophical underpinnings of music in their lives by engaging in these original, collaborative methods.

Turning briefly towards my own approach to the descriptive dissertation phase of this research, I have endeavored towards models of reflexive and performative ethnography (Kisliuk 2004; Shelemay 2008; Wong 2008, 2015, 2019) as described in Chapter 2 and models of ethno/musicology that prioritize mutual benefit for the communities with whom we work as scholars (Emberly 2014; Emberly and Davhula 2019). While these approaches to ethno/musicology have gained some popularity in the past thirty years since the so-called "Crisis of Representation" in the 1970s and 1980s (Geertz 1973; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; McMurray 2020), they are by no means mainstream in the field of ethno/musicology. As such, I have offered my own reflections on this process throughout this dissertation in an effort to make the processes and influences underlying this dissertation clear for any who may wish to follow along in these models.

Further Considerations and Areas for Study

While this research was directed to the intersections of philosophy and music relevant to children's logical processing of music's structures and intellectual and emotional impacts as a primary consideration of children's musical cultures, this dissertation gave primary focus to only a small selection of musical experiences to which children had given their philosophical attention. Beyond the sessions and

examples from my fieldwork that were considered but ultimately not included, there are several areas that I would recommend for further attention in future studies expanding this area and these strategies of ethno/musicological research. In particular, whereas Chapter 3 focuses on philosophies of music and Chapter 4 focuses on music making as a site of philosophical praxis, there is still much to be said about the use of music for otherwise straightforward philosophical purposes with children, or how music can be a launching point towards social and moral philosophy rather than musical philosophy. While I had many sessions with musical prompts that led into musical conversations and music making, I also had many sessions with musical prompts that led into topics under the umbrellas of moral or social philosophy. Many of these sessions, while not topically centered around music, were nonetheless enriched by the use and inclusion of music as a prompt. Thus, further research is needed to consider the role music might play as a modality within more standard Philosophy for Children or philosophy practices at large. Inversely, this future research could likewise inform ethno/musicology and music education to the extent that an examination of music as a starting point for social and moral philosophy sessions could reveal further information about children's musical lives and cultures. Likewise, it could help realize scholars' calls (Kanellopoulos 2007; Woodford 2016) for considering music as a launch point for critical and cultural musical intelligence, rather than merely technical musical intelligence.

Another area for future consideration that has not been explored here is the intentional use of musics outside children's own culture, or so-called "world music." While our sessions (like "What's the Vibe?" in Chapter 4) did often include world popular, or "WoPop," music when suggested by the children (for example, K-Pop was a

common inclusion), I did not engage these examples any differently than examples from U.S. music culture or with any lens towards imparting greater cultural specificity or specialization in our sessions (beyond translating the lyrics). Rather, in keeping with the learner-centered approach of Philosophy for Children, I chose not to follow the interests of the children themselves which most often led away from these topics. This was likely due to greater familiarity with the musical and philosophical components of their own, predominantly U.S.-based culture. That said, this is absolutely an area ripe for future study by ethno/musicologists working with children. As Cantarelli Vita (2021) has shown through archival studies, children's capacity for "respectful resonance" or developing a greater intellectual and emotional capacity for the cultures of other children through the engagement of the music of other cultures could assuredly further enrich and diversify the philosophical themes considered here by expanding to consider intercultural exchange and understanding to the our understanding of children's musical philosophizing.

Similarly, further explorations of elements of children's cultures beyond the mostly immaterial musical and philosophical forms of culture considered here would further enhance ethno/musicological understanding of children's musical lives. For example, while I do offer some brief reflections on ethnicity, gender, and family in Chapters 3 and 4, a more robust examination of these intersecting identity categories and their effect on the children's thinking and music making would further illuminate the findings of this project. Moreover, further exploration of the four themes and methodological practices explored in this research conducted outside the context of K-12 schools would similarly offer more expansive views of the cultural aspects of

children's philosophical and musical lives. Given the setting of this project, it was not possible for me to engage children around topics or interests that would have otherwise been deemed inappropriate for the school setting in which this research was completed. As such, future research in this area would benefit greatly from additional types of fieldsites that could encompass the many areas of children's philosophical and musical considerations that did not arise within the K-12, U.S. setting.

Finally, further considerations of the potential for children as collaborators in additional aspects of the research process within the scope of my original adaptation of the community of philosophical inquiry model would be beneficial for both future ethno/musicological research as well as the lives of children. As discussed in Chapter 1 and throughout this work, one of the pervading findings has been the degree to which children were capable of engaging philosophical questions and considerations of the same nature as professional scholars, albeit relative to their own cultural frame rather than a formal academic context. As such, I echo other scholars (Montgomery 2009, Emberly 2014) in calling for further exploration of research models that endeavor towards intellectual partnership and scholastic collaboration with the children with whom we work, in music and otherwise. As this research has demonstrated, children are capable, creative, engaged collaborators without whose questions and insights this research would not have been possible. As such, future research exploring the collaborative strategies outlined above would further add to the voices of scholars and children seeking new understanding and strategies for working alongside children to explore, analyze, understand, and describe their own musical and intellectual lives for adult scholars and teachers alike.

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Appendix I - Weekly Schedule and Slides

Weekly Schedule

Classroom (Grade)	Day	Time (Pacific)	Frequency
Ms. Terry (Fifth)	Thursday	1:15-2:15	Bi-Weekly
Ms. Todd (Fourth and Fifth)	Friday	9:00-9:45	Weekly
Ms. Gardner (Kindergarten)	Friday	10:00-10:30	Bi-Weekly
Ms. Hamilton (Second)	Friday	11:25-12:10	Bi-Weekly
Ms. Schneider (Fifth)	Friday	12:10-1:00	Monthly
Ms. Thompson (Third)	Friday	12:20-1:00	Bi-Weekly
Ms. Martino (Fourth)	Friday	1:45-2:25	Weekly

Slides from “What’s the Vibe?” with Ms. Terry’s Fifth-Grade Class

What’s the Vibe?

A musical game of philosophy

What is a vibe?

The feelings something gives off
Energy
How you’re feeling

How do you know what the vibe is?

See expressions, and feel the energy
sense if something is positive
If it's not a good vibe, people will be
down or angry
Something you know happened in
history, like a massive fire, catacombs
Read the room

Does music have a vibe?

Yes, it might depend on the event
(birthday, wedding, funeral)
Major and minor in music (minor
is sad, major is happy)

In one word: what's the vibe? "Crunchy Taco"

Words

Happy
Active
Energetic
Pretty fire
Taco
Good

Why do we feel that way?

A lot of songs sound mad or screamy, but not this one. He doesn't sound mad
Upbeat and happy song

In one word: what's the vibe? "Octopus's Garden"

Words

Sappy (Happy and sad)
Happy
Free (but trapped at the same time)
Hawaii
Hopeful
Being alone with someone
Like a movie
Reminiscent

Why do we feel that way?

Tempo: not so fast to be energetic, but not slow enough for romance like "Perfect" by Ed Sheeran
The lyrics
"I'd like to be / under the sea"

In one word: what's the vibe? "Megaverse"

Words

Pretty Fire

Energetic

It's giving anger issues

Like k-pop, but an american song that
added way more punk than their should be

Dance

Why do we feel that way?

Every few verses they say "urrrrrr"

The beat

Very loud, felt louder than it was

In one word: what's the vibe? "From the Start" by Laufey

Words

Disney Princess Vibes

1930s

Ratatouille

Romantic

Disappointed

Inner moment

Why do we feel that way?

Ukulele

Swaying, muffled

Romantic songs are usually slow, but this
isn't.

"She's kind of desperate"

Freedom

What should Freedom's vibe sound like?

Star-Spangled Banner
Joyful
Victorious
Louder
Not strict, not fitting in any genre

Why do we feel that way?



Appendix II - Research Process Materials

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Assent Script (Grades K–2)

The Musical “Why”: Towards Philosophical Understandings of Children’s Musical Cultures

I am a college student so I have homework too. To finish college, I have to do a project to show what I have learned. It is called a research study I’m doing my project on music and philosophy. To do this, **I am asking for your help.**

Today, I am going to talk to you about my project and how I would like you to be part of it. You will get chances to ask any questions you have about it. After I have answered all your questions today, you should talk to your family about participating. After you and your family have thought about it and asked any questions you may have, you and your family will get to decide whether you want to participate. **No matter what you decide: everyone will still get to participate in philosophy class like you normally do.**

Does anyone have any questions so far? (Pause to answer any initial questions.)

My project is going to be about how philosophy can help us understand music and art, and how music and art can help us do philosophy. To help me think about this, I would like to write about our classes and why we do the things that we do. You do not have to be in my project if you do not want to. **If you want to be in my project, I will record our voices and sounds. I will not use your real name in what I write.** We will talk in small groups about our classes and how you feel about the classes. We may do this one time or two times. **You can change your mind and stop if you do not want to be in my project anymore. Nobody will be mad at you if you do not want to be in my project. It is okay if you do not want to answer all my questions.** If you do not want to answer a question, you can say “pass” or “skip,” or you can shake your head no.

Does anyone have questions?

You and your family can talk to me at any time If you or your family have questions or if you do not know if you want to be in my project. You can also talk to your teachers or the counselors if you want to.

Do you want to be in my project?

Students who assent

Students who do **not** assent

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INFORMATION ABOUT A UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON RESEARCH STUDY

The Musical “Why”: Towards Philosophical Understandings of Children’s Musical Cultures

What is this study about?

We are conducting this study because we want to learn more about music and philosophy with children. In particular, we want to explore how philosophy with children can help us understand children’s relationships to music and children’s understandings of music. This study will consider three big questions:

- 1.) How can music help us do traditional philosophy?
- 2.) How can philosophy help us to think more deeply about music itself?
- 3.) Can making music be a philosophical experience?

This study will be part of a larger focus on music in all philosophy classes at **School Name Redacted**. Any students at **School Name Redacted** Elementary who have philosophy class will be able to participate in the study. **All students will be able to participate in philosophy as they normally do whether they choose to participate in the study or not.**

What will you be asked to do?

If you give your permission for your child to be part of this study, they will be asked to participate in philosophy as they normally do. We would also like to conduct informal, small-group interviews with participants. Interviews would last approximately 30 minutes and occur during philosophy sessions. No participant would be interviewed more than twice. Finally, we would also like to record the audio of both regular philosophy sessions and small group interviews.

Why might you want, or not want, to participate?

Some benefits of participating in this study include:

- 1.) Being able to explore musical and artistic ways to share their own ideas
- 2.) Being active co-researchers whose input will shape the study itself
- 3.) Getting an opportunity to shape the philosophical culture of **School Name Redacted** Elementary

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This study poses no additional risks to participants since all participants will already be receiving philosophy classes. In general, some participants may feel uncomfortable sharing personal thoughts and feelings, especially with their peers. All participants will be allowed to refuse to answer any question for any reason. **Participants will be allowed to opt out of any parts of this study, or the entire study, at any time for any reason.**

How will we protect the information you provide?

We will protect participant confidentiality. We will store a single copy of participants' names and other identifiable information (an identifier key) separately from the study data. Access to participant's identifying information will be limited to members of the study team and any individuals from the UW and Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO) whose oversight is required for this study. When we publish or present the results of this study, we will not use anyone's real names or identifying features. If we learn that any participants intend to harm themselves or others, we must report that to the appropriate authorities.

The information and/or samples that we obtain from participants for this study might be used for future studies or presentations. We will remove anything that might identify participants from the information/samples we use. If we do so, the information/samples may then be used for future research studies or presentations without getting additional permission from you.

What if you want to stop being in this study, or if the researcher decides you should no longer participate?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Any participants will be allowed to withdraw at any time for any reason. Participants may also choose to be involved in some parts of this study without being involved in others. For example, a participant can engage in classroom discussions without participating in the small group interviews.

How will we test, store, and share your information and samples?

Data will only be shared for educational and academic purposes in the form of publications, presentations, and workshops. No data with identifying information will be shared. All data containing identifiers will be stored in a secure, password-protected external hard drive. The data from this study will be retained by the researcher in perpetuity for future educational and academic use, as described above.

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Will you get to know your research results?

The results of this research will be shared throughout the study. Participants will be actively shaping the research process and considering the data throughout the study. Excerpts of written work or presentations about this study can be shared with participants during philosophy sessions. Once completed, participants may also request the results at any time by contacting the researcher, who will share digital documents or recordings with participants.

Other information about this study.

Data collection for this study will conclude no later than June 2024.

What can you do if you want more information?

Talk to the study team. We are here to help you understand the study. Please ask us any questions you may have, even about things that are not in this document. It is our responsibility to give you the information you need to make a decision and to give you time to think about whether or not you want to sign up. If you feel you have been harmed by participating, you can contact us about that too.

Talk to someone else. If you want to talk about the study with someone who is not part of the study team, talk about your rights as a research subject, or to report problems or complaints about the study, contact the UW Human Subjects Division. **You can also talk to your child's teacher, principal, or counselor if you have concerns.**

Study Team	Principal Investigator: Jack Flesher (Thurgood Marshall Elementary Philosopher-in-Residence) Contact: jflesh@uw.edu UW Faculty Advisor: Dr. Patricia Shehan Campbell (Professor Emerita of Music Education and Ethnomusicology) Contact: pcamp@uw.edu
UW Human Subjects Division	206.543.0098 hsdinfo@uw.edu

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Consent presenter statement

By printing my name on this form, I am attesting that I have provided the participant's legal guardian(s) with information about this study. The participant's legal guardian(s) has been given sufficient time to consider participation, and I have answered any questions they had. The participant's legal guardian(s) have indicated that they understand the nature of the study, including risks and benefits of participating.

Printed name of study staff obtaining consent

Date

Participant's legal guardian statement

By signing this consent form, I confirm that the study has been explained to me and I give my consent for my child to participate in the research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research or feel that my child or family has been harmed by participating in the study, I can contact a member of the research team or the UW Human Subjects Division using the information listed above. I will receive a copy of this consent form. I give permission to the researchers to retain and use the study data as described above.

Printed name of subject

Printed name of legal guardian

Signature of legal guardian

Date

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Legal Guardian Consent Form

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INFORMATION ABOUT A UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON RESEARCH STUDY

The Musical “Why”: Towards Philosophical Understandings of Children’s Musical Cultures

What is this study about?

We are conducting this study because we want to learn more about music and philosophy with children. This study will consider three big questions:

- 1.) How can music help us do traditional philosophy?
- 2.) How can philosophy help us to think more deeply about music itself?
- 3.) How can making music be a philosophical experience?

This study will be part of a larger focus on musical topics in all philosophy classes at **School Name Redacted**. Anyone who has philosophy class will be able to participate in the study. **Everyone can participate in philosophy as they normally do whether or not you choose to participate in this study.**

What will you be asked to do?

If you want to be part of this study, all you have to do is participate in philosophy as you normally do. We would also like to conduct interviews with some students in small groups. Interviews would be short and occur during philosophy class. No one would be interviewed more than twice. We would also like to record the audio only for philosophy classes and interviews.

Why might you want, or not want, to participate?

Some benefits of participating:

- 1.) You will get to explore music and art as ways to share your ideas
- 2.) You will get to actively shape this study with your thoughts on philosophy
- 3.) You will get to an opportunity create things that may get shared across the school

This study poses no additional risks to participants since all participants will already be receiving philosophy classes. In general, you may feel uncomfortable sharing personal thoughts and feelings, especially with your

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classmates. You can refuse to answer any question for any reason. **You will be allowed to decide not to do any parts of this study, or the entire study, at any time for any reason.**

How will we protect the information you provide?

We will protect your identity. You will be given a pretend name or “pseudonym” for this study. No personal information about you will be shared. Any personal information that I collect will be stored separately in a protected place. The only people who will be able to access your personal information are members of the study team. Some members of the Philosophy Learning and Teaching Organization (PLATO) or the UW may also have access if it is required to protect you. If we learn that anyone in the study intends to hurt themselves or others, we must report that to the appropriate authorities.

The information we get from you might be used for future studies or presentations. We will remove anything that might identify you from the information/samples that we use. If we do so, the information/samples may then be used for future research studies or presentations without getting additional permission from you.

What if you want to stop being in this study, or if the researcher decides you should no longer participate?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You will be allowed to withdraw at any time for any reason. You may also choose to do some parts of this study without doing others. For example, you can participate in classroom discussions without participating in the small group interviews.

How will we test, store, and share your information and samples?

Data will only be shared for educational and academic purposes in the form of: publications, presentations, and workshops. No data with identifying information will be shared. All data containing identifiers will be stored in a secure, password-protected external hard drive. The data from this study will be retained by the researcher in perpetuity for future educational and academic use, only as described above.

Will you get to know your research results?

The results of this research will be shared with you throughout the study. You will be actively shaping the research process and considering the data with me. Excerpts writing or presentations about this study may be

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shared with you during philosophy class. Once completed, you may also request the results at any time by contacting the researcher, who will share digital documents or recordings with you.

Other information about this study.

Data collection for this study will conclude no later than June 2024, at the end of the 2023-2024 academic year.

What can you do if you want more information?

Talk to the study team. Please ask us any questions you may have, even about things that are not in this form.

We are here to help you understand the study. It is our responsibility to give you the information you need to make a decision and to give you time to think about whether or not you want to sign up. If you ever feel you have been harmed by participating, you can contact us about that too.

Talk to someone else. If you want to talk about the study with someone who is not part of the study team, talk about your rights as a research subject, or to report problems or complaints about the study, contact the UW Human Subjects Division using the information below. **You can also talk to your teacher, principal, or counselor if you have concerns.**

Study Team	Principal Investigator: Jack Flesher (Thurgood Marshall Elementary Philosopher-in-Residence) Contact: jflesh@uw.edu UW Faculty Advisor: Dr. Patricia Shehan Campbell (Professor Emerita of Music Education and Ethnomusicology) Contact: pcamp@uw.edu
UW Human Subjects Division	206.543.0098 hsdinfo@uw.edu

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Assent presenter statement

By printing my name on this form, I am attesting that I have provided the participant with information about this study. The participant has been given sufficient time to consider participation, and I have answered any questions they had. The participant has indicated that they understand the nature of the study, including risks and benefits of participating, and wish to participate.

Printed name of study staff obtaining assent

Date

Participant's statement

By signing this assent form, I confirm that the study has been explained to me and that I want to participate in the research. I have had a chance to ask questions. If I have questions later about the research or feel that I have been harmed by participating in the study, I can contact a member of the research team or the UW Human Subjects Division using the information listed above. I will receive a copy of this assent form. I give permission to the researchers to retain and use the study data as described above.

Printed name of participant

Signature of participant

Date

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