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Matthew S. Swanson

Composing Democracy:
Collective Identity Formation in Small Group Composition

Matthew S. Swanson

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Reading Committee:

Patricia Shehan Campbell, Chair

Steven Morrison

Shannon Dudley

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Abstract

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Matthew S. Swanson

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:
Professor Patricia Shehan Campbell
School of Music

The teaching and learning of music, and its relationship with the practice of schooling, has been variously defined through the centuries. While a long view of history reveals common aims between music and general education such as morality, citizenship, and social harmony, over the last half century the fixation on discrete skills and measureable outcomes in math, science, and reading has created a considerable wedge between music programs and the educational system they occupy. As educational policy matures into the twenty-first century, there are opportunities for rekindling a sense of common purpose based on broad democratic, societal principles. This study is based on the hypothesis that music education, particularly the practice of small group composition, possesses unique capacities to cultivate collaborative skills that are essential to the functioning of a democracy. Exploring these capacities holds the potential to build an important bridge to the broader sphere of educational practice in the transformations ahead.

Toward this end, this study investigated a composition project with 52 fourth and fifth grade children at one school in the Pacific Northwest. Children formed 14 small groups and met

for an hour weekly over the course of four months, endeavoring to compose and perform an original piece of music. Ethnographic techniques were employed, and data collection was built upon a combination of observations, audio recordings, interviews, written surveys, and material culture.

From the data, the process of forming collective identity, or a shared definition, emerged as integral to the children's musical and collaborative success. Forming such an identity, which took on average nine weeks to accomplish, encompassed a multitude of dynamics, including the establishment of roles, the navigation of discrepancies in musical ability, and the interface of gender and musical decision-making. The interplay between these dynamics shaped the trajectory for each group, defining their collective sound and in some cases driving their decision to "start over" or even "break up." Many aspects of this process were seen to be quite novel for the children compared to their prior experiences of collaboration in school: The degree of freedom, the scope of time, the necessity for mutual participation, the emphasis on musical rather than verbal forms of communication and leadership, and the democratic nature of performance. The unprecedented and profound ways in which many of the children engaged with these factors suggest that small group composition may indeed be a rich and unique platform for cultivating collaborative and democratic dispositions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Group Composition	2
Theoretical Background	5
Social Interdependence Theory	5
Collective Identity	7
Purpose	10
Research Questions.....	10
Overview, Scope, and Limitations	11
Chapter 2: Literature Review: Broadening the Context	14
The Question of Purpose in Music Education	14
Historical Conceptions of Purpose	21
Hypothesizing a Common Ground of Purpose.....	30
Democratic Citizenship Education	31
Cooperative and Collaborative Learning.....	35
21 st Century Skills	38
Discussion: Potentials of Group Composition.....	40
Collective by Nature	42
Collective on Multiple Levels	42
Rich with Problems	44
Conclusion: Potentials for Common Ground	46
Chapter 3: Method and Context	48
Overview of Method	48
Research Setting: Alder Park Elementary	49
Private Schools in Context	51
Philosophy and Curriculum	53
Researching Children at Alder Park Elementary.....	56

The Music Program	58
Participants	60
Teacher Participants	61
Consent	62
Data Collection	63
Audio Recordings	64
Interviews	65
Written Materials	66
Observations	67
Data Analysis.....	68
Chapter 4: The Bumpy Road... To Somewhere.....	71
Forming Groups.....	71
The Spaces: Managing Sonic Chaos	73
Instruments	77
The Role of the Teacher	78
Timeline.....	82
Chapter 5: Forming Collective Identity	86
Collective Identity in Small Group Composition	89
The Importance of Establishing Roles.....	90
Navigating Discrepancies: The “Squeaky Wheel” Phenomenon.....	97
Killer Kowz	99
C’est La Vie.....	107
Miracle.....	111
Conclusions from the Squeaky Wheel Phenomenon.....	116
The Forking Path: Gender and the Musical Compass	117
Vocal versus Instrumental Directions.....	118
Defining Genre and Sound	124
Defining Boundaries.....	133
Breakups and Breakdowns	139
Getting in the “Same Key”: The Collapse of Gravity	139

The Breakup of Miracle.....	147
Reinventing the Wheel: The Importance of Drafting.....	148
Face the Sparkles.....	150
Race and Ethnicity Questions.....	156
Collective Conclusions: Coalescing as Bandmates.....	161
Chapter 6: Distinctions and Takeaways	164
The Project in the Context of Alder Park Elementary	164
The Matters of Scope and Freedom.....	165
The Beat is the Driver Seat: The Importance of Semantic Grounding.....	172
Shadow’s Shadow.....	173
Miracle.....	180
Save That Thought.....	183
Grounding, Musical Ability, and Teacher Scaffolding	187
Leadership as a Musical versus Verbal Process	189
Products in Action: Democracy through Performance.....	195
Standing in a Culture of Collaboration.....	200
Chapter 7: Conclusions	203
Collective Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model	203
Zooming Out: Revisiting the Rationale.....	212
Cooperative/Collaborative Learning	214
21 st Century Skills	216
Democratic Citizenship Education	217
Lessons and Reflections	222
Teacher Reflections: Lessons from a Perceived Failure	223
Scope	230
Freedom.....	232
Structural Considerations	237
Beyond Alder Park Elementary.....	239
Parting Thoughts.....	240
References	242

Appendix 1: Parent Consent Form	270
Appendix 2: Teacher Consent Form.....	274
Appendix 3: Student Assent Form.....	277
Appendix 4: Sample Interview Questions	279
Appendix 5: “Rolling Stone” Interview Questions	280

LIST OF FIGURES

4-1. Diagram of spaces (aerial view).....	75
4-2. Project timeline	83
5-1. Band Trajectories	87
5-2. Melodic hook possibility by Rachel and Sirena.....	100
5-3. Basic pattern by the Killer Kowz.....	100
5-4. Killer Kowz song with Ross on the strings.....	103
5-5. Excerpt of Killer Kowz final song “Smooth Groove”	106
5-6. Excerpt of C’est La Vie final song “Round and Round”	110
5-7. Basic pattern for Miracle song “School’s Out”	114
5-8. Excerpt of Miracle final song “School’s Out”	115
5-9. Enough Said’s rap about school.....	119
5-10. Excerpt of Enough Said final song “The Unknown”	122
5-11. Joey’s piano riff.....	124
5-12. Excerpt of Say Something final song “A Seattle Life”	126
5-13. Karen’s Rap.....	128
5-14. Excerpt of Double Trouble final song “Fame”	131
5-15. Excerpt of Poptarts final song “Megarun”	133
5-16. Excerpt of Third Dimension final song “Around the World”	136
5-17. Veggie Song by Face the Sparkles.....	137
5-18. Eva’s guitar chord progression.....	140
5-19. Eva’s vocal idea	141
5-20. Gravity song (minor version).....	142
5-21. Liana’s song idea.....	148
6-1. Excerpt of Shadow’s Shadow final song “Elevator Music 1”	178
6-2. Excerpt of final song by Save That Thought.....	186
6-3. Mark’s adaptations to Dominic’s guitar playing.....	199

7-1. Theoretical model of collective identity formation.....205

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On an otherwise quiet Tuesday afternoon at Alder Park Elementary, the music room is bustling with sounds and activity so boisterous that it spills out into neighboring spaces like an over-carbonated beverage. At the top of the stairs outside the room a group of four girls is laughing loudly as they unsuccessfully try to coordinate metallophone, drum and ukulele ideas around a percolating xylophone groove. In the neighboring lunchroom three boys sit at a table with journals open, discussing the structure of their hypothetical song, periodically drumming on the table as they scratch out the order in which various instruments will enter their piece. On the edge of a nearby stage a girl strums a ukulele by herself while softly singing words scribed in the journal in front of her. Just inside the door to the music room, one is struck by a wall of sound—a piano and violin resonating with a rapid staccato pattern that edges its way through three chords. A boy sits on a bench with guitar in hand, receiving chord instructions from a girl in his group, while another girl pens out lyrical ideas in her journal. In the back corner of the music room a door opens into another space—a storage room turned into a rehearsal space—where two boys engage in an energetic exploration of sound effects on a keyboard, another boy plays deafening melodic lines on a metallophone, and two girls try desperately to bring the group together to share their ideas.

The musical wanderings, negotiations, rehearsals, laughter, and chatter from each group bleed together into a cacophony of creative output—a thick sonic landscape through which I, the teacher, frantically wade through in the way of a triage doctor, offering time-sensitive support to one group and then moving on to the next. At the front of the music room an electronic whiteboard displays a generic image of a sunrise, symbolizing the dawn of a project, with oversized text at the center posing the challenge: “4-5 ALBUM?” Indeed, these fourth and fifth

grade students have embarked on the quest for a full-length album of original music, and in this second week of working together, such an ambitious goal is by no means a guaranteed outcome. However, in the coming weeks something slowly begins to happen—the fourteen groups across three classes cease to be groups in the typical school sense; rather they become “bands” with their own unique working styles, processes, and sounds. It is this evolution into bands that forms the focus of this dissertation. The pages that follow aim to cast a lens on the ways in which the various groups evolve over several months of working together, and how they navigate the road that ultimately became the title of their original album: THE BUMPY ROAD TO SOMEWHERE.

Group composition

The creation of original music by children is certainly not a new concept. In the last three decades the creative process has received a great deal of attention in music education research, with consideration of topics ranging from developmental stages (Swanick & Tillman, 1986; Kratus, 1989; Barrett, 1996; Glover, 2000), to compositional strategies (Burnard, 2000; Burnard and Younker, 2002), to reflective thinking and revision (Hickey, 2003; Webster, 2003; Wiggins, 2005, 2011; Younker, 2006).

Numerous studies have also investigated creative musical projects explicitly as socially-driven processes (e.g. Claire, 1993/1994; Allsup, 2003; Faulkner, 2003; Wiggins & Espeland, 2012). Emerging from such work is a conception of social dynamics as an essential component of the creative process. Faulkner (2003) noted that in group composition work involving children aged 6-16, musical ideas were “tried, tested, revised and developed by the group.” Students in his study saw this collective musical behavior “as a quality control method, whereby

the best ideas are selected and developed in the best possible way” (p. 117). Drawing from extensive experience with facilitating creative music-making, Wiggins (2003) concluded that social dynamics in fact drive the creative process, with the “negotiation and evaluation of ideas” requiring children to “explain, clarify, justify, and ‘campaign’ for their ideas” (p. 160). Through these mechanisms, ideas become refined to make them acceptable to the group, and “new musical concepts emerge as students defend their original ideas or seek to reach compromise” (Kaschub, 1997, p. 15). In this way, collaboration becomes a vehicle for innovation, a conclusion that similarly emerged from Allsup’s (2003) research on small group composition in a high school band setting, where “peer learning had less to do with the transmission of skills...and more to do with the process of discovery. Simply put, participants discovered more thanks to the input of their peers” (p. 33)

Not only are social processes central to the generation and refinement of creative ideas, they have also emerged in the literature as an important end in themselves. Faulkner (2003) asked his primary and secondary collaborators to reflect on their creative work and received an overwhelming majority of socially-driven responses, including: “Everyone took part in it”; “it was like a co-operative project”; “we all worked brilliantly well together” (p. 109). He concluded the following:

Pupils' responses, unrestrained by the imposition of formal criteria that reflect aesthetic objectifying, clearly show that that the value and meaning of their compositions was based not just in the work itself and in the interplay of its component parts, but at least equally as much, in the social context in which the music is formed, experienced and celebrated. (p. 109)

The recognition of this collective, social dimension of group composition is the impetus for the present study.

While the musical outcomes of collaborative composition projects have received some attention in the literature, the collaborative outcomes themselves have been mostly left alone. As the broader arena of education has exalted the importance of democratic citizenship and “21st Century Skills” such as collaboration, communication, and collective problem solving, music educators have been noticeably absent in the discourse. Though a survey of 214 elementary school principals on the value of their music programs revealed the considerable value they placed on non-musical outcomes such as cooperation, lifelong learning, self-esteem, self-expression, understanding other cultures, and critical thinking (Abril & Gault, 2006), outcomes like these have received relatively little attention in the debate surrounding the purpose of music education. The intent of this study is to attempt to bridge the gap by laying some groundwork for the field of music education to gain an active footing in the broad conversations that are driving educational policies forward. The rationale is based on the hypothesis that music educators have a great deal to add to such conversations—that we may indeed be sitting atop a sizeable resource in terms of collaborative potential. Through exploration of compositional collaboration with a group of fourth and fifth grade children, this study hopes to facilitate a better understanding of the unique ways in which music can contribute to holistic development of children as future professionals and citizens.

Theoretical Background

Social Interdependence Theory

The mechanics of social engagement within groups has long been acknowledged and scrutinized in the field of psychology. Ever since the *gestalt* movement of the early 1900s shifted attention from individualistic to holistic conceptions of human behavior, the fertile terrain of group interactions has surfaced as a unit for psychological investigation (Johnson & Johnson, 2009a). Lewin (1935) first brought attention to the idea of the human group as a dynamic whole driven by the ebbs and flows of interdependent parts, with individuals made interdependent by the presence of common goals. This formed the groundwork for the theory of social interdependence, attributed to Morton Deutsch (1949). Deutsch distinguished cooperation and competition as two distinct forms of interdependence: Positive interdependence (cooperation) occurred when the goals of group members were aligned, such that the achievement of one member's goals depended entirely on the attainment of the other members' goals. Negative interdependence (competition) occurred when the attainment of an individual's goals depended on the failure of the other group members to reach their goals. In Deutsch's conception, positive interdependence resulted in promotive action, which engendered three separate psychological processes: *Substitutability*, where the actions of one group member become substitutable for the actions of the other group members; *positive cathexis*, where positive psychological energy is directed outside the self; and *inducibility*, where individuals are open to being influenced by others (Deutsch, 1949a).

Through empirical investigation of small group work, Deutsch (1949b) uncovered that cooperative tasks not only fostered positive interdependence, substitutability, positive cathexis, and inducibility, but also enhanced group productivity and improved interpersonal relations as

compared with competitive tasks. Deutsch's theory of social interdependence and its empirical foundations planted the seeds for a long, productive lineage of academic inquiry into the idea of cooperative learning, with a corresponding proliferation of the cooperative learning model into nearly every corridor of educational practice. As Johnson and Johnson (2009) conclude, the bridge between social interdependence theory and cooperative learning practice is one of "the great success stories of social and educational psychology" (p. 365), with "one of the largest bodies of knowledge in education and social psychology" (p. 375) being applied on an unprecedented scale across educational domains. It is now widely accepted that cooperative learning structures result in higher achievement (D.W. Johnson & R. Johnson, 1989), more positive interpersonal relationships (D.W. Johnson & R. Johnson, 2007), and improved psychological health (D.W. Johnson & F. Johnson, 2006) than do competitive, individualistic structures.

The theory of social interdependence, and subsequent research into cooperative learning, provide a foundational building block for this dissertation research. At the core is the notion of the small group as the unit of measurement, with group sizes of two to five being established as optimal for promotive interdependence (D.W. Johnson & R. Johnson et al., 2007). The presence of a common goal is also a defining element—in this case the composition and performance of a musical piece—with the implicit requirement that for *each* group member to succeed, *all* the group members must succeed. This requirement is accompanied by Deutsch's prerequisites for promotive interdependence: Coordination of action (substitutability), contributions beyond the self (positive cathexis), and openness to others' ideas (inducibility). The design of the project (outlined in chapter four) is set up such that success requires these elements of cooperation.

While social interdependence theory and cooperative learning models provide a rationale and a layout for the small group structures and task orientation in this study, they fall short of providing a cohesive framework for the collective outcomes in a music-specific context. Much of the research into cooperative learning has focused on the outcomes for individuals—such as achievement, attitudes toward others, or psychological health—within group processes. Since the intent of this study is to explore the evolution of groups as entities in and of themselves, particularly as they construct themselves in musically unique ways, it is necessary now to turn to the field of sociology for an additional framework: Collective identity.

Collective Identity

The concept of collective identity, which has evolved into common usage within the field of sociology, is usually attributed to Alberto Melucci, who used it as a model to explain Italian social movements in the 1980s. Collective identity can be understood as a “shared definition of a group” (Kaminski & Taylor, 2008) or a mutual feeling of “one-ness” or “we-ness” drawing from a common thread of experience or characteristics (Snow, 2001). The primary use of the term has been among social movement scholars, who have applied it to movements such as feminism (Roth, 2000; Rupp & Taylor, 1999), peace activism (Hunt & Bedford, 1994), and gay and lesbian rights (Valocci, 1999). Though collective identity has scarcely been applied in the field of music education, it is proposed here as an apt conceptualization for the student-formed bands in the present study.

There are several components of collective identity that are of particular utility in the context of small group composition. First of all, there is acknowledgement of collective identity as a process of becoming something together—that a group of individuals actively forms a

shared definition through dynamic interactions. In this way collective identity can be seen as something that is “invented, created, reconstituted, or cobbled together rather than being biologically preordained or structurally or culturally determined” (Snow, 2001, p. 5). Secondly, the aggregation of a group of individuals can be seen as “a field containing a system of vectors in tension” (Melucci, 1995, p. 50). Through the process of collective identity, the various vectors “seek to establish an equilibrium between the various axes of collective action and between identification that an actor declares and the identification given by the rest of society” (p. 50). Third, there is an orientation toward collective action—that a group of interacting individuals not only develops a shared definition of “we,” but that they also apply that definition through a course of action in pursuit of common goals. Finally, there is the conception of collective identity as a process of delineating boundaries—that it is as much about defining what the collective is *not* as it is about defining what it *is*. For example, just as participants in social movements might utilize symbolic resources such as hand signs and gestures as “boundary markers of collective differentiation” to heighten “awareness of in-group commonalities and connections and out-group differences” (Snow, 2001, p. 7), band members might utilize instrument choice, band names or vocal styling to define the core and the edges of their collective identity.

In the musical realm, collective identity has not been applied specifically, but its tenets are sometimes summoned in reference to the experience of group musical activity. For instance, Cross (2012) suggested that the process of collective music-making generates an “affiliative sense of shared purpose and meaning” (p. 15) not unlike the shared definition or “we” that is described with respect to participation in social movements. Similarly, Schutz (1951) argued that through musical performance “musicians co-create a collective experience, generating a shared

lifeworld and a ‘mutual tuning-in relationship by which the ‘I’ and ‘thou’ are experienced by both participants as a ‘we’ in vivid presence” (p. 79).

Lim’s (2013) qualitative investigation of the London-based a cappella group, the *Swingle Singers*, also offers glimmers of collective identity in a musical context. As one of the members shared:

Every time a new person joins, the relationship basically starts from zero. Even when things are well, it’s not just about integrating them into the whole. There’s always a sense of us all apart and coming back fresh...It’s emotional and takes a lot of energy and effort to go through that process over and over again. But it’s healthy, and it’s necessary. That’s how the group progresses. (p. 13)

Given that collective identity results from the interplay of the individuals involved—the field of vectors in tension—changing the membership necessarily changes the chemistry of the group. Thus, similarly to what has been argued with respect to social movements in the field of sociology, a musical group is never fixed, but rather is subservient to the dynamic interplay of its constituent components. When the musical group in question is no longer a high level performing ensemble, but rather a collection of 9, 10, and 11 year-olds with limited musical skill and very little experience forming a musical group, the evolution of collective identity can be even more colorful, complex, and contentious than any of the *Swingle Singers* could ever have imagined (as is laid out in detail in chapter 5).

Purpose

Building upon the theoretical foundations of social interdependence and collective identity, the purpose of this study was to examine the social dynamics and collaborative outcomes of a small group composition project with fourth and fifth grade children. Particular focus was given to: 1) How groups evolved over time as children worked to collectively create and perform their musical products, 2) The types of communication that guided and permeated their process, and 3) The relationship between their experiences in this project versus their experience of collaborative activity more broadly. The investigation was guided by the following research questions:

Research questions

- 1) Through what processes, musical or otherwise, do children find common ground in a small group composition project?
- 2) How do groups evolve over time?
- 3) What are the factors affecting the musical direction of each group?
- 4) How do groups navigate discrepancies in musical ability?
- 5) What is the teacher role in relation to the collective functioning of the groups?
- 6) What is the relationship between musical and verbal communication among children in their small group composition project?
- 7) How does the collective functioning of the groups relate to the musical products?
- 8) How does a small group composition project relate to collaborative processes in other areas of the school program?

Overview, Scope and Limitations

This dissertation describes a small group composition project with a group of 9, 10, and 11-year old children at an elementary school in Seattle. The study is based on data collected from ethnographic fieldwork with three music classes within the school, including observations, recordings and transcriptions of small group sessions, interviews, and review of school artifacts. This single-school case is not intended to be generalizable to elementary music classes on a local, national, or international scale; rather the discussion highlights the school community as uniquely characterized by an emergent curriculum and an emphasis on collaborative problem-solving. This context was chosen intentionally to hold the collaborative potentials of small-group composition to a high bar—if such potentials are to emerge from this project, then they will have to stand out as visible against a backdrop that is already rich with collaborative activity. Despite the unique context of the research, there are aspects of this project that are applicable elsewhere, as is addressed in the concluding chapter.

Following this introduction, chapter 2 offers some background perspective on historical conceptions of purpose in music education and how these have interrelated with perceptions in education as a whole. Contemporary notions of purpose are also addressed, particularly the movements of “Democratic Citizenship Education,” “Cooperative Learning” “Collaborative Learning,” and “21st Century Skills.” The chapter concludes with a rationale for focusing on small group composition in music for the development of collaborative skills.

Chapter 3 outlines the context and method of the study. Following an overview of Alder Park Elementary in terms of philosophy, curriculum, and demographics, positionality is established with respect to my dual role as teacher and researcher. This chapter also describes the participants in the study, and lays out the method, giving an overview of the data collection and

analysis. The fourth chapter turns the attention toward the project itself, describing the setup of the task, the formation of groups, management of instruments and spaces, the timeline, and the culminating processes of recording and performing.

Chapters 5 and 6 present the data from the study. Chapter 5 is framed around the notion of collective identity, utilizing this concept as an umbrella for the emergent themes of role determination, musical ability, gender, vocal considerations, boundary delineation, and band evolution. Chapter 6 builds upon the collective identity weave, seeking to situate the small group composition project within the context of Alder Park Elementary and to summarize the unique potentials that emerged from the project, such as the scope and freedom inherent in the process, the musical dimension of communication, and the democratic nature of performance. Chapter 7 synthesizes the emergent themes by way of a theoretical model of collective identity formation. This is followed by a revisiting of the rationale with respect to the themes, and a chronicling of the lessons and reflections gleaned from the process.

Given the robust and extensive lineage of research into musical creativity and group composition, it is reasonable to question what the present study will uniquely contribute to this body of literature. It is posited here that the contribution will address the following needs:

- To bring current conceptions of group composition to bear with educational understandings outside of music.
- To position collaborative compositional activity in relation to the group-work structures that have become common in other domains of schooling (as a result of social interdependence theory, and movements such as cooperative and collaborative learning, and 21st Century Skills).

- To apply the sociological frame of collective identity as a way of understanding collective outcomes that are unique to a music project.
- To synthesize the previous three objectives as a way of shedding new light on the question of purpose in music education.

It is hoped that the pursuit of these aims will not only add an additional layer to a considerable tower of knowledge in music education (on group composition), but also that it will strengthen this knowledge through the construction of bridges to disciplines outside music.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: Broadening the Context

Given the goal of this study to consider how a music project may support broader educational goals, it is necessary to first establish some context for how music educators have positioned themselves, and been positioned, in relation to the larger enterprise of schooling. This chapter provides an overview of a historical relationship that has been accompanied with equal parts ambiguity and tension, describing the “gulf of purpose” that has sometimes characterized the discourse while offering a potential footing for common ground. The first section describes the myriad ways in which music educators and scholars have sought to define their field in relation to schooling and society at large. It is difficult to address the question of “why we teach children music in schools” without considering the overarching question of “why have schools in the first place?” The second section of the chapter traces the historical roots of the latter question, showing how this historical perspective offers a potential common ground for music education and education as a whole. This common ground is next considered in light of four contemporary currents in education— Democratic Citizenship Education, Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and 21st Century Skills—and is used to highlight small group composition as a potential anchor point for positioning music in the educational discourse that is currently underway.

The Question of Purpose in Music Education

Ever since Lowell Mason taught the first public school music course at the Hawes school in Boston in 1837 (Keene, 2010) there has been considerable discourse on the question of purpose in music education. As a relative outlier on the curricular map (as compared with

pursuits like mathematics, literacy, and science), the discipline of music education has never been granted a lifetime lease in the American educational landscape; rather it has been forced to continually assert its value in schools through advocacy efforts. The constant necessity to justify the merits of music education has at times fueled tensions in the field, with advocates occasionally finding themselves at ideological odds with each other—separated by what might be termed a gulf of purpose.

On one end of the ideological spectrum, proponents of a philosophy driven by notions of *aesthetic education* have advocated for “music for the sake of music.” The roots of the aesthetic concept trace back to the Enlightenment in Europe, where notions of music (particularly instrumental music) as a work-centered, object-focused fine art began to surface (Kristeller, 1990). As Elliott (2012) noted, the idea of elevating composed musical works to the aesthetic pedestal has been hugely influential ever since:

Privileging musical products and conceiving music in terms of aesthetic objects—music as removed from and placed above ordinary life in a special “aesthetic realm”—has had a dramatic effect on Western musical values and music education (p. 79)

The notion of capturing music as an object to be appreciated on its own aesthetic terms was certainly echoed in scholarship across the twentieth century (e.g. Langer, 1942; Meyer, 1956; Reimer, 1970), and in many ways formed the foundation for the dominant paradigm in music education over the latter half of the century. The translation of this paradigm into advocacy work gave rise to the idea of “music for the sake of music”—the argument that the purpose of music in schools was self evident; that musical study was worthy of inclusion solely on the basis of its

musical characteristics, aesthetic beauty, and the requisite skills for producing it. The philosophical positions of the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), one of world's largest arts education organizations, still contain echoes of the aesthetic education perspective. As Gates (2000) proclaimed at the organization's "Vision 2020 symposium":

Bennett Reimer and his philosophical predecessors such as Charles Leonhard, Harry Broudy, and James Mursell argue for a music-based rationale for music study, rather than a justification based on extramusical benefits. This...is a value that music teachers share. (p. 65)

Such a view has also retained a footing in NAfME's core documents, which state that music represents one of the "fundamental components of basic education", a position that is justified by a predominance of music-specific objectives such as "singing", "performing on instruments", "improvising melodies", and "reading and notating music" (NAfME, 2012). From a policy point of view, this focus on the intrinsic value of music and musical skills took hold during the Cold War era, when a national discussion about the need for a more competitive curriculum based on abstract intellectual abilities (rather than moral or democratic aims) opened the door for music education advocacy on the basis of its academic, intellectual value (Woodford, 2012).

Emboldened in this period of curricular reform, and later supported by the notion of musical aptitude as a separate intelligence (Gardner, 1983), aesthetically oriented advocates for music education began to dismiss nonmusical benefits as "ancillary" and "utilitarian" (Mark, 2002), a stance that retains a strong presence in the field today.

At the opposing end of the ideological spectrum, numerous researchers and policy makers have attempted to formulate a rationale for music education as a vehicle for other educational aims. This body of work has drawn less upon a unified philosophy of music education, and more upon practical considerations such as budget cuts and reallocations in the face of political reforms. The reauthorization of title 1 in the 1970s, which made funds for music instruction contingent on its effectiveness in supporting learning in reading, writing, and mathematics, was the catalyst that first prompted researchers to justify music through non-musical means (Mark, 1996). More recent reforms like the “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB, 2001) and “Race to the Top” (RTT, 2009) have continued to reinforce the need for an extra-musical rationale. Drawing upon such practical considerations, a large number of studies have investigated the effect of music instruction on learning transfer to other subjects—particularly mathematics (e.g. Bilhartz, Bruhn, and Olson, 2000; Graziano, Peterson, and Shaw, 1999; Gromko and Poorman, 1998) and language learning (e.g. Douglas and Willatts, 1994; Ho, Cheung, and Chan, 2003)—and have found modest increases in performance on standardized achievement measures (Wolff, 2004). The limited nature of many of these studies, however, and their pairing in popular discourse with dubiously-founded claims like the “Mozart effect” (Rauscher, Shaw, and Ky, 1995) have left many music educators justifiably skeptical of extra-musical rationales for music education, particularly those that render music subservient to the standardized testing requirements of other disciplines.

Above the melee of budget cuts, advocacy efforts, and on-the-ground practicalities, recent scholarship in music education philosophy has offered a more nuanced, though similarly divergent picture of purpose in music education. The aesthetic approach of justifying music on the basis of great works or musical objects has eroded in favor a broader recognition of music’s

role in society and culture. Music has been recognized “not a thing at all but an activity; something people do” (Small, 1998, p. 2); something that is “vital to all societies and cultures because its doings, makings, and effects work to define, embody, and reflect community and social values and fulfill a wide range of divergent and evolving needs” (Elliott, 2012, p. 81). This *praxial* conception of music and music education (e.g. Elliott, 1995; Regelski, 1996) has been complimented by a recognition of the value of music as an embodiment of culture, with a rich capacity for facilitating deeper, more respectful understandings of multicultural points of view (e.g. Campbell, 2004; Lundquist and Szego, 1998; Volk, 1998). Music education has been acknowledged as a pathway to social justice as well, grounded in ethical and moral principles, with the power to confront societal ills such as bigotry, violence, oppression and patriarchy, and bring forth greater equity, truth and beauty in society (Jorgensen, 2003). Scholars have also attributed to music education a certain democratic purpose (e.g. Woodford, 2005; Allsup, 2007), beyond the mere mechanics of civic engagement and toward a more profound shaping and redefining of society as a whole. Such lofty conceptualizations of music education, and its role in schools and beyond, are a far cry from previous notions of music as a self-contained, aesthetic entity, and they represent a considerable paradigm shift in the field. Even Bennett Reimer, one of the original proponents of the aesthetic education movement, shifted in recent times toward a wider lens in the contextualization of music education and its purpose, evident in the following statement:

This turn in music and music education aims us toward ends related to societal values, adding a strong dose of reality to the ways we regard what music is and what music education is and should do. This view connects us with a host of thinkers inside and

outside education who are aiming toward betterment of the human condition in every possible way. Summoned out of the sanctuary offered by uniqueness, we are thrown into the rough and tumble of the world's most pressing problems. Thereby, we become equally responsible for addressing them, a responsibility not to be taken lightly.”

(Reimer, 2012, p. 115)

Coupled with the profound transformations and elaborations on the *why* questions in music education, there has also been a necessary shift in the matter of *how* music is taught. Bowman (2002, 2012) has argued the need for a recognition of music education as an *educational* as well as a *musical* endeavor, as he wrote: “engaging in musical instruction with educational intent requires we attend to what is being performed, experienced, taught, or learned besides the ‘music itself’” (Bowman, 2002, p. 26). He drew a distinction between the idea of *training* and *education*—training being the development of skills to execute specific tasks; education pointing to a more holistic cultivation of societal ideals—and argued that music educators have too often mistaken these goals as one in the same. The root of this confusion traces to the Latin roots of the word education, which are twofold: *Educare* means to train or to mold, while *educere* means to lead out or draw out (Bowman, 2012). While *educare* (aka training) involves “the preservation of knowledge and traditions, and prepares the young to fit into existing circumstances,” *educere* (aka education) refers to “preparing new generations for the inevitability of change, prepares the young to create solutions to problems yet unknown” (Bowman, 2012, p. 24). Though the development of vocal and instrumental techniques may be crucial to group participation in music, they are in and of themselves only training objectives. As Bowman warned, “it is entirely possible to teach and to make music well while failing to achieve

its educative potential” (p. 4). Only if a broader range of educational “commitments, values, and obligations” (p. 4) are taken into consideration does musical instruction transcend training and become educational.

Bowman’s argument shifts the attention away from the perfection of technique and skill—the philosophy of “if it sounds right it is right”—toward the cultivation of “attitudes, propensities, and dispositions” (Bowman, 2002, p. 9). The educated person then becomes one who is not only skilled, but who is resourceful, agile, and flexible, able to apply knowledge and adapt to changing circumstances. Educators become facilitators of an open process of growth, one in which learners imagine possibilities beyond what they can see, and seek to realize these through inquiry and experimentation (Dewey, 2004). Education itself moves beyond “a direct utilitarian purpose; it leads to a certain mode of consciousness, a delicate, sustained reflective disposition toward experience, an openness toward potential truth and possible meaning (Abbs, 1994, p. 15). Though these lofty ideals may “presuppose the internalization of various skills and techniques” (Bowman, 2002, p. 8), such skills and techniques cease to be ends in themselves. Rather, music education emerges as a pathway to critical thought and reflection, one that challenges conventional wisdom and leads to the continual reinvention of society at large (Dewey, 2004).

Bowman’s work points to existence of a common ground between music education and education in general. They are united in the call to educate in the sense of *educere*, “the processes of teaching and learning that prepare people for futures that are, strictly speaking, unknowable” (p. 23), and not simply to train concrete skills or inculcate existing knowledge. From the standpoint of advocacy, it would seem crucial to clarify and define this common ground—what does education in the *educere* sense look like in a musical versus non-musical

context? How can these two be synergistically interwoven or mutually reinforced in a school setting? Considering these questions and exploring this common ground may offer the possibility of establishing music as a partner with general education in the pursuit of broader ideals, however the work of music education philosophers has yet to substantially take on this charge. While the literature to date has offered a rich and diverse justification for music education, it has mostly skirted any direct connection with larger educational policies, aims, and trends. It is one of the central motivations for this dissertation to explore and strengthen this connection in the search for a shared platform for music and education, one grounded in the notion of *educere*. The historical roots for such a connection are considered next.

Historical Conceptions of Purpose

In contrast to the recent fixation on linguistic and mathematical literacy as monolithic educational goals (Cohen, 2006, p. 201), a longer view of history presents education as a much broader enterprise. Stretching back several thousand years, the seeds of schooling in ancient Greece, Egypt, and India were sown primarily as an organized means for socialization (Nash, 1998). More recently, the founders of American education gave credence to democratic ideals such as concern for the common good, observance of the law, and participation in matters of public life (McClellan, 1999). The “Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education” formulated by the National Educational Association in 1918 are also decidedly non-academic, focusing on “health, command of fundamental processes, worthy home membership, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character” (Bobbitt, 1920). These lofty principles encapsulated the ideals of the time—creating a reflection of American society’s goals for itself. Similar decrees have been made across the span of history, illustrating education as an institution

grounded in moral, ethical, and social considerations (Cohen, 2006).

A historical view of music education shows a parallel trend, with musical skills often overshadowed by extra-musical objectives. As Plato stated in *The Republic*, “Education in music is most sovereign, because more than anything else rhythm and harmony find their way into the innermost soul and strongest hold upon it, bringing with them and imparting grace, if one is rightly trained, and otherwise the contrary (Plato, 1984, p. 322). Mark (2002) summarizes similar writings through the Renaissance and the centuries that followed on the virtues of music in education, highlighting morality as a principle goal: “Children who were educated correctly and with the proper kinds of music were expected to become mature citizens whose lives were in harmony with their communities” (p. 1047). A similar line of thinking prompted the “Boston School Committee” of 1838, in their rationale for including music in schools, to pose the qualifying questions: “Is it intellectual—is it moral—is it physical? Let vocal music be examined by this standard” (Boston School Committee, 1838, p. 123). These examples point to a deep-seated conception of music education as a broad societal endeavor—one valued as much for its building of character and shaping of citizens as its imparting of instrumental skills and vocal technique.

In the decades following the Boston School Committee report, music began to gradually find a foothold in many American schools (though not a majority), a testament to the tireless advocacy by influential thinkers such as Lowell Mason, Horace Mann, William Tomlins, and Samuel Winkley Cole (Mark, 2013). Educational policy in this period in many ways reflected the legacy of the industrial revolution, with school boards and administrators mandating increased mechanization and scientific evaluation in classroom practice. In such a climate, music education moved in stride with other subjects to develop and implement rigorously scientific, systematic,

skill-oriented approaches to instruction. As superintendent Thomas Lothrop of the Buffalo, New York schools declared in 1843:

Musical instruction should be systematized and become part of the graded course, both teachers and pupils being held to a strict account for the amount of their work in this as other studies, by term and annual examinations. By a careful appointment of the elementary principles among the different grades the pupils will secure, while reading the sounds and combinations of letters required in reading the language they speak, such a familiarity with music that they can read it as readily as the letters of the alphabet.
(Buttleman, 1937, p. 80)

Thus, in the latter part of the nineteenth century, just as music was struggling to find a footing in the larger enterprise of schooling, music classes became oriented around drills, examinations, and sequential texts, with music specialists trained to scientifically implement a prescribed “scope and sequence” centered on music literacy (Mark, 2013). The pendulum of American educational history had swung decidedly in the direction of basic skills and accountability (Kliebard, 2002), and all subjects, music included, were forced to follow suit.

The move toward an industrial conception of education in the latter half of the nineteenth century fueled an equally large swing at the turn of the twentieth century to the opposing pole of educational progressivism. John Dewey, a key figure in this philosophical transformation, reflected on the state of education in 1897:

Modern theory and practice in education have laid relatively too much stress upon the volitional training in practical control and intellectual training in the acquisition of information, and too little upon the training of responsiveness. We need to return more to the Greek conception, which defined education as the attaching of pleasure and pain to the right objects and ideas in the right way. This ideal overemphasized the emotional element, but we have now gone to the opposite extreme. (Dewey, 1897, p. 330)

In the mind of Dewey, and other progressives like Friedrich Froebel, and Colonel Francis Parker, education had become excessively fixated on abstract drills and skill development. This led Dewey to famously declare: “Who can reckon up the loss of moral power that arises from the constant impression that nothing is worth doing in itself, but only as a preparation for something else” (Dewey, 1983, p. 277). Such a sentiment fueled the progressive movement to work toward reclaiming the moral power of education, through child-centered, experiential, democratic, ethically-driven instructional practices.

As was the case in the previous pendulum swing, music worked in tandem with the prevailing educational current of the time. The popular basal series, “the Progressive Music Series,” published in 1914, reflected the philosophical orientation that was taking hold in educational thought, as stated in the introduction:

The general aim of education is to train the child to become a capable, useful, and contented member of society. The development of a fine character and of a desire to be of service to humanity are results that lie uppermost in the minds of the leaders of educational thought...Music, because of its powerful influence upon the very innermost

recesses of our subject life, because of its wonderfully stimulating effect upon our physical, mental, and spiritual nature, contributes directly to both of the fundamental purposes of education. (Parker, McConathy, & Miessner, 1916, p. 9)

The synergy of purpose between music and education in the progressive era—married around the commitment to educating holistically, through real-world activity, with the aim of reinvigorating the moral and democratic character of the society at large—was not new, but rather echoed a union of thought that stretched back to ancient times. Standing on this common ground through the early part of the twentieth century, music education and general education seemed poised to forge a shared path toward a progressive transformation of society. Beyond the rhetoric, however, the vestiges of industrialization, with its mechanized approaches to delivering and evaluating instruction, stifled the implementation of progressive principles and created a dichotomy between philosophical principles and on-the-ground realities (Mark, 2014). For this reason the progressive movement never fully took hold in American education, and as such the renewed and common sense of purpose that had been shared between music and education also faded away, never again to surface as American education entered the dynamic and tumultuous decades of the post-World War II era.

The aftermath of the Second World War left the United States and the Soviet Union at increasing odds with each other, and as tensions mounted between these two remaining super powers, the pressure for competition in the global arena began to escalate in the political, social, and educational thought of the time. The launch of the Soviet satellite *Sputnik I* (the world's first space satellite) in 1957 was the catalyst that caused a full boil over into national hysteria in the

United States, prompting a total revamping of the educational system, as summarized by Mark (2014):

The Soviet Union's technological success shocked the American people, who were abruptly awakened to the fact that the United States no longer held the lead in space technology and might be slipping behind militarily. Education reform was deemed critical to the nation's ability to defend itself through technology, military might, and economic prowess. (p. 12)

In the wake of Sputnik, resources were generously poured into the development and implementation of science and technology curricula on a national scale, and music (and other arts) were left in the periphery as the nation struggled to reconcile its disgraced international status. As these initiatives gained momentum in the ensuing decade, policy organizations such as the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) began to express concern over the increasingly unbalanced curriculum, and such concerns prompted a moderate resurgence of funding to the arts (Mark, 2014). The renewed support of music in schools at this time, however, was less about positioning music as a core subject and more about acknowledging the perceived correlation between arts participation and success in "true" core subjects like math and science. The Panel on Educational Research and Development, a coalition of cross-disciplinary experts, expressed this sentiment aptly in 1964:

Certain members of the Panel were convinced that there was a degree of correlation between excellence in scientific achievement and the breadth of an individual's human

experience. The best scientists, it was thought, were not necessarily those who had devoted themselves single-mindedly to their own field; somehow, familiarity with the arts and humanities sharpened a good scientist's vision. (Lowens, 1971, p. E4)

Statements such as these became a common refrain for justifying music instruction as American education settled into a rhythm of reform in the last five decades. Dwindling SAT scores and the perception of failing schools prompted a 1983 report by the National Commission for Excellence in Education entitled "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform," which brought renewed attention to the necessity of maintaining global competitiveness through an increased emphasis on math, technology, and science, a bolstering of standardized testing and accountability, and a corresponding de-emphasis of the arts (though they were still supported to an extent). The subsequent "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" of 1994 created national standards for the arts and placed, for the first time, the arts among the list of core subjects, lending a renewed legitimacy to the field of music education. Just six years later, however, the rhetoric of failing schools once again prompted the need for "back-to basics" reform—this time with an even greater emphasis on standardized achievement measures—in the "No Child Left Behind Act" (NCLB) of 2001. The arts were again included in the list of core subjects, however they were not included in the list of subjects to be tested, and given that schools and districts were to be evaluated solely based on standardized test scores, NCLB effectively removed support for music programs (Mark, 2014). The recent "Race to the Top" initiative, part of the Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (RRA), has similarly dampened federal support for music education, with music programs eligible for little of the federal grant funding allocated on the basis of student achievement.

Through all of these cyclical twists and turns of policy there is a notable disconnect between the aims of music education and the aims of education as a whole; a substantial chasm which has grown wider with each passing federal initiative. Educational policy has increasingly asserted that the sole purpose of schooling is to produce measurable student outcomes in a narrow trifecta of subjects comprised of math, science, and language arts. There is no room for a common purpose in this paradigm. Instead, music educators have been forced to either submit to the needs of the federally prioritized subjects—integrating musical study with other academic disciplines—or to “go it alone” and formulate a separate rationale on the basis of musical priorities. Leadership in music education in the last century has not surprisingly chosen the latter path, maintaining a dominant paradigm based on the assertions of aesthetic educators like Charles Leonard, Allan Britton, and Bennett Reimer; a conception that the purpose of music in schools can be found in its own aesthetic qualities. Though such a notion strongly asserts the autonomy of music education, its complete removal from the powerful whims of general educational policy ironically renders it subservient to these whims. Such a chasm of purpose likens music to a distant neighbor or a strange bedfellow; cohabitating the educational sphere and wholly dependent on its structural support, but possessing nothing in common and working toward no shared objectives. In this arrangement the only way music has been able to maintain its tenancy in the educational landscape has been through unceasing advocacy at the hand of organizations and coalitions like the National Association for Music Education (NAfME, formerly MENC), the National Coalition for Music Education (NCME), the American Council for the Arts (ACA), and the National Coalition for Education in the Arts (NCEA), along with a multitude of others.

It is remarkable, given the tenuous and demanding arrangement described above, that music education has maintained such a stalwart position in American schools. As the field moves further into the twenty first century, it is possible to imagine a different arrangement. What if music and general education were more aligned in terms of aims—would there be a need for such constant advocacy? Perhaps it could be possible to rekindle some of the common ground from the educational past; a reinvigoration of schooling as a holistic, social, ethical, and democratic endeavor. There are hints that such a shift might be underfoot. At the dawn of the twenty first century, the Phi Delta Kappa Gallup poll found that a sample of American parents believed the single most important purpose of public schooling was to prepare people to become responsible citizens (Cohen, 2006). In the same year, when the House of Representatives passed a resolution in favor of music education, Congressman David McIntosh of Indiana declared “music education has touched the lives of many young people...it has taught them teamwork and discipline, while refining their cognitive and communications skills” (House of Representatives Concurrent Resolution 266, 2000). As educational thinkers reconsider priorities in the twenty first century, it is possible to imagine such aims coalescing across subject areas. According to Mark (2014), the present moment may be ripe for rekindling a common ground of purpose:

The monumental changes in American society tell us that it is especially crucial that music educators remain open to new ways of thinking. As schools focus more on twenty-first century skills, a new emphasis on imagination, innovation, and creative skill may well place the arts at the forefront of contemporary school reform. As we saw earlier, music education has played an important role in some of America’s pivotal trends and

events. The present moment offers music education further opportunities to significantly impact the educational path of the nation. (Mark, 2014, p. 21)

From this perspective, perhaps music education could *truly* become part of the academic core in the educational transformations ahead.

Hypothesizing a Common Ground of Purpose

Certainly there are historical foundations for a more engaged partnership between music education and education as a whole, and the intent of this section is to identify more specifically some potentials for common ground. Naturally it would be impossible in the span of this dissertation to assimilate the entirety of educational policy and philosophy with a holistic view of music instruction; indeed, the intent in this volume is much more modest: To focus the lens on one particular form of musical activity, in this case group composition. In order to investigate potential areas for common ground, the discussion will next explore group composition in relation to four currents in educational thought, policy, and practice, namely: Democratic Citizenship Education, Cooperative Learning, Collaborative Learning, and 21st Century Skills (Note that due to their considerable crossover, cooperative and collaborative learning will be combined into one section and considered by way of comparison). These currents were selected for inclusion in this discussion for different reasons: Democratic Citizenship Education for its embodiment of the broad virtues that offered a historical common ground for music and education in the progressive era of the early twentieth century; Collaborative/Cooperative Learning for their structural similarity to the group composition project under study and their attention to collective problem solving; and 21st Century Skills for their encapsulation of a

paradigm shift in educational thought at the present moment. The following discussion first summarizes each strand, and next considers each in relation to the process of composing in a group.

Democratic Citizenship Education

The acknowledgement of schools as ideal public meeting grounds where diverse peoples can learn to work together toward common ends has been articulated by scholars under the heading of “democratic citizenship education” (e.g. Newmann, 1975; Parker, 2003). The notion of democratic citizenship has been variously defined throughout the ages and across disciplines, but a synthesis of its sociological and political dimensions offers an overarching set of constituent attributes: Democratic citizenship defines an individual’s adherence to a particular political power, the legal status through which individuals are both empowered and protected, the rights and duties of active participation in the political process, the expression of identity through belonging to a particular community, and the support and welfare to which an individual is entitled within the political entity, all filtered through and reflective of the cultural and intellectual meanings that define the society (Preuss, 2003; Turner, 1990).

The idea of citizenship education, which emerged in the field of social studies, was traditionally focused on imparting factual knowledge about the inner workings of a democratic government. As Butts (1980) described, citizenship education “embraces the fundamental values of the political community, a realistic and scholarly knowledge of the working of the political institutions and processes, and the skills of political behavior required for effective participation in a democracy” (p. 122). The goal of this traditional model, according to Parker (2003), was to become “one who votes, develops opinions on matters of public concern, holds dear

commitments to liberty and justice, and has a deep understanding of the mechanics of democratic government, from its three branches to its protection of individual rights” (p. 18). Such a model, referred to dismissively as “mainstream civics” by Boyte (1994), has been sharply critiqued by progressive educators, who have argued that the focus on the mechanics of political engagement has ignored social and cultural diversity, cultivating citizens who act merely as “voters” and “informed spectators” of the political process (Banks, 2008; Parker, 2003). This has prompted a renewed framework, emphasizing the intersection of democratic citizenship with multicultural education, and pointing to diversity as a key value in the cultivation of meaningful democratic engagement.

According to this conceptualization, “democratic citizenship education seeks to teach, among other things, that diversity is a social fact, that it is a social good, why this is so, and how diversity and democracy require one another” (Parker, 2003, p. 1). As Dewey suggested almost a century ago, simply bringing diverse students and teachers together, as schools do, is not a sufficient condition for engaging the democratic process:

“Persons do not become a society by living in physical proximity. Individuals do not even compose a social group because they all work for a common end. The parts of a machine work with a maximum of cooperativeness for a common result, but they do not form a community. If, however, they were all cognizant of the common end and all interested in it so that they regulated their specific activity in view of it, then they would form a community. But this would involve communication. Each would have to know what the other was about and would have to have some way of keeping the other informed as to his own purpose and progress. Consensus demands communication.” (Dewey, 2004, p. 3)

The central role of communication in democratic processes was echoed by Habermas (1984) in his theory of communicative action, which posed “argumentative speech” as the basis for democratic action. Such speech was characterized by the absence of coercive force, the mutual quest for understanding, and the compelling power of the superior argument, which enabled a kind of “deliberative community” to function among its practitioners (Habermas, 1990).

Drawing on Habermas’s theoretical foundations, Parker (2003) applied the notion of deliberation to educational contexts, defining it as “discussion aimed at making decisions about what action to take” (p. xxii). This is distinguished from debate, where positions are preplanned, and voting, where no meaningful interaction is required (p. 81). With deliberation, one group engages in the collective construction of an action plan, which it reaches through consensus building. Parker argues that such a process has profound educational value:

Deliberation is not only a means to an end (reaching a decision), but an end in itself, for it creates a particular kind of democratic public culture among the deliberators. When a diverse group of people deliberate together, they create a new ‘we’ in which differences are regarded as an asset. (Parker, 2003, p. 80)

In group discussions of controversial issues (the predominate format in the democratic citizenship education model), such differences will inevitably bring students into conflict at times over incompatible ideas. While in a traditional approach to music education such conflict might present an obstacle to the “real” purpose of the process (to arrive at the musical product), the democratic citizenship framework allows for the negotiation of conflict to be a learning goal

of its own. In fact, conflict can be seen to reside at the core of the deliberation process—it is the spark that ignites its most potent learning outcomes. Johnson & Johnson (2009a) concur that “conflict is to student learning what the internal combustion engine is to the automobile” (p. 38). By negotiating through sometimes challenging disagreements, students learn how to build coherent arguments, give persuasive presentations, critically analyze and challenge others’ positions, view issues from a variety of perspectives, and seek reasoned judgments. “Students learn that the purpose of advocacy and criticism is not to win but rather to clarify the strengths and weaknesses of various courses of action, so that a joint agreement may be reached regarding what represents the best reasoned judgment” (Johnson & Johnson, 2009a, p. 48).

Deliberation is thus an avenue to cultivating engaged, consensus-building democratic citizens who are capable of listening and finding solidarity across differences through “humility, caution, and reciprocity” (Parker, 2003, p. 16). Discussion toward action becomes then not just an instructional method, but a curriculum outcome in itself, with participants embodying Burbules’ conception of “reasonable” people, being able to converse productively about beliefs and values with the objective of reaching understanding rather than winning (Burbules, 1995). Such a collective spirit of conversation leads to a set of moral virtues: “tolerance, respect for the opinions of those around one, willingness to listen, and reliance on persuasion, not force” (Burbules, 1995, p. 86). These are crucial values for the effective functioning of a democratic society, and proponents of democratic citizenship education argue that schools, as sustained public meeting grounds for diverse peoples, are ideal venues for bringing such virtues into being.

Cooperative and Collaborative Learning

While democratic citizenship education was conceived primarily as a process of large group discussion and engagement, the collaborative and cooperative learning models arose as a way of conceptualizing small groups of students working together in schools. In fact, the majority of small group activity that has proliferated in the educational sphere has developed under the umbrella of these two frameworks (Tolmie et al, 2009). In terms of common ground, both models emphasize discussion and the collective processing of information as key facilitators of learning, and both assume a relatively equal footing in terms of the knowledge base and expertise of the participants, as contrasted with peer tutoring, where an inequality of expertise is both assumed and necessary (Dillenbourg, 1999). Where the two models differ is in the format and degree of interaction between participants. Cooperative learning is often structured around multifaceted tasks, employing the “jigsaw” method where individual participants complete components of the larger task, and then regroup to synthesize their efforts (e.g. Cohen, 1994; Sharan, 1980). Collaborative learning, on the other hand, is typically oriented around discrete tasks, which are approached entirely through collective discussion and action (e.g. Roschelle & Teasley, 1995; Summers, 2006).

The different orientations of the two models are reflective of their different theoretical origins. As discussed previously, cooperative learning was an outgrowth of social interdependence theory (Deutsch, 1949), drawing upon social psychological research on team functioning in order to structure conditions that engender mutual efforts and understandings (Tolmie et al, 2010). In contrast, collaborative learning was founded on notions of sociocognitive conflict, leaning particularly on the work of Piaget (1932; 1985), with a focus on the intentional

reconciling of conflicting ideas as an instrument for conceptual change (e.g. Roschelle & Teasley, 1995).

Cooperative learning emerged in educational discourse in the early 1980s, and has proliferated widely into educational practice. As Roger Johnson and David Johnson, two of the model's leading proponents proclaimed:

From being discounted and ignored, cooperative learning has steadily progressed to being one of the dominant instructional practices throughout the world. Cooperative learning is now utilized in schools and universities throughout most of the world in every subject area and from preschool through graduate school and adult training programs. (Johnson & Johnson, 2009a, p. 365)

Cooperative learning is centered around highly structured tasks, in which the teacher establishes groups (with balanced levels of expertise among the group members), outlines mutual goals, offers joint rewards, and assigns roles (such as summarizer, encourager of participation, elaborator). The process of working together in these roles is as important as the end product, with the groups building interpersonal skills through “face-to-face promotive” interaction (Johnson et al, 1994). Significant attention is also given to monitoring individual achievement with respect to the goals and processes of the group, as well as assessing group performance through structured discussion and formal evaluation.

Collaborative learning, part philosophy and part method, is a student-focused orientation to instruction where student responses to open-ended scenarios are derived through group consensus (Blumenfeld, Marx, Soloway & Krajcik, 1996). The notion of collaborative learning

emerged in educational literature in the early 1990s, and grew up amidst the areas of science and technology education. In classroom practice, groups of students are faced with open ended problems, and are tasked with collectively grappling toward solutions—using existing language and knowledge to construct new understandings—a process referred to by Roschelle (1992) as “convergent conceptual change.” Bruffee (1999) outlines three basic principals of collaborative learning: That knowledge is socially constructed as a “consensus among the members of a community of knowledgeable peers;” that ownership of knowledge is shared among the members of the community; and that interdependent social relationships shape a community of knowledgeable peers (p. xii). Peters and Armstrong (1998) further elaborate that collaborators “labor together in order to construct something that did not exist before the collaboration, something that does not and cannot fully exist in the lives of individual collaborators” (p. 75).

What is constructed among collaborative learners is not predetermined by an adult expert. In fact, in many ways collaborative learning emerged as a reaction to cooperative learning, which Flannery (1994) maintained “the traditional lines of classroom knowledge and authority” (p. 17), with the teacher still firmly in control. The collaborative model shifts to a more open-ended approach, with groups of students engaging collectively in dialogue, deliberation, negotiation, and compromise to reach a mutually agreeable solution to a problem.

Despite the differences in approach, both cooperative and collaborative learning have been highly influential in the formulation and implementation of small-group structures in school settings. This is partly on account of extensive research into the benefits of cooperative and collaborative small-group processes, which has highlighted their role in fostering improvements in participants conceptual grasp and application of skills, effort and motivation to achieve, social relationships, and psychological health and self esteem. While research into cooperative and

collaborative learning models has proliferated into nearly every educational discipline and into a variety of professions including medicine, business, and counseling, Luce (2001) points, music education has been notably absent from this trend:

With intensifying frequency, the literature outside of music education has argued that the skills of negotiation, compromise, and consensus are fundamental for students entering the professional work force and the world community...A vast literature base of reports, research, debate, and discussion continues to grow on the evolution and efficacy of collaborative learning in various settings, populations, and disciplines, but not in music education. (p. 22-23)

While most people would agree that music is an inherently cooperative and collaborative discipline, music educators have yet to fully probe the theoretical and practical implications of the cooperative and collaborative learning models. This may be because music educators still rely on a predominance of large group (full class) activities, while small-group activity has often been confined to the less common practices of informal learning or group composition—from whence no significant bridge has yet been built to the parallel currents in general education. It is hoped here that this discussion and research can offer at least the beginnings of such a bridge.

21st Century Skills

The entry into the 21st century has prompted a reexamination of educational goals and policies on a large scale. In 2002, the Partnership for 21st century skills (P21) emerged in the United States, forging an alliance between the Department of Education and several

organizations from the private sector (Apple Computer, Cisco Systems, Dell Computer Corporation, Microsoft Corporation, and the National Education Association, among others), and endeavoring to position a newly-defined set of “21st century skills” at the center of K-12 education. This partnership, which targeted “the profound gap between the knowledge and skills most students learn in school and the knowledge and skills they need in typical 21st century communities and workplaces” (P21.org), is part of a larger international movement, and has grown in tandem with parallel initiatives toward 21st century skills, such as those produced by the European Union, UNESCO and EnGauge (Voogt & Roblin, 2010).

At the core of the P21 framework are the “learning and innovation skills” (also called the “4 C’s”), defined as creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration (P21.org). These overarching capacities are coupled with “information, media and technology skills” such as “information literacy, media literacy, and ICT (information communication technology) literacy, as well as “life and career goals” including “flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, and leadership and responsibility” (P21.org). All of these skills are to be cultivated through the core subjects of English, reading or language arts, world languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history, government and civics (P21.org).

To date the P21 framework has been adopted as educational policy in 19 states, and has had considerable impact in the educational discourse, with 6 of the core subject areas (including the arts) developing “skills maps” to integrate the teaching of 21st century skills. This framework, combined with other parallel documents on a global scale, represents a considerable shift in

educational thinking, not only in terms of technological literacy, but also in terms of the emphasis on creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking.

Discussion: Potentials of Group Composition

In light of the complex, muddled and sometimes distant relationship between music and the rest of education, and in light of the educational discourse that has emerged in recent times (such as democratic citizenship education, cooperative and collaborative learning, and 21st century skills), group composition provides an intriguing entry point for an empirical deep dive into collaborative potentials. For one, group composition would appear to be fertile ground for the kind of deliberation described by Parker (2003) and other scholars of Democratic Citizenship Education, with group members needing to democratically deliberate across differences toward a joint form of musical action. Some of the structures and tenets of the cooperative and collaborative learning models also seem aptly suited to group composition and the collective negotiation and construction of a shared musical understanding. Additionally, the collective composition of a piece of music seems to represent an eerily perfect synthesis of the “4 C’s” of the 21st century skills framework, conveniently aggregating creativity, collaboration, communication, and critical thinking into one project.

Returning to the gulf of purpose described earlier, however, these tidy assertions demand scrutiny, as the idea of music education as a vehicle for non-musical outcomes has been challenged by many of the leading voices in the field. Charles Leonhard, one of original proponents of aesthetic education, summarized the “illogic” of using music for non-musical means:

“While reliance on statements of the non-musical value of music may well have convinced some reluctant administrators to more fully support the music program, those values cannot stand close scrutiny, because they are not unique to music. In fact, many other areas of the curriculum are in a position to make a more powerful contribution to these values than is music.” (Leonhard, 1965, p. 42)

If Leonhard’s assertions are correct, then the process of deliberation toward democratic action would be more appropriately relegated to another area of the curriculum, not music. Indeed, the idea of deliberation has its roots in the realm of social studies education, with a focus on confronting challenging societal issues (Engle, 2003; Hess, 2009), and as such it is reasonable to assume that it could remain contained within that discipline. From the aesthetic education perspective, the attainment of the 4 C’s of 21st century learning would also be best left to a different wing of the school building, such as a science experiment, group math work, or a language arts discussion.

To counter this argument, there would need to be something unique about music in the pursuit of these non-musical ideals. There would have to be a reason to pay attention to such broad dispositions instead of just focusing on the music itself and the musical skills used to produce it. These conjectures point to the hypothesis driving this research—that there are indeed qualities of musical participation, and particularly group composition, that are uniquely suited to collaboration, joint decision-making, and collective action. These qualities are elaborated next.

Collective by Nature

Music education has a unique focus on delivering group-oriented products. Musical products come in the form of performances (as well as recordings of group music-making) and these are arguably defining features of the music education field. Though the generation of products is prevalent in other areas of school curricula (particularly in the visual and language arts), these most often result from the efforts of individual students. Music classes are quite unique with their emphasis on collective product sharing.

This collective quality of music education in many ways reflects how music is practiced in the world beyond school. Indeed, collective dispositions such as articulating one's position, listening across differences, building consensus, and establishing a course of action have been observed as key ingredients needed to function in a variety of "real world" musical contexts, from garage bands (Campbell, 1995; Jaffurs, 2004; Green, 2002) to orchestral composing (Burnard, 2012) to high-functioning ensembles (Lim, 2013). Emphasizing such dispositions in music education may realize the plea made by Carter (2000) at the National Association for Music Education's Vision 2020 Symposium: "To place the emphasis on the development of skills needed to function effectively as an adult" (p. 57), both in music and beyond.

Collective on Multiple Levels

Successful collaborative work requires the establishment of common ground, a process that Baker, Hansen, Joiner & Traum (1999) refer to as "grounding." They describe how grounding can occur on two different levels—while *pragmatic* grounding uses language as a medium for finding common understanding, *semantic* grounding occurs "on the level of the medium itself" (Baker, Hansen, Joiner & Traum, 1999, p. 46). The work of these researchers

focused on computer-mediated learning of scientific concepts, and they provided an illustration of pairs of French secondary students collaborating through a computer interface to graphically illustrate an energy chain (a model used in Physics to represent the storage, transfer, and transformation of energy). Working remotely from each other, students communicated through an online chat while they collectively created and modified an on-screen energy chain.

Pragmatic grounding occurred in the initial phase of interaction, where students learned how to communicate with each other and understand what the other was “trying to tell them.” It was in this phase of the process that students decided, both implicitly and explicitly, how they would proceed with the task and how each would contribute. With this basis for communication and collaboration in place, the groups moved into *semantic grounding*—on the level of the medium itself, in this case the physical concept of energy—where interactions were focused on understanding the concept and enacting a graphic illustration.

Though this computer-mediated science activity is quite remote to music, its underlying principles of are of great utility in conceptualizing the processes of communication and collaboration in a musical context. Unlike the science example, where communication on the level of the medium itself (i.e. semantic grounding) was a combination of verbal communication and joint action, semantic grounding in music can be seen as proceeding entirely through nonverbal, musical means. Thus, in a musical context, the distinction between pragmatic and semantic grounding can be modified slightly to account for dynamics and formats of communication that are uniquely musical: Pragmatic grounding referring to verbal exchange, and semantic grounding referring to communication through musical action. (This distinction, an extension of Baker, Hansen, Joiner & Traum’s (1999) conceptualization, is maintained to frame the processes of the student groups in this study—see further discussion in chapter six).

Composition in a group format uniquely embodies the two levels of grounding. Though during initial interactions students may try to establish common ground by way of conversation, as the process moves forward their interactions may increasingly be characterized by musical exchange. The latter *semantic* layer of grounding puts words into sounds, establishing a joint platform for mutual understanding through the enacting of musical ideas. This deep layer of musical coordination, with its synergistic nature leading to the “urge to merge” (Keil & Feld, 1994), situates music uniquely as an allegory for cooperation and citizenship.

Rich with Problems

Group composition, the focal point of this study, is hypothesized here to represent the ideal context in which to explore collaborative processes. The justification for this focus lies partly in the critical pedagogy of Paulo Freire (1970). In his ground-breaking critique of the traditional “banking model” of education—in which learners represented empty vessels to be passively filled with expert knowledge—Freire proposed the alternative “problem posing” education. This model, which transformed learners from passive listeners to “critical co-investigators in dialogue” (p. 81) rewired education from a system of domination and control to one driven by the “emergence of consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (p. 81). Students in Freire’s visionary schooling “come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. Problem-posing education affirms men and women as beings in the process of becoming” (p. 84). The critical consideration of “problems,” mediated through dialogue, can be seen as the currency that drives students toward new understandings.

Applying Freire’s framework to the musical realm, every musical endeavor might be imagined as a collection of musical “problems”—ambiguities that need to be decided before a

musical product can be achieved. In a traditional approach to music education, musical material is mostly chosen from existing repertoire, which offers a diminished number of problems, since many of the fundamental compositional building blocks are carefully detailed in the score. (It is true that a score presents a whole host of its own problems of interpretation and orchestration, however I contend that composing basic musical ideas is prerequisite to, rather than separate from these later-stage considerations). When compositional pressures are alleviated by an existing score, and when matters of interpretation are handled by a conductor, music education begins to resemble the banking model of education, with students existing passively as “ears” to absorb sonic material, or as vocal chords or fingers waiting to embody scripted techniques and sequences. If the goal is to facilitate problem-based, deliberative experiences for students, characterized by critical dialogue, then it is advantageous to shift focus to the opposite end of the spectrum, to composition, where the musical material is mostly or entirely undecided. Starting with a blank slate, as composition projects often do (although acknowledging that people bring to such projects their musical understandings, interests, “language”, and skills) offers the maximum number of problems that need to be resolved by student musicians, and focusing on group contexts means that every resolution must be reached collectively. Group composition is also quite a multilayered process, with the initial idea generation to be followed by decisions about form, roles, orchestration, sound, and performance (Faulkner, 2003). Even the performance itself could be seen as a form of critical dialogue in which players and singers respond to spontaneous variations in tempo, pitch and tone color. Due to the copious number of “problems” to be overcome in such projects, each to be solved through processes of “collective agency” (Barnes, 2000), group composition is proposed here as an ideal setting in which to explore collaborative outcomes.

Conclusion: Potentials for Common Ground

Many music educators are understandably skeptical of attempts to integrate their curriculum into the general education sphere. For instance, ideas such as singing the multiplication tables or chanting science facts in rhythm do not come across as particularly valuable musical experiences. Rather, such activities seem to render music as subservient to the content of other subject areas, coopting musical instruction as a tool for the betterment of test scores and academic standing. Would not musical instructional time be better spent facilitating authentic expression of rich musical traditions? This dichotomous paradigm—the forced choice between music as subservient to other disciplines and music for its own sake—is what has fueled the somewhat uneasy relationship between music programs and broader educational aims.

As this exploration of literature has attempted to show, however, such a dichotomy may represent a somewhat oversimplified picture. Stripping back the recent layers of high stakes testing, “back to basics,” and narrowly-defined “core” academics, the historical perspective provides more of a shared platform on which music can stand with the rest of education. From this point of view, particular academic skills are not ends in themselves, but rather they are merely tools in the cultivation of capable citizens who are functional in their communities and democracies. Education becomes more than a “mere preparation for later life;” rather it takes on the “full meaning of the present life” (Dewey, 2008. P. 50). The various subject areas, including music, can be seen as distinct yet synergistic avenues toward this common end.

The historical ideals that gave rise to the institution of education are echoed in more recent educational thinking, and this discussion has highlighted four models as points of reference: Democratic Citizenship Education, Cooperative and Collaborative Learning, and 21st Century Skills. These models orient teaching and learning around the pursuit of broad potentials

such as collaborating across differences, innovating solutions to problems, and developing collective forms of action. Though 21st Century Skills have been mapped according to disparate subject areas, including the arts (P21.org), the notion of Democratic Citizenship Education has been primarily applied within the domain of social studies, while Cooperative and Collaborative Learning have received very sparse attention in music education (Luce, 2001), and as such the application of these latter three frameworks to a music project is somewhat novel.

In building this framework, I argue that the study of music possesses unique capabilities in the pursuit of the loftier educational goals mentioned previously. Due to the orientation around collective product sharing, and the two-tiered pathway to finding common ground (both verbal and musical), music is proposed to be a fruitful channel to the development of collaborative dispositions. Narrowing in further, group composition, due to the wealth of musical problems it poses (each to be negotiated and solved collectively), is proposed as a logical arena in which to examine the potential collaborative outcomes in a music classroom. With all this in mind, the study takes to the field in a single music classroom. The method for examining collaborative potentials in a particular group composition project is outlined next.

Chapter 3: Method and Context

Overview of Method

The research for the project involved a qualitative investigation of a group composition project with upper elementary students at one Seattle school. The design aligned with Stake's (1998) definition of an instrumental case study (p. 88), with its focus on a particular issue—in this case the social dynamics of collaborative engagement. The project blended the ethnographic techniques of participant observation (Spradley, 1980) with the reflective lens of auto-ethnography (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009; Wong, 2008). Given that I have taught music at the school for seven years and actively participated in the activities under study (as a teacher-researcher), an acknowledgement of positionality was required, in keeping with the principle of reflexivity (Denzin, 1997). Similar to teacher-researchers who have come before me (e.g. Allsup, 2002; Beegle, 2010; Burnard, 2000; Faulkner, 2003; Feay-Shaw, 2001; Roberts, 2012; Wiggins, 1994) a concerted effort was necessary to avoid distortions of interpretation based on my prior knowledge of the participants and the context. Efforts taken toward this end included member checking, cross-referencing with independent scholars (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), and triangulation of multiple data sources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Data collection also consisted primarily of audio recordings gathered by the students (independent of my presence), such that I was physically absent (in the general vicinity but not tuned to the particulars of every group all the time) from many of the interactions under scrutiny.

My active membership in the culture under study came with certain advantages as well, allowing the research to proceed without disrupting “the flow of the interaction unnaturally” (Adler & Adler, 1998). As Randall Allsup (2002) found in his dissertation research on a similarly long-term small-group composition project with secondary students, his positioning as

an outsider-researcher was often a liability in terms of his interactions with the students. The students expressed a great deal of discomfort with his role as a researcher, his practice of field noting, and his constant questioning, leading him to reflect:

“I wish these students were mine, and not part of a dissertation study. If I were their teacher, I am sure I would be closer to them and they would trust me if I offered advice, made comments, or started a dialogue. This study feels unnatural...” (p. 174)

As teacher of the participants in my study, my presence was less likely to alter their experience of the project, affording a more naturalistic look at how dynamics unfolded in each group. (The only aspect of the research that received comments from the participants was the use of audio recording devices to record the processes of each group—as further explained in the data collection section later in this chapter, six such comments were made over the course of the project.) It could also be said that my extensive knowledge of the context and participants served to a degree as a springboard for deeper engagement with “what was really going on” in the culture.

Research Setting: Alder Park Elementary

Alder Park Elementary (pseudonym) is a private non-denominational elementary school in Seattle with an enrollment of 326 students from pre-Kindergarten through 5th grade. The demographic composition of the school spans the spectrum of socioeconomic status (SES) and ethnicity, but is nonetheless dominated by white, middle to upper class students. Though the specific income range of children’s families was not available to me, it is safe to say that many

of them occupied the top twenty percent of income earners in Seattle, which were found to have average household earnings of \$248,000 annually in the 2014 census (U.S. census bureau, 2014). The results of a parent survey indicated the following breakdown: 55% Caucasian, 17% multi-racial, 6% Asian American, 1% African American, .1% East Indian, 1% Latino, 1% Middle Eastern, .1% Native American (18% of families did not respond to this demographic question of race/ethnicity). Currently tuition is \$23,688 per year, and 20% of families receive some form of financial assistance. Class size is approximately 17 students, with 18 classes separated into mixed age groupings: Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten, 1st/2nd, 2nd/3rd, 3rd/4th, and 4th/5th.

The school began on the campus of the University of Washington in 1911 as a preschool and kindergarten for children of faculty and students. During the first 70 years of its existence the school was a lab setting for educational researchers and students from the university's education department. In 1981 a group of eager parents and educators founded a 501(C)3 non-profit organization and moved the school off campus (to a location different from its present address) to function as a parent cooperative (pre Kindergarten-Kindergarten). Within 10 years, the school expanded to include elementary grades (in the process incorporating one of its current buildings) and by 1999 the school reached its current size of over 300 students.

Between 1991 and 2003, the school was a split campus with elementary students attending in the current building (known as the north campus) and pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students attending in a separate building (known as the south campus). In 2003 a new building—something of an architectural marvel with a maze of classrooms separated by child-sized doors—was built at the site of the north campus, and from thence forward the pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten students were housed in the new building (referred to as “the labyrinth”) while the elementary students stayed in the old building (known as the “the tower”).

Specialist classes (including music, art, Spanish, physical education, science, library, and design and technology) are split between the two buildings, with all but the physical education and Spanish programs housed in the labyrinth building.

The organizational structure of Alder Park Elementary School reflects its early history as a lab school, with teachers assuming the role of educational researchers, designing, implementing and evaluating programs. Philosophically, the school maintains a commitment to reinventing education, citing in its mission statement the “ongoing effort to shape and share our innovative education model” (school website). This commitment has prompted the ongoing facilitation of mathematics and science workshops for a national pool of educators, numerous partnerships with local schools focusing on literacy programs, a quarterly educational journal, and an interactive online learning module used to disseminate innovations and practices to the larger educational community.

Private schools in context

The research took place at a private elementary school, and as such it is necessary to provide some context for private schooling at a National and local level. The National Center for Education Statistics found that in the 2011-2012 school year there were 30,861 private schools in the United States, serving 5.3 million Pre K-12 students. Private schools accounted for 24 percent of the nation's schools and enrolled 10 percent of all Pre K-12 students (Capenet, 2014). They also found that most private school students (80 percent) attended religiously-affiliated schools, and that most private schools were small with 86 percent having fewer than 300 students (Capenet, 2014). According to the membership data of the Northwest Association of Independent

Schools (NWAIS), Seattle has a similar percentage of private schools (31 out of 117), but there are far fewer religiously-affiliated schools (only 6 out of 31).

Hoxby (1994) explained the existence of private schools as follows:

A private school can exist when it can offer schooling that is so much closer to the demands of a sufficient number of households that households in question are willing to cover its costs (in addition to whatever property taxes they must continue to pay for public schools) (p. 4)

The costs of private schools vary significantly, with religiously-affiliated schools nationally charging an average of \$7,790 in tuition per year, and non-sectarian schools charging \$21,510 annually (Capenet, 2014). Given this discrepancy, the high percentage of non-religious private schools in Seattle reflects the city's relatively high medium income (14th in the country according to the 2014 census). Fitting Hoxby's explanation, in Seattle wealth affords opportunities for school choice, with 31 private school programs tailored to particular micro-demographics.

One of the core values of NWAIS is independence, with schools having "the latitude to determine their own missions and philosophies, to select their faculty and students, and to develop their curricula is an essential prerequisite for their success" (nwais.org, 2014). This means that individual schools may diverge into distinct philosophical or curricular niches (in ways that public schools could not, due to standards and restrictions), branding themselves in particular ways to particular families. For example, the latitude to craft its own educational design has allowed Alder Park Elementary to grow itself into a progressive institution focused on

child-centered, hands-on, collaborative, and project-based learning, and the families it serves have intentionally chosen to be a part of such an educational paradigm. Other independent schools have built their brands differently—such as another elementary school that stands on a platform of social justice, or an all-girl’s middle school based on the empowerment of girls in math and science—and the attending families have “bought in” to the corresponding philosophical orientation of their chosen school. This freedom to create philosophically-driven educational niches, reflective of the private school climate in Seattle, is an important background piece to understanding Alder Park Elementary.

Philosophy and Curriculum

Before considering the collaborative composition project at hand, it is necessary to contextualize the process in the “school climate” (Cohen, 2006) in which it took place. As McCarthy (2010) argues:

Researchers need an approach that accommodates the multi-faceted synergies that are embedded in music making. An ecological approach is needed to gather information about the physical environment and activities that happen there, to make connections with social and cultural values. (p. 9)

Given the current focus on small group processes, it is important to note that the school program at Alder Park Elementary is highly collaborative at all levels. Teachers meet daily in teams to develop, plan, and refine curriculum, and students frequently work on group projects in subjects ranging from math, reading, social studies, technology, science, music, and physical education.

As part of “service learning projects,” fifth grade students also serve alongside teachers on committees that address programmatic elements such as admissions, special events, and facilities. A formalized system of student government has been in place for more than a decade: At the classroom level, “class meetings” provide a venue for children to grapple with issues of classroom functioning. Each class also sends representatives to “all school meeting,” where the delegates problem-solve playground and lunchroom dynamics and plan community events.

Indeed, collaborative problem-solving forms the fabric of Alder Park Elementary School, with the following statement posted on the school website with respect to its core academic values:

Collaboration is a vehicle for the civic responsibility we want our students to develop. To participate effectively in a democratic community, children need to learn to engage in dialogue. We think it is vital for children to learn to explain their own thinking, to consider another point of view, to build on someone else's idea, and to reconsider their own thinking based on feedback from others. Teachers expect children to collaborate to solve problems, to plan activities, and to work together on whole class projects. Children are also expected to consult classmates whenever they need feedback or another idea for approaching a problem. In this way, children are exposed to multiple strategies for solving a problem and become more flexible in their thinking. Children learn to assume leadership at the same time that they assume responsibility for the needs of others in the group. (school website)

“Teaching for understanding” forms another tenet of the school philosophy, and

children charged with constructing their own understanding and testing out theories to make sense of how things work. The classroom is “set up as a laboratory for the child to conduct his/her research and the teacher acts as a coach to the child” (school website). For example, when working on daily “math vitamins,” which are open-ended problems that can be approached on multiple levels, children design their own approach, using blocks and other “manipulatives” to “build” their solution (whether it involves counting, adding, subtracting, grouping, dividing, or other higher operations), all the way receiving coaching from a teacher designed to stretch the child to the next level of conceptual understanding. Such approaches lead to the claim on the school website that “children in our school own what they are doing and exhibit an agency that is not always seen in traditional, teacher led classrooms.”

“Inquiry” is another central organizing principle at Alder Park Elementary School, with reflective learners developing “thinking habits that make them better at learning” (school website). This reflective inquiry is said to happen at multiple levels, as “the teachers model thinking, planning, risk taking, implementing, and reflection” (school website). The school also places value on individualized instruction, acknowledging that different learners proceed at different rates in their academic, social, emotional, and physical development. Part of the strategy for differentiating to meet these myriad needs is to pose open-ended problems (like the “math vitamin”) that can be approached at multiple levels, and teachers are charged with coaching individual students or groups of students at their chosen level.

A final component of the curriculum at Alder Park Elementary School is the idea of “theme study.” This concept is articulated on the school website, expressed extensively on admissions tours, and documented in several of the school’s online and print publications. Each spring the faculty meets to choose a broad concept to orient the following year of study (past

themes include balance, form, quest, layers, and rhythm, and the concept at the time of the research was “lift.”) The theme is used as a launch point for conversations about curricular directions, and is described by teachers as facilitating the design of lessons and interdisciplinary projects. As an example, at the time of study the theme of “lift” had prompted a study of the dynamics of air and wind for the 1st and 2nd grade classes, which was coupled with a read-aloud book that chronicled pirates sailing the high seas, which was in turn reinforced with the construction of kites in art class and the composition of pirate shanties in music. During the research project, the 4th and 5th graders (the group under study) were engaged in an exploration of hot air balloons, wings, the corresponding platonic solids, and mechanisms of flight.

Researching Children at Alder Park Elementary

There are issues that are specific to researching children. Children are recognized by Institutional Review Boards as a vulnerable population, and are given corresponding special protections with respect to research participation. On the other hand, a great number of child studies in recent years (e.g. Campbell, 2010; Lum, 2007; Marsh, 2008; Griffen, 2009; Roberts, 2012) have given credence to children as a competent and viable population for research, worthy of study in their own right, and yielding rich understandings in the fields of music education, ethnomusicology, and beyond. All the same, there are ethical issues at play in studies with children (Farell, 2005; Holmes, 1998), and care must be taken minimize the power differential between researcher and participant. As Roberts (2012) described, precautions may need to be taken in interviewing, such as interviewing in groups of two to four students, interviewing in a neutral location with less adult regulation, sitting in a manner that minimizes size differences, and even dressing more casually to cast oneself as more of a “non-teacher.”

In the case of Alder Park Elementary, the gap in power between students and teachers is equated quite differently from the typical school. Given the focus on student ownership, agency, and independence, and the conception of teachers as coaches (or the proverbial “guide-by-the-side”), there is an unusually horizontal relationship between teachers and students. This manifests in many ways throughout the school. For one, students refer to all teachers and administrators by their first names. Secondly, teacher dress is fairly casual, such that it is not unusual to see teachers wearing jeans, t-shirts, and athletic shoes. Third, classrooms are structurally set up in quite an atypically manner: There is no “front” of the room from where teachers lecture and monitor student performance; rather classes tend to sit in circles on a rug to discuss matters (with the teacher sitting as part of the circle), or students work in groups in circular fashion at tables spread throughout the room, with teachers moving amongst the space to support and offer probing questions. Fourth, classroom management and discipline practices are designed to be empowering rather than top-down, relying on conversations that appeal to individual and collective accountability as opposed to abstract policies and authority. Fifth, the structures of “class meeting” and “all school meeting,” which provide a platform for students to voice concerns, and democratically reach solutions to problems that are facing the school, inculcate a sense that students are working in tandem with teachers to manage the school space and activities. This idea is brought to its logical end in the fifth grade year, where, as part of their “service learning projects” students serve alongside teachers on committees such as the Admissions Committee, the Community Development Committee, and the Faculty Coordinating Committee. In this role students attend meetings and events outside of school time, work with teachers to fulfill the obligations of the committee, and propose their own projects to be carried out alongside the adult members of the committee.

This relatively horizontal positioning between students and teachers in the school culture of Alder Park Elementary mitigated to a significant degree the power differential between the participants in the study and myself as researcher. Thus when it came to interviewing, I deemed it fitting within the ethos of the school to engage in conversations with individual students outside of class time (more specific interviewing procedures are laid out later in this chapter). Though such a decision goes somewhat against the grain of previous ethnographic work with children, it is largely reflective of a particular micro-culture at Alder Park Elementary that places students and teachers on an unusually level playing field.

The Music Program

According to written descriptions of the music program at Alder Park Elementary (that I myself created), the program is a “fun, hands-on, creative environment” in which children participate in “movement, listening, singing, playing, and composition” (Internal assessment document). The program is housed in a medium sized room with large windows looking out over the playground, and is supported by an adjacent “storage” room containing myriad instruments and audio-visual equipment. Elementary classes come to music one hour per week, while Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten classes come for a half hour weekly. I have served as the music teacher for the past 8 years, although for the two years leading up to the study I taught in a part-time capacity with a colleague teaching the remaining classes. This colleague was involved with one of the three classes under study. (I have included background information about both myself and my colleague in the “participants” section).

The program curriculum draws upon the pedagogical mainstays of Orff, Kodaly, and Dalcroze—integrating their philosophical underpinnings and practical techniques but not

adhering to a strict sequence of any one method—while taking considerable inspiration from multicultural music pedagogy (for example Campbell, 2004) as well as approaches to facilitating musical creation (such as Wiggins, 2001). A survey of past concert programs reveals a variety of American folk and traditional songs, traditional songs of world cultures from countries on every inhabited continent, popular songs spanning the last century, and a large number of student-composed and teacher-composed songs. Given children’s divergent progression through the multiage class structure, there is no uniform development sequence of curricular activity (such as “in 3rd grade we play drums”). Rather each year is treated fresh, and building upon the theme, instrumental and vocal skills as well as conceptual understandings are integrated (in developmentally targeted ways) into new areas of musical inquiry. Particular areas of instrumental instruction include barred percussion, hand percussion, baritone and soprano ukulele, and recorder.

This flexible, theme-based planning has facilitated a large number of creative and interdisciplinary projects. These projects are partly enabled by the concert calendar that leaves the fall largely open for periods of extended inquiry. Previous classes have composed soundtracks for narrated fairy tales, collaborated with professional Jazz musicians to record a CD of original Jazz compositions, constructed a class set of guitars, created digital “sound collages” out of found sounds around the school campus, fabricated a collection of “marching band” instruments out of discarded construction materials, and composed songs to reinforce concepts from other specialty areas such as science, Spanish, or library. Composition and songwriting are regular parts of the curriculum—making Wiggins “community of composers” (2005) a fitting description for the program—however every composition endeavor is framed in a new way

according to the theme and the focus of study, and as such there were no set routines for the specific project under study.

Participants

The study focused on three mixed-aged classes of fourth and fifth grade children (n=52, divided into two classes of seventeen and one class of eighteen). Within this sample there were 23 boys and 29 girls, 18 of whom were in 4th grade and 34 of whom were 5th graders. The ethnic breakdown of the participants was as follows: 77% Caucasian, 13% Asian-American, 6% African-American, and 4% Latino. Of the 23% of participants identified as non-Caucasian, almost half were mixed-race with one Caucasian parent, a fact that is given further attention in chapter 5. In the background survey, 35 of the children reported taking some form of music lessons outside of school: 18 in piano lessons, 6 in violin lessons, 5 involved in some form of dance, 2 in lessons, 1 studying voice, and 1 taking ukulele lessons (note that 5 of these children were involved, or had been involved in 2 different musical activities).

This sample represents the entire population of the oldest level in the school, which was purposefully sampled for their maturity level in dealing with a sophisticated composition task. Previous work supports the focus on upper elementary grades for this type of task: A similar age group was selected by Younker (2006) with her work on reflective thinking in children's composition, and by Beegle (2010) in her investigation of "planned improvisations." Though these children have engaged in composition projects in prior years, the project studied here was more extensive than anything they had encountered before, and was designed to represent a "pinnacle" experience that would tap their full collection of collaborative, cognitive, and musical skills.

Teacher Participants

Though participants in this study were often left to work independent of adult support, it is critical to acknowledge the powerful role played by adults in guiding groups through the process. In some cases, I would offer small pieces of procedural advice that groups might incorporate into their process; in other cases groups became stuck for lack of musical ideas, and I would offer musical suggestions to move the group forward. In this way, I became a “collaborator” or “co-learner alongside students” highlighting “the creative capabilities of both” (Muhonen, 2013). Because of this, I recognize here my own participation in the process (and to a lesser degree my colleague, who co-taught in one of the three classes) with a brief background.

A 38 year-old white male, I am a multi-instrumentalist, with 11 years of formal piano training, extensive informal experience on guitar, mandolin, and ukulele, and intermediate fluency on banjo, drums, bass guitar, and a variety of percussion instruments. My trajectory into music teaching was non-traditional, having relegated music to the informal realm of my young adult years as I pursued a scientific degree, and later (after a Masters degree in curriculum and instruction) found my passion for teaching in the elementary classroom. My approach to music has always been exploratory and inventive, with a primary emphasis on inventing, expanding, or modifying musical ideas. Stylistically, my interests are global in scope, though my areas of primary experience are in Jazz, Blues, Bluegrass, Rock, and Electronica.

My co-teacher (who was involved with one of the 3 classes under study) has served as a classroom teacher at the school for 12 years. A 40 year-old white male, he holds a Masters in teaching with a focus on literacy. He is a guitarist with formal training in rock styles on both electric and acoustic guitar, as well as a vocalist well-versed in popular styles. He is lead vocalist

and principle songwriter for a well-known “kindie” rock band that tours nationally and has produced 10 albums.

Consent

Initially the principal, parents, and classroom teachers of the involved participants were contacted by way of written letter and informed of the aims and structure of the proposed research. Three weeks prior to the start of the project, informed consent for the research was then obtained from the parents of the involved students (Appendix 1) and their classroom teachers (Appendix 2), and assent was obtained from the participants themselves (see Appendix 3), in accordance with the standards maintained by the Institutional Review Board. The consent forms described my intent to gather audio and video recordings of student work processes, conduct interviews, and ask participants to complete written documents and maintain a songwriting journal. This form clarified that participants’ identities would be protected through the use of pseudonyms in any subsequent write-up or publication. The form also clarified that interviews would take place during recess or lunch, or at other times during the day that the classroom teacher indicated would not be disruptive or impact their learning.

Given my dual role as teacher and researcher, it was also necessary to clarify that students who opted out of participation would still be a part of the regular music class, and would still participate in most aspects of the project. However, their face and voice would be blurred from video and audio recordings to protect their anonymity, they would not be interviewed outside of class, and they would refrain from filling out the written forms. As it turned out, consent was granted by the parents of every one of the 52 students. In terms of student assent,

there were two students who initially withheld assent, but then reversed positions and assented after conversations with their parents (all before the study began).

Data Collection

According to Brewer (2000), ethnography “is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities” (p. 6). Though it holds firm roots in cultural anthropology, ethnography has proliferated into other academic fields as a way of uncovering rich meanings amidst complex settings. As it has crossed disciplinary boundaries, aspects of the approach have evolved. The traditional expectation of a year or more in the field has faded as researchers in other fields have supplemented ethnographic methods with other techniques such as analysis of audio or video recordings. In the case of this particular study, the use of audio recordings enabled a rich ethnographic picture despite the relatively modest timeline of one day per week for 15 weeks. In recording the processes of each group I was able to isolate the inner works of 14 groups from the chaotic background of the larger classroom context—allowing 14 snapshots to emerge from what would present to the traditional ethnographer as one messy picture. This technological advantage allowed for the methodical analysis of individual groups and the corresponding parsing out of the “micro-cultures” (Campbell, 2010) of each small collective as separate from the larger cultures of the classroom and school.

There are those who pose that ethnography can be utilized by a researcher-as-subject, in the form of auto-ethnography (Bartleet & Ellis, 2009; Wong, 2008). Auto-ethnographies present deeply reflective and personal accounts, rendered in narrative prose that blends storytelling with empirical exploration. This study is not an auto-ethnography in this sense. Though I was a

participant in the process, and my reflections on my participation will be represented to a degree in the chapters that follow, I was never a focal point of the research, and as such my participation might be better understood as participant observation (Spradley, 1980). Additionally, the extensive use of audio recordings—which offered a behind-my-back lens on the proceedings of the groups and enabled multiple listenings or “relivings” of experiences for which I was not present—further removed the student groups from a personal lens. Thus my positionality in this research echoes the statement made by Deborah Wong (2008): “My research is not about me, but it hinges on auto-ethnography.”

Audio Recordings

Each student group was equipped with a Sony ICD-PX 820 handheld voice recorder and instructed to record every moment of their time working together. I offered a simple presentation on how to use the device, making sure that children were able to turn it on, record and stop, and select the correct folder for their class (to aid in the organization of the recordings). Usually one group member would become the expert with the recorder and manage it for each practice, but despite their growing expertise there were some pitfalls. At times children would stop recordings inadvertently during the class and interactions would be lost. In other instances, the recorder would become estranged from the group as they migrated to a different space, or the group would split up and the recorder would thus capture only part of the group’s interactions. There were also a few times where the device simply malfunctioned and needed to be replaced. Overall these glitches were few and far between, however, with only an infinitesimal fraction of the data lost along the way.

The student groups had varied reactions to the presence of the recorders. For the most part the devices were forgotten and ignored, and I was often struck by how quickly this would occur (and children would unintentionally “go on record” saying things that they certainly did not wish me to hear). A handful of times the recorders became focal points and a child would hold one like a microphone to offer a spirited rendition their budding song. In six separate instances students expressed discomfort with the recorders. For example, Jared expressed: “Imagine if they always had these recorders hidden in the classes...that would be creepy!” In another group, Michelle said “I wish we weren't being recorded,” and her fellow group member agreed: “I don't like being recorded.” The groups were all informed at the start about the purpose of the recordings and how it would just be me listening to them, but it for some it was hard to mitigate that sensation of “being watched.” I can only imagine the level of discomfort would have been significantly higher if I had been an unfamiliar researcher from the University.

Interviews

The interactions observed and recorded during the group work sessions were probed for deeper meanings by way of semi-structured interviews with nineteen of the participants in the study, purposefully selected to represent the spectrum of student groups, and to shed light on the emerging themes of the study [see appendix 4 for sample interview questions]. Interviews allow a researcher to gain a more nuanced picture of the research subject's perceptions (Fontana & Frey, 1994), and require a degree of trust and cooperation from both parties. Toward this end my position as an established teacher in the school, whom the participants had known and trusted for up to 7 years, was an advantage in conducting interviews that were honest and engaged.

As Fetterman (1998) reflected on interview strategies, “the most effective strategy is, paradoxically, no strategy. Being natural is much more convincing than any performance” (p. 498). With this in mind, I began with a collection of interview questions that were targeted to each interviewee, but then allowed for the flow of the conversation to move in unanticipated directions. This open approach enabled themes to come forward that were hitherto not evident from my observations and notes. This same approach was used to conduct interviews with one of the participants’ classroom teachers, and the principal of the school.

In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I designed a set of peer-to-peer interview questions, setting it up as a “Rolling Stone” interview where in partnerships, participants would take turns as “reporter” and “famous musician” interviewee [see appendix 5 for a list of interview questions]. This enabled the gathering of some perspective from all the participants, including those who were not part of the semi-structured interviews. On one hand, the peer-to-peer model allowed for the sharing of insights that students would not have been comfortable sharing with their teacher, on the other hand the structured format did not leave room for further probing questions to clarify things that were said. All interviews were audio recorded by way of a Sony ICD-PX 820.

Written Materials

Faulkner (2003) pointed out that given time constraints, and given the unpredictable nature of creative inspiration, it is advantageous to enable students to take their creative work outside of school walls. Toward this end, children in this study were provided with “songwriting journals” that they carried with them to record ideas that arose. These journals were much loved by some students, and mostly ignored by others. It became apparent that the journals were

primarily being employed to scribe lyrics (which only applied to a few self-chosen “singer songwriters”), as well as the occasional structural map. Music notation was only sparsely utilized in the journals, partly because the pages were blank. For the few that desired, I offered separate notational paper for writing down ideas.

Each participant completed an initial questionnaire with questions related to musical background and group work experience. A “Songwriting check-in” form was completed by each group on the 8th week of the project. This was later followed by a Peer Assessment form based on demo recordings of each group’s song. Artifacts offered an additional data pool, with materials including the student-recorded album that resulted at the end of the project, interactive whiteboard documents, lyric sheets, organizational charts, and prior artifacts such as student recordings, concert footage, planning documents, internal assessment documents, and publications originating from the school and the music program.

Observations

My role as teacher in this project did not allow for extensive fieldnoting of the type outlined by Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995). Most of the time I was quite literally running between groups to answer questions, offer guidance, and procure necessary equipment and supplies, and as such it was impractical to think about taking notes during the process. The moments following classes were also much too hectic with setup and extra duties to allow for writing. I would, however, take time in the evening following each research day to reflect in writing, leading to the generation of 35 typed pages of written reflections. These notes were later cross referenced with the audio recordings from individual groups. In doing so, there were sometimes large discrepancies between what I thought was happening at the time of research,

and what emerged in the more nuanced picture from the recordings (which included the times in which I was not present during the exchanges of small groups working simultaneously on their compositions). Such discrepancies reinforced the limitations of a purely participant-observation approach to this particular research project. Nevertheless, the reflections from my in-the-moment experiences shed some light on the bigger processes and my role within them, as is elaborated in subsequent chapters.

Observations were also conducted outside the music room to gain an understanding of the kinds of collaborative projects facilitated in other areas of the school program. Student government structures such as “class meeting” and “all school meeting,” as formalized venues for democratic discussion, were also examined over the course of the research to shed light on the larger democratic functioning of the school. Additionally, my participation in the “daily life” of the school as a teacher enabled data collection from various sources, including informal conversations with children, classroom teachers, administrators and my co-teacher, playground observations, and faculty meeting discussions. These lived experiences outside of music were triangulated with the extensive documentation of the songwriting project, creating a picture of how a particular “community of composers” (Wiggins, 2005) contributed to the broader school culture, as well as how this community may be enabled by and nurtured within the school culture at large.

Data Analysis

The recordings of group work sessions, semi-structured interviews, and peer-to-peer interviews constituted approximately 100 hours of audio files. Transcription of these files led to a total of 343 pages of transcriptions (257 pages of group work transcriptions and 84 pages of

interview transcriptions). It is worth noting that the recordings of individual groups were a mix of dialogue and musical exploration, and as such the process of rendering these to text became a hybrid of transcription and a kind of temporally-removed “field-noting.”

The 343 pages of transcriptions, along with the 35 pages of my own reflections, were entered into the online research application Dedoose. Through the process of open coding (Creswell, 2012), 143 thematic codes were established (organized into 17 parent codes), which were then refined and reapplied to the data by way of closed coding (Creswell, 2012), for a total of 6643 code applications. This thematic organization was brought to bear with written materials (questionnaires, songwriting journals, peer assessments, songwriting check-ins, interactive whiteboard documents, lyric sheets, organizational charts, and prior artifacts such as student recordings, planning documents, internal assessment documents, and publications originating from the school and the music program), previous recordings and concert footage, and lived experiences and observations within the school community. Through careful synthesis, these various data sources were triangulated (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), leading to a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of participants’ experiences and interactional dynamics, and affording theoretical interpretations that were well “grounded” (Glaser, 2002) in the perspectives of the children under study.

Ethnographic approaches typically incorporate interpretations contemporaneous with observations, allowing for patterns of behavior to be recognized, theorized and subsequently re-examined in the field (Glaser, 2002). While my journal reflections did facilitate the formation and refining of understandings mid-stream in the project, the heavy load of transcription was left until after the project was complete. This approach allowed for a clear distinction between my teacher role and my researcher role, functioning as a form of validity checking for the auto-

ethnographic elements of the design. Creating some distance from the recordings allowed me to function more naturally as a teacher (without the unnatural and typically impossible knowledge of what was going on behind my back). Additionally, sitting with the recorders some months after they were gathered enabled a fresh clarity in my understanding of the emic perspectives involved, without clouding interpretations in the fog of teaching demands, lesson planning, and student assessment. In a sense, this approach created a two-fold application of grounded theory (Glaser, 2002)—with theoretical understandings grounded in the moment-to-moment observations and reflections of the project, and subsequently “re-grounded” through the fly-on-the-wall lens of the omnipresent recorders. Though atypical in sequence for an ethnography, I would argue that for the particulars of this study, this twofold approach enriched the strength of the design and the resulting interpretations.

Chapter 4: The Bumpy Road...to Somewhere

The project was quite simple in essence: Form a group, and create an original piece of music. These are precisely the words that introduced the project to three separate classes of 4th and 5th graders on October 1st of 2013. This invitation, “kid friendly” in its conciseness and clarity, and mirroring the kind of open-ended prompt espoused in the collaborative learning model (Brufee, 1999) was met with overwhelming excitement by many participants, with a smaller number showing visible trepidation. They could not have possibly comprehended (nor could I really) the breadth and complexity of what was to follow. As we took that first step onto the “bumpy road to somewhere,” we were really entering a garden of forking paths, with the chemistry of each nascent band poised to unfold in wildly different directions. This chapter presents a brief overview of the twists and turns that followed, examining some of the logistical considerations that emerged along the way.

Forming groups

Before splitting into groups, classes were posed with the open-ended question of “what makes a good musical group?” Children’s responses first dealt with the number of people that should be in each group. Prompted to identify bands that they knew, children named groups such as 5 Directions and the Beatles (though such an association would be abhorrent to an older generation, for these children the current “hits” seemed to exist side-by-side with the music imparted to them by their parents). From these conversations, there was general consensus that 3-5 people would be a reasonable target for group size. There was also discussion, facilitated by teacher-prompted, open-ended questioning, of balancing musical propensities, for example being

careful not to combine all the strongest singers into one group, and spreading out those students with demonstrated skill on particular instruments. Children were also well aware of the guidelines typically posed in classroom group projects: Mixing gender, mixing up classroom groups, mixing grade level, and generally avoiding working with your best friends exclusively. I chose to take a fairly open approach to these considerations. As MacDonald & Miell (2000) highlighted, social familiarity or friendship can have a positive impact on both the processes and outcomes of children's collaborative compositional work. I gave children the freedom of choice in group formation, with the caveat that they "keep in mind" the general guidelines, and ensured that there was at "some gender mixing within each class" (not necessarily within each group). This latter statement was made in an effort to avoid a total separation by gender, which I thought might narrow the scope of my data. Basically I chose an approach that danced between total freedom and total constraint, but which leaned closer to freedom. And with that, the groups took shape. I penned the following journal entry on the evening of the project's inauguration:

The part I've been most concerned about in this project is the forming of groups, and today is the day that it happened. It was quite a fascinating and relatively uneventful process. Each class took less than three minutes to arrive in their groups and no intervention was needed (except for group C which needed a tiny bit of questioning to move forward) [that is, questioning by a teacher to mediate a disagreement about which groups two particular students would join]. I summarized the agreed-upon parameters as far as group size (3-5), balance of skills/abilities, gender mixing (not required for every group, but required for the class as a whole). I was surprised that for the most part they automatically mixed gender, and found groups that were highly compatible from a

teacher perspective. They've certainly had a lot of practice with this, and it showed today.

Between the three classes (referred to from this point on as groups "A, B, and C"), there were 13 groups that emerged: 4 groups in class A (consisting of 4, 4, 4, and 5 students), 5 groups in class B (consisting of 2, 3, 4, 4, and 4 students) and 4 groups in class C (consisting of 4, 4, 5 and 5 students). For the most part groups formed quickly and automatically. Only in a couple cases (particularly in class C) did I notice some reluctance about the incorporation of certain children. Overall there were 4 same-gender groups, and 9 mixed gender groups. I also observed a general mixing in terms of musical ability and instrumental skill, although there was a tendency for those with formal training on an instrument to seek at least one other classmate with similar formal training. In terms of race and ethnicity, there was no clear pattern of affinity or clustering that occurred, with the 11 students of color distributing themselves fairly uniformly amongst the groups.

The Spaces: Managing Sonic Chaos

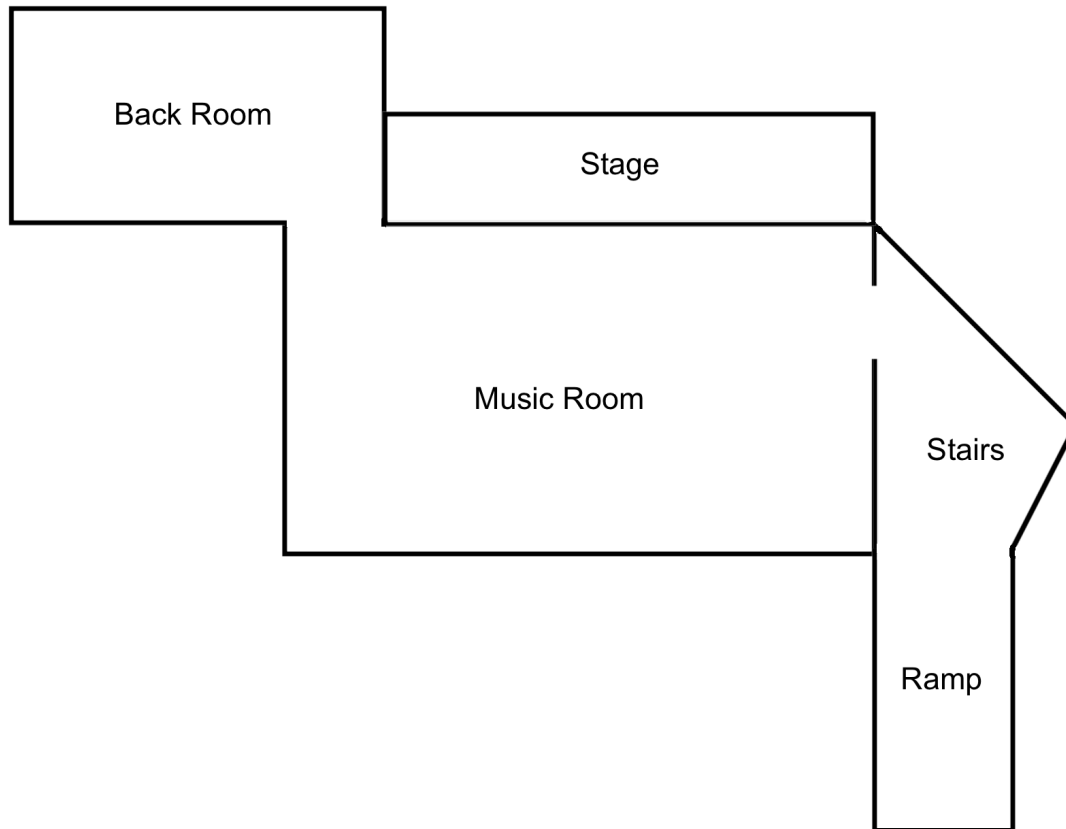
Though the ideal configuration for this type of project would be a collection of sound-proof rooms for each group, few music rooms can hope for this type of arrangement. In this case I made efforts to separate a handful of spaces that students could use [see figure 4-1 for a diagram]:

- *The main music room* (a 10 foot by 25 foot space, consisting of an upright piano, an electric piano, a drum set, and a large number of portable instruments. The music room

had a moveable wall that separated it from the large adjacent lunch room. When the wall was opened, the music room became the stage for performances)

- *The back room* (actually a large storage closet that I had rendered into two work spaces separated by a large storage cabinet. We referred to the spaces as the “front back” and the “back back.” Both spaces had an electric keyboard.)
- *The stage* (directly outside the music room, on the other side of a moveable wall, it was really just a strip of stage showing, with a large step leading down to the lunch room, known as the “Interconnection.” During class times this space was mostly empty and quiet. All instruments had to be transported to the stage.)
- *The stairs/ramp* (directly outside the door to the music room, this was a series of carpeted stairs heading to a carpeted ramp. Often groups would end up on the ramp to distance themselves from their neighbors on the stage.)

Figure 4-1: Diagram of spaces (aerial view)



I had envisioned that two groups could work in the music room, two in the back room, one on the stage, and one the stairs. This would create ample space for everyone. When it came to choosing spaces, it became clear that the music room itself was the least desired area to work. This was probably due to the desire for novelty and the opportunity to work in a more “out of the way” space than normal music activity would permit. In reality space constraints became a theme of the project, and “noise bleed” between the different groups became a constant challenge. Whenever two groups got to playing in the back room or the music room, “Turn it down!” became a frequent refrain. In one hilarious interaction, a student counted in and then

both his group and his neighboring group began playing at the same time, illustrating just how fluid the exchange of sound was between the two.

The spaces outside the music room emerged as a sort of refuge from the chaos that lay within—at one point a 5th grade girl in the music room expressed in exasperation “Let's go outside and figure out what we're doing!” In this and countless other interactions, the music room and back room were illustrated as not particularly conducive to forward progress. This was compounded by the easy access to many loud instruments in these spaces, such as electric keyboards, drums and electric guitar. The exterior spaces were not only distant from these more “fixed” instruments, they lacked any set instruments of their own, hence the students retreating to these spaces would gravitate toward compact instruments that were easy to carry. These quieter instrument choices reinforced the stage and the ramp as respites from the sonic chaos elsewhere.

In a journal entry after second day of the project, I wrote the following:

The noise is such a frequent issue. Today we discussed how to keep things running smoothly with this project and ‘volume’ came up in every class. It was a bit better today, but I still observed groups trying to work in the main room and then complaining “it’s too crazy in here” and going back out to the Interconnection. Is it too much to ask students to compose amongst the chaos?

As the process moved forward and discussions were replaced with more frequent musical practices, certain strategies emerged to address this challenge. At times groups had to agree to take turns doing “run-throughs” (shorthand used henceforth to refer to a single musical enactment, successful or not, of a given composition) so they could hear themselves. I also tried

breaking up the format: On some days, certain groups would practice while others would work on separate tasks, and then switch. On other days, I would try having each group share and problem-solve in the large group format. This tactic had limited success, as the groups were usually quite eager to get on with the process of crafting their own songs, no matter how noisy the environment.

Instruments

Instrumentation was left wide open in the project. I offered the full array of classroom instruments, including xylophones, metallophones, and glockenspiels of different ranges, ukuleles (soprano and baritone), guitars (both acoustic and electric), electric keyboards, recorders, pitched percussion instruments (such as boomwackers, tone bells, marimba boxes, and wood blocks), and unpitched percussion instruments (such as handheld drums, rhythm sticks, shakers, tambourines, etc). I also encouraged students to incorporate any instruments that they played outside of school. In response to this, three students brought in violins, one brought an electric guitar, and another brought in a ukulele. There were seven students with formal piano training who took on a piano or keyboard role within their group.

There was a tendency toward convenience in the selection of instruments. For example, groups in the back room might settle onto the two keyboards there, experiment with the guitars and bass hanging on the wall, pull out xylophones and metallophones from the storage cabinet, and incorporate the chimes sitting on the shelf. In this way, instrument selection was sometimes guided by what was visible in children's immediate surroundings.

In the initial weeks (and really throughout the project for some groups), there was a great deal of movement between instruments. Naturally, many children saw the project as an

opportunity to try out different things. In general, students with more musical experience outside of school tended to stick closely to one or two instruments (not necessarily the instrument studied outside of school), and children with less experience tended to jump around more. This was certainly the case with the group Save That Thought, where all four group members had significant experience on instruments outside of school (three played piano and one played violin), and all four stuck with one instrument through the whole composition process (though two of the piano players took on glockenspiel and metallophone instead of piano). In contrast, the members of the group Moose Named Yak had little formal instrumental experience outside of school, and they jumped around to different instruments until the very end of the project—for example Liana started on ukulele, moved to piano, then played glockenspiel, and ultimately performed on the drums. This juxtaposition held true for many of the groups, and suggests that formal training on an instrument, in addition to building instrument-specific skills, may cultivate a certain level of commitment or perseverance to practice and stick with other instruments, even unfamiliar ones.

Not surprisingly, the four electric keyboards (loaded with sounds and beats and textures) were strongly desired and were explored by many, but in the end were only incorporated into five of the group's songs. In general, the effort to determine to the instrumental role of each group member, and the decision of whether or not to include vocals, were overwhelming themes of the project (as discussed further in chapter 5).

The Role of the Teacher

Setting aside the many aspects of conducting a research project, my role as a teacher in this project was also quite multifaceted. First, I offered a great deal of logistical support, such as

helping procure instruments and supplies, and tuning instruments. Secondly, I maintained expectations for conduct, in fitting with the ethos of the school. These values are spelled out in the school constitution (itself the result of a historical collaboration between students and teachers in “all school meeting”), and consist of the following guidelines: “Respect yourself, respect others, and respect the environment” (the last of these referring to school property). Third, I responded to student questions regarding instrumental technique, or compositional matters. Fourth, I initiated musical support when I perceived a group to need redirection, clarification, or “next steps.” Fifth, I helped to mediate conflicts, either when students sought my support, or when I deemed student interactions in the small groups to be distracting from the musical process. With respect to this last role, my researcher role sometimes came into conflict with my teacher role—the researcher in me wanting to see how students could handle conflict and what they could gain from it; the music teacher in me wanting to support their successful musical learning without getting caught up in personal conflicts.

Fitting with the inquiry-based culture of the school, my approach to offering support often took the form of posing questions to guide children’s learning and allow them to use prior knowledge to construct solutions to musical problems. In doing so, I was attempting to scaffold their learning process. As Wiggins (2010) writes, summarizing Lave and Wegner (1991) “scaffolding enables a learner to participate in the practice of an expert while assuming responsibility for only those aspects of the practice that are within reach for the learner, with support.” There are limits to the amount of scaffolding that is useful to students’ process. Dogani’s (2004) study of six music teachers in English primary schools showed that though teachers were inclined to engage students in creative activities, their highly structured, teacher-controlled approach “contrasted with children’s intuitive response to music making” which

consisted more of improvisation, creation, and performance, all based on social interaction. Hickey (2003) describes how successful composition activities depend on the appropriate degree of rules and parameters: Too little scaffolding may lead to little more than chaotic noise, and too much might facilitate a “rule bound” composition that faintly resembles music. So what is needed is a delicate balance, or to use the verbiage of Margaret Barrett (2003), a midpoint between “freedom and constraints.”

Engaging in the mutual process of scaffolding does not mean that teachers relinquish their role as facilitator—indeed Green’s (2008) informal pedagogy has been critiqued for its “stay out of the way” instructional philosophy (Allsup, 2008). Rather, teachers become an important part of a “community of composers” (Wiggins, 2005). Instruction then becomes a “joint venture in which students and teachers share responsibility for learning and refining the strategies” (Palincsar, 1986, p. 73).

At one point I reflected in my journal:

One of the challenges of this project is maintaining the balance between student autonomy and teacher control. There is potential for such chaos initially that the teacher has to struggle with the inner tension of ‘losing control’ over the situation. What lines does one draw? What parameters does one set?

The challenge of managing logistics while simultaneously offering targeted scaffolding for each of four or five different groups was overwhelming at times. At another point I wrote with a degree of exasperation:

I'm giving it everything I've got—trying to deliver strategic nuggets to each group and to not let anyone fall through the cracks—but it still seems that I'm leaving students hanging much of the time.

This feeling of being stretched all the time eventually led to the necessity of meeting some groups outside of class time to offer the support they needed. These meetings, which became known as the “lunch meetings,” took place with four of the groups and offered an opportunity for targeted scaffolding outside of the rush of classroom activity. This is not an unusual strategy, of course, employed as well by classroom teachers hoping to help their student with class assignments, homework and independent projects.

In addition to the direct support and facilitation that I offered during the project, it should be said that the skills, knowledge, and dispositions imparted in my previous teaching (with some I had been their music teacher for seven years) was instrumental in shaping their process. Really, these aspects reflect a classroom “climate” (Palincsar, 1998), perhaps supported a larger “school climate” (Cohen, 2006), that might reinforce and enable the process of group composition—allowing productive and empowering group interactions to be enacted by students with increasing independence. As Allsup (2002) concluded, democratic values such as respect, equity, and honesty necessarily precede the implementation of collaborative learning experiences. My previous years in the classroom must thus be acknowledged as setting the tone for the project at hand.

Timeline

The project took place between early October of 2013 and mid February of 2014 (see project timeline—figure 4-2). After laying the groundwork and determining the parameters within which students would work (Wiggins & Espeland, 2012), students set about the process of choosing instruments, deciding on roles, generating musical ideas, and in some cases creating text (Wiggins, 2003), followed by further decisions about form, orchestration, sound, and performance (Faulkner, 2003). The entire work time for each group amounted to one hour per week for 12 weeks, though it should be noted that work time was often significantly reduced by the requirements of setup time and by the occasional scheduling interference with another aspect of the school. Wiggins & Espeland (2012) noted that sufficient time must be allowed for a multiplicity of ideas to be considered within the collaborative group and for consensus to be reached. Previous research into group songwriting has also supported the idea of an extended process spanning a timeline such as 12 weeks. At the secondary level, both Allsup's (2003) mutual learning communities and Abramo's (2011) gendered rock groups utilized a similar, though slightly shorter timeline. At the elementary level, Younker (2006) documented fifth grade students composing in groups over the course of six to eight sixty-minute periods, while Beegle's (2010) investigation of fifth grader's planned improvisation took place over twelve thirty-minute sessions. Thus this project's timeline for song creation (twelve sixty-minute sessions) was longer than what has been previously documented at the elementary level, which was intended to leave room for greater depth, further extension, and substantial revision, all of which will facilitate the kind of group dialogue and decision-making that the study was designed to probe.

Figure 2: Project Timeline

Week	Date	Activity
1	10/1/13	Introduction of project, “Background Survey”
2	10/8/13	Formation of groups, work session # 1
3	10/15/13	Work session # 2
4	10/22/13	Work session # 3, “stickiest idea” sharing
5	10/29/13	Work session # 4
6	11/5/13	Work session # 5, “progress report” sharing
7	11/12/13	Work session # 7
8	11/19/13	Work session # 8, “Songwriting Check-In”
9	12/10/13	Work session # 9
10	12/17/13	Demo recording session
11	1/7/14	Work session #10, Peer Assessment of demos
12	1/14/14	Work session # 11
13	1/28/14	Work session # 12, Recording session
14	2/4/14	Rehearsal
15	2/7/14	“Songwriter’s Ball”, public performance

The project overview took place on October 1st, with group formation and preliminary work time beginning on October 8th. Work time continued on October 15th and by October 22nd groups were charged with performing their “stickiest” or “catchiest” idea to date for the larger group. October 29th began with a group feedback session—watching the videos of the previous weeks sharing and offering feedback in a large group format—followed by continued small group exploration and refinement. November 5th was billed as a “power session” to be concluded with “progress report” to be delivered by each group in the form of a short performance. November 12th offered continued work time, and on November 19th groups rotated through a written “songwriting check-in” station to allow time for reflection, and to allow a smaller number of groups to practice at a given time without so much background noise. December 10th was a busy day getting ready to record “demos” the following week, and on December 17th the demo recordings came to be. On January 7th the groups exchanged demo recordings and offered

feedback to a partner group, using this feedback to refine their songs and continuing this revision into January 14th.

On January 28nd the classroom was set up as a recording studio, and some of the songs were recorded, with children becoming “hyphenated musicians” (Theberge, 1997; Tobias, 2012) as they negotiated different roles as performers, directors, and sound engineers. In the end this task proved to be extremely difficult, with each group requiring too much time to record and the process requiring too much patience for the other students’ attention spans. A decision was made to relegate recording to a live format in the culminating performance for the school. A short rehearsal for each group was staged on February 4th, and the final session, a public performance called the Songwriter’s Ball, took place on February 7th. As it turned out, an institutional inspector arrived just prior to the show, and for issues of ratio requirements and supervision, the early elementary (pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten) members of the school community were unable to attend. There were many parents in attendance, however, as well as teachers, administrators and all the elementary students.

Though the Songwriter’s Ball concluded the proposed scope of research, the student group’s composed songs lived on for an additional two months. In preparation for the big all-school spring concert in April, I created a medley of all 14 songs to be performed by all 52 participants in the project, and this piece was rehearsed over the course of six weeks and performed on April 4th. For the medley I included a verse, or a refrain, or an instrumental motif from each of the final songs, transposed in a few cases to ease transitions. For some of the song segments, the authoring group played their original instrument parts in the performance; in other cases the large group would take on some of the accompanying rhythms with body percussion. All vocal parts were delivered in unison by the large group, and I played piano throughout as a

way of anchoring the nearly eight minute-long medley together. The piece incorporated a dizzying array of rhythmic shifts, key changes, and instrument switches, and yet, as is further discussed in chapter seven, the students' profound ownership of the musical material allowed them to move fluidly and with unprecedented independence through the many transitions—a revealing end to the long and bumpy road.

Ch. 5: Forming Collective Identity

At the dawn of the project, I stood in anticipation of a rich unfolding of the collaborative process for each student-formed band. I imagined that there would be copious conflicts, and that students would be forced to democratically engage with their band mates, sharpening skills of negotiation and compromise in the pursuit of mutually agreeable products. I expected that different groups would proceed in qualitatively different ways, at varying rates, and with different degrees of success. I also stood, however, with a certain suspension of expectation—a recognition of the vast number of variables at play and the enormous potential energy that was about to be released over a period of time that was unprecedented with this age group. With a certain degree of trepidation I was forced to admit that it was impossible to foresee the path that lay ahead.

As the 15 weeks unfolded between the initial introduction and the final Songwriter's Ball, it became clear that indeed there were a number of emerging outcomes that I could not have imagined at the outset of the project. Many of these outcomes pointed to the idea of collective identity—or the process of creating a shared definition as a group—which is the focus of this chapter.

In some cases student groups began with a verbally-driven process, making a master plan on which everyone could agree, but often this plan would completely unravel as they got to exploring instruments and playing together, and over the course of weeks their music would coalesce into something very different than what they had initially envisioned. In many cases, after groups composed songs, they would turn around and discard their previous work in favor of a different sound or genre. Some bands even encountered unresolvable disputes that led to breakups and reformings, which always occurred along gender lines. In interviews children said

things like: “I know Alicia as a friend, but not as a band member,” or “you can’t just form a band with people you don’t know.” Normally music educators have focused on shorter-term interactions, where groups come together, generate ideas within teacher defined parameters, and refine them toward a final product in a matter of a few hours or less. What was emerging from this project was clearly something different—a process of coevolving and collective construction spanning several months.

Figure 5-1: Band Trajectories

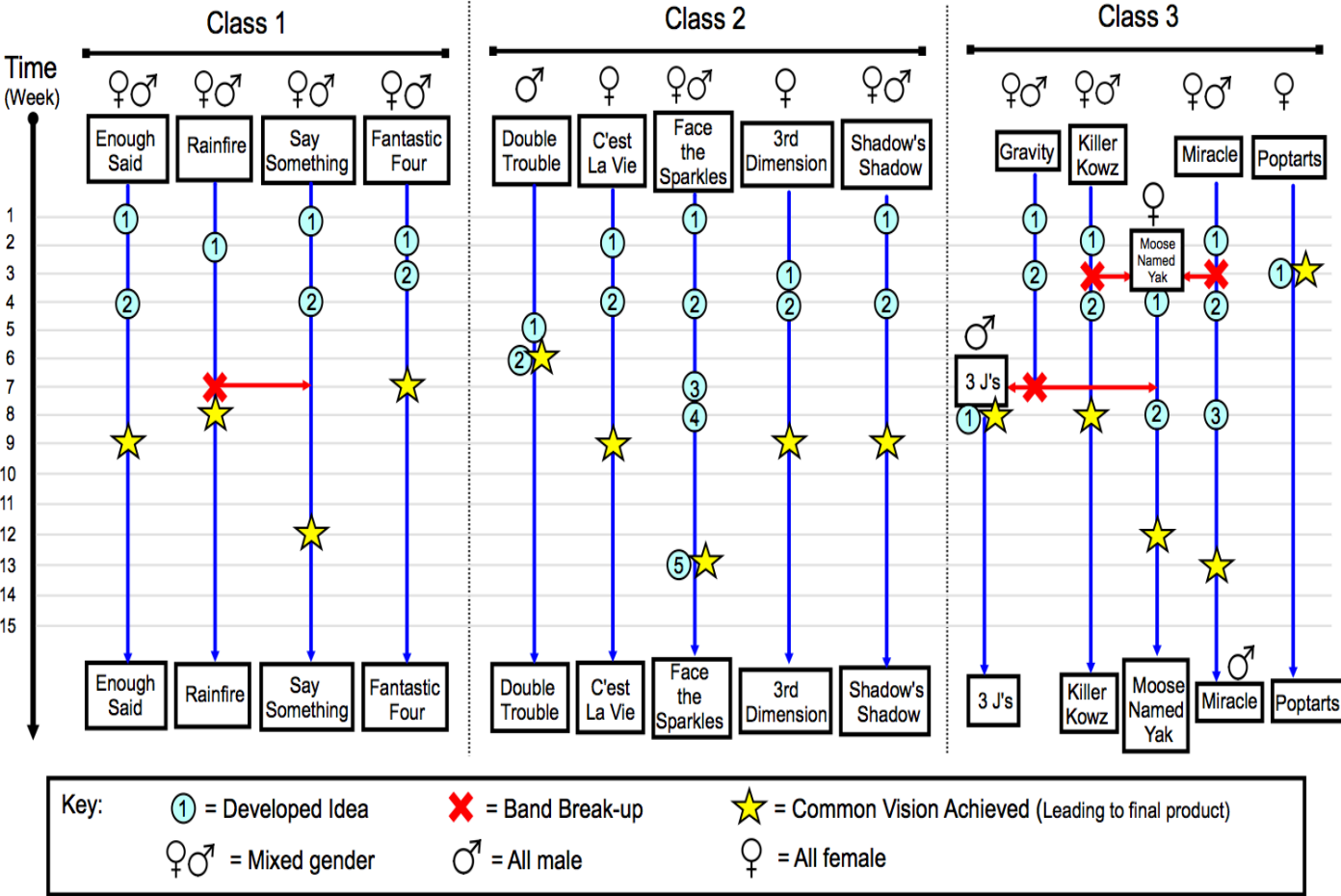


Figure 5-1 illustrates the trajectory of each band over the course of the project. At the start, class 1 divided into four mixed-gender groups: *Enough Said*, *Rainfire*, *Say Something*, and the *Fantastic Four* (the band names emerged later in the process, but are introduced here in order to keep track of the groups.) Class 2 formed into two mixed-gender groups: *Face the Sparkles* and *Shadow's Shadow*; two all-girl groups: *C'est La Vie* and *Third Dimension*; and one all-male duo: *Double Trouble*. Class 3 separated into three mixed-gender groups: *Gravity*, *Killer Kowz*, and *Miracle*; and one all-girl group: *Poptarts*.

The red X's in the chart indicate where breakups and reformings occurred. In the third week Sirena and Liana left their former groups (*Killer Kowz* and *Miracle*, respectively) to form a new duo which they called *Moose Named Yak*. In the seventh week the group called *Gravity* disbanded, the female members (Eva and Fay) joining *Moose Named Yak*, while the male members (James, Jason, and Jared) formed a new group called the *3 J's*. In that same week Marie left the group *Rainfire* and became a vocalist in the band *Say Something*. This fluid unfolding of the groupings was a surprising and notable outcome of the project, and is given further consideration later in this chapter.

The progression of each group through different developed ideas or drafts (indicated by the blue circled numbers in the chart) is another notable outcome. Rather than following a straight line trajectory through the stages of deciding roles, generating ideas, composing a draft, refining the composition, and performing (Wiggins, 2003), groups in this project tended to start over multiple times in pursuit of their final products. Only in a few cases (as in the *Poptarts*, *Rainfire*, and *Say Something*) did an initial idea follow a trajectory all the way through to the final performance. For all other groups, song drafts were discarded along the way in favor of new ideas. On average this renewal occurred two to three times for each group, although *Face the*

Sparkles moved through four different drafts before landing on their fifth and final iteration on the 13th week of the project.

The yellow stars in the chart indicate the point at which each group arrived at some sort of common vision that led directly to their final product. It should be noted that this was a somewhat arbitrary judgment on the part of me as the researcher, however there were actually distinct moments for many of the groups where solidification around some collective vision did occur. The average timing for this solidification was on the ninth week of the project, with a range from week 3 (the *Poptarts*) to week 13 (*Face the Sparkles* and *Miracle*). This nine week average is quite a surprising outcome, especially given that typical compositional projects with this age group are far shorter in duration. It appears that shifting the focus from merely “composing a song” to the higher bar of “forming a band” and creating a collectively owned product may require a paradigm shift with respect to scope.

In order to anchor these developments within a cohesive theoretical framework, this chapter briefly reviews the concept of collective identity. This is followed by a presentation of the data organized into themes of collective identity formation, namely: The importance of establishing roles, navigating discrepancies in ability, gender as it interfaces with decisions around vocals, the delineation of genre, the orientation toward school music, and the definition of boundaries, band breakdowns and break-ups, and issues of race and ethnicity.

Collective Identity in Small Group Composition

As described in chapter one, there are several aspects of collective identity that are of pertinent to small group composition. First of all, collective identity can be seen as a *process* of

becoming something together. In other words, a group of individuals *actively* forms a collective definition through shared interactions (Snow, 2001). Secondly, collective identity conceptualizes a group of individuals as “a field containing a system of vectors in tension” (Melucci, 1995, p. 50). As they move toward a shared definition, the various vectors “seek to establish an equilibrium between the various axes of collective action and between identification that an actor declares and the identification given by the rest of society” (p. 50). Third, there is an emphasis on collective action—that a group of interacting individuals does not passively become something, but rather they actively create a shared definition through a course of action in pursuit of common goals. Finally, there is the notion of collective identity as a process of delineating boundaries—that it is as much about defining what the collective is “not” as it is about defining what it is. With these four main principles of collective identity in mind, the following sections outline the themes that emerged for the student bands in this project as they grappled for those “shared definitions” and “senses of we” along the bumpy road of small group composition.

The Importance of Establishing Roles

The determination of instrumental and vocal roles within each band was of pivotal importance in the pursuit of a shared group identity. In the analysis, “roles” was indeed the most frequently applied code, with 462 applications (7% of the total number of code applications). As described earlier, the project was framed in a very open-ended manner, with students invited to choose from the wide variety of instruments in the music classroom or even to bring instruments from outside of school. On one hand, this led to an exciting richness of opportunities for instrument choice; on the other hand it sometimes fueled paralyzing indecision or conflict over instruments perceived as “more desirable.” Such challenges began early in the process, as

revealed in this transcript from the first meeting of the trio called *Third Dimension* (consisting of Dede, Gina, and Aisha):

Dede: What instruments do you want to do?

Gina: Oh piano—I think Dede should do piano. [messing around on piano]

Aisha: To me that sounds like reggae music, and trust me my dad plays reggae music, no offense.

Dede: I think either this [piano] or the drum thing...Ok, what do you want to do? We should focus on that.

Aisha: Singer—I'm a singer. Gina sings...Me and Gina sing.

Dede: How about one singer and something else—too many singers won't work.

Gina: We will rock you! [Starts singing while stomping and clapping. Tries to get Dede to take over the stomping and clapping]

Dede: But there's three of us, so two singers and one piano equals not 'We will rock you.'

Aisha: Let's go ask Matt if we have to use instruments.

[Asks and Matt says "It's up to you. Anything is fair game—It's up to you guys"]

Gina: Dede—we all have to be flexible...what's your third choice?

Dede: That one.

Aisha: You could be a back up singer!

Dede: Never going to happen.

Gina: I have the perfect idea for you, if you would just be flexible. [Shows the stomping and clapping idea again]

Aisha: You don't even know how to do anything on the instruments.

Dede: No—I don't.

Aisha: I think we should just focus on the strategy...can you help us please, it's just one song, it's not the entire album...

[Gina grabs another instrument...inaudible conversation]

Gina: We're trying to help you! [trying to choose instruments] I don't really think this group is really working well. I don't feel comfortable...

Dede: Can't I do any thing besides—

Aisha: But it's just for one song.

[Matt intervenes "What are you guys stuck on?"]

Gina: I don't want to work with you guys.

Dede: Just because I don't want to do something, is everything wrong?

Aisha: It's just one song.

Dede: I know! I want choices!

Gina: If Aisha had a nice idea and this was a nice song to do and we all had ideas to collaborate—

Aisha: We can make more than one song--it's just one song! [Actually, this is a misunderstanding on their part. While they were welcome to create different songs, they would only perform one in the performance and contribute one to the album.]

Dede: But my question is—

Gina: I don't want to be in this group anymore. I don't feel comfortable being in a group that does not want to collaborate.

Aisha: And who's not being flexible on anything!

Dede: No—you gave me one choice! To stomp my foot and clap my hands!

Aisha: You could either do this thing or not--that's a choice.

Though the ferocity of this debate dissipated after the first meeting, the issue of roles persisted through much of the project for this group. Ultimately they all ended up singing (though Dede had a much smaller part than the other two) while only Gina and Aisha played instruments (keyboard and drum). An interesting sub-current to the conversation above is the suspicion by Gina and Aisha that Dede would not be able contribute effectively—a suspicion of low musical ability that drove many of their debates surrounding roles. This issue of ability is further explored in the following section.

The issue of determining roles was also accentuated by the desire for novelty. In the all-boy duo *Double Trouble*, the following conversation occurred on the sixth day of the project. In the dialogue, Dominic sees an opportunity to try the drum set and attempts to abandon his guitar part in favor of this novel role:

Dominic: Mark—I'm going to think of some drum thing. [On the big drum set]

Mark: Dominic, you're on guitar.

Dominic: I walked out on guitar!

Mark: But Dominic—

Dominic: I want to play drums!

Mark: But Dominic—you already committed to guitar! I don't have an instrument.

Stop...Dominic, let's get serious! OK this is really annoying, let's go.

Dominic: OK, let's get back on track. [moving to back room] Mark, we have to find an instrument for you...I really don't want to play guitar though.

Mark: I want to...ok, what should I play? I'm not good at guitar though. You're good at guitar.

Dominic: I don't like it.

Implicit in this conversation, and many others like it, is an emphasis on what the individual student “wanted” to play, as opposed to what was best for the song. In fact, much of the process of establishing roles was characterized by the attempt to find everyone a role that they were happy doing. As Zachary summarized about his work with *Shadow's Shadow*, one the biggest challenges along the way was “getting everyone to have a part to do.” This challenge was particularly pronounced for the group *Moose Named Yak*, who changed from a duo (Sirena and Liana) to a quartet (adding Eva and Fay) in the seventh week of the project, following the break up of the band *Gravity*. The challenge of establishing roles as a newly formed quartet was expressed by Liana in the following interaction:

Matt: Are you moving in different directions?

Sirena: Fay and Liana want parts, but they're going away and not even listening!

Liana: I want a part, and no one is really listening, so I just went off and wrote my own part.

Matt: What do you mean by a *part*?

Liana: I want to be able to DO something, and I haven't been able to do anything. I was just like singing and I want to be able to play an instrument.

Sirena: But if we do everything separately, how will we know if it works?

Liana: I like got everyone together, but nobody was really listening.

Fay: I'm trying to figure out if there's something I can play. I don't want to just sing.

The perceptions expressed here of singing as a non-existent or even negative input into the song are interesting. Perhaps students perceived singing as an “ordinary” activity, which was contrasted with the enormous potential for novelty in the instrumental realm. The opportunity to play something the drums, or a keyboard, or an electric guitar (a long-sought dream for many), combined with the uncomfortable idea of singing in such an “exposed” format as a small band, may have led some to dismiss singing as a possibility. At the very least, it fueled tensions for many groups. In an interview with Sirena, the tensions and confusions surrounding the selection of roles were quite evident. In the segment that follows, I pressed further to try to better understand the apparent priority of making sure that everyone had “something to do”:

Sirena: When we first did the recording I know that Liana was playing the piano, but now I'm playing the piano (and) she's playing the glockenspiel, but when we first started the group like that none of us knew what we were doing... 'Cause me, Fay and Eva started singing all together on the recording, and Eva didn't know the guitar chords...and Fay didn't have an instrument. And I think the first practice that we had in the group...like that didn't work very well, 'cause we were trying to figure out what Eva and Fay could do without kind of messing up what we had started before.

Matt: Ah. So that seemed like an important step—that people needed to have something to do?

Sirena: Yeah.

Matt: Do you think that that was helpful for your song to find those parts or was it mostly about keeping people happy? Do you think that it actually made the song better?

Sirena: Well I think in some ways...’Cause then Liana had nothing to do ‘cause she didn't want to play the ukulele anymore. Then like Fay and Liana would go off to these instruments and no one would know what they were doing and then they would come back with stuff that's like really slow, and then me and Eva had done some stuff on a guitar that was a lot faster. I think that week that I was gone they got a lot of stuff done because when I came back they all knew what they were doing, except for that one moment when they had the drum issue. I think now that we have...I think the balance is good. We don't have loads of percussion, but then we don't have loads of like...no one's not doing something.

The last three lines of this transcript are particularly poignant. Just as Sirena seems to offer a musical justification for the roles her group has established, bringing up the issue of “balance” and the amount of percussion they have incorporated, she hesitates, then falls back on the idea that “no one’s not doing something.” This reinforces the point she made earlier, that much of the goal through these contentious practices was “to figure out what Eva and Fay could do without messing up what we had started before.” From these and other similar conversations, the idea starts to emerge that managing social relationships—ensuring that peers were content with their roles within the band—were just as important as musical considerations in the forging of collective identity. Sirena’s explanation above suggests that perhaps the musical and social considerations were in fact inseparable in the minds of the student participants. Though I tried to parse out these elements with the question “do you think that it actually made the song better?”. Sirena’s response perfectly blended the musical issue of balance with the extra-musical issue of balancing everyone’s involvement in the *doing* of the music. From the perspective of collective

identity, this suggests that developing a definition of a “shared we” is not simply a process of crafting a sound or a shared musical product, but rather is just as much (if not more) about defining and maximizing everyone’s *feeling* of involvement in the act of performing the music.

Navigating Discrepancies: The “Squeaky Wheel” Phenomenon

The issue of establishing roles was often interrelated with the challenge of navigating discrepancies in musical ability, and this correlation was particularly pronounced for four of the student bands. I became particularly aware of this pattern on the ninth day of the project, when I wrote the following journal entry:

C'est La Vie (one of the bands) really hit an impasse today. Erin really can't stay in time on any of the instruments, but she really wants to be involved with something other than singing. I tried to get her on a glockenspiel but that really flopped. The inability to play in rhythm with the group really leads people to shut down. I've seen this with Dede, Ross, and today Nigel too. On an earlier day Liana shut down with Sirena because she really wanted an instrument, even though their song was great without it, and her metallophone explorations weren't really working as well...Also, what was happening with Karen today? She seemed so detached from what was going on. Whereas in the past she's been a fairly central player, today she was hanging out with a ukulele (and) not really playing much. I was trying to gently think of a way to suggest that she try going back to the drum, but Erin was on there [on the drum] playing something that didn't fit with the rhythm at all. Karen said “but they changed the rhythm” implying that Erin didn't know how to play it. But it seemed that she knew exactly how both rhythms worked—the

blockade was a social one. Perhaps Karen didn't want to hurt Erin's feelings. It seems that the biggest impasse for this group is figuring out what to do with Erin. Is this a theme from the project? (How to navigate differences in ability!). A similar issue has come up in multiple groups. The *Killer Kowz* have been trying to figure out what to do with Ross. *Miracle* has been trying to fit Nigel in. *Third Dimension* also had initial concerns of Dede not being able to keep up musically.

As I began to observe this pattern more closely, I began to reference its occurrence with the moniker "the squeaky wheel phenomenon" in my notes and journal entries. The phenomenon emerged in groups containing several members with moderate to higher degrees of musical competency, coupled with one outlier member with a lower degree of competency (i.e. the squeaky wheel). As I noted above, the area of musical ability that seemed to be a trigger was rhythmic synchronization, which played out in particular with three cases: Ross's inability to match the beat in the *Killer Kowz*; Erin's challenge with syncing rhythmically in *C'est La Vie*, and Nigel's struggle to find the pulse in *Miracle*. There were clear discrepancies in *Third Dimension* as well, and Dede did struggle to play instrumental parts in rhythm, but the group mitigated this challenge by confining her to a "backup singer" role. Interestingly, the ability to sing in tune was not nearly as much of an integral factor in the groups' processes. This could be partly because the self-identified "non-singers" actively avoided taking on singing parts, so there were fewer issues of out-of-tune singing. Perhaps more importantly though, unlike on-pitch singing, rhythmic coordination was central to each group's ability to act physically and collectively in a synchronous manner, enabling the kind of "collective joy" and "self-loss in the rhythms and emotions of the group" that Ehrenreich (2007, p. 9) has argued are longstanding

parts of being human. In cases where one group member clearly stood outside of this collective coordination, the group was forced to orient their collective identity construction around this central discrepancy. This orientation around the “squeaky wheel” was clearly at play for the three groups mentioned above, although the manner in which this played out was different for each group, as is summarized next.

Killer Kowz

The example of the Killer Kowz highlights Melucci’s (1995) explanation of collective identity as a “system of vectors in tension,” with different iterations of the band finding different equilibriums, and with a particular “pull” exerted by the squeaky wheel vector (namely Ross). The initial weeks were mostly exploratory for the Killer Kowz . The girls (Rachel and Sarina) would typically excuse themselves to work on lyric-writing on the stage outside the music room, while the boys (Ross, Nathan, and Chad) would freely explore instruments in the back room. For the boys in this group, the keyboard with its wide variety of sounds and effects was a significant attraction, though they didn’t manage to narrow in on any riffs or developed ideas. The girls had a breakthrough on the second day and returned to share a melodic hook with the line “we are impossible” (See figure 5-2—note that all transcriptions of the students compositions are mine, not produced by the students themselves). Though the hook was well received, it was clear that the group had not yet developed any shared sense of purpose, and the idea faded away amidst the renewed keyboard explorations.

Figure 5-2: Melodic hook possibility by Rachel and Sarina

im - pos - si - ble we are the im - pos - si - ble we can do the im -
 pos - si - ble we can change the world to - day

By the fourth day the “system of vectors” in the Killer Kowz had shifted. Sarina had moved on to form the group *Moose Named Yak* with Liana, and Ross was absent for the day. This change in configuration completely altered the collective functioning of the group. The three remaining members moved out to a new space, and managed to assemble a rhythmic octave pattern and melody on two metallophones and a drum. [Figure 5-3]

Figure 5-3: Basic pattern by the Killer Kowz

S. Metallophone
 A. Metallophone
 Drum

Sop. Met.
 Alto Met.
 Drum

Perhaps the departure of Sarina had relieved the tension around whether or not there would be vocals in the song, and the group was able to proceed in a solidly instrumental direction. With Ross absent, the tendency to aimlessly explore on the keyboard was also noticeably absent. It stands to reason that this new configuration of three members had rapidly established a shared definition of their new grouping and were actively moving along a new trajectory. This trajectory might have continued through the project, however the return of Ross the following week reintroduced a vector with a strong pull into the system, as I noted in my journal that day:

There are different collective identities at play here. This 'messing around on keyboard' identity was established on day one when Rachel and Sarina were working separately. Then the group established a new identity when Sarina left and Ross was absent. Now they're back to day one, and Ross doesn't have a place.

Initially Ross continued exploring keyboard sounds, but now that the rest of the group had a sense of compositional direction, they tried to help Ross orient his playing around the octave pattern that was happening on the metallophone. At this point it became clear that he was having difficulty syncing with others and playing with a steady pulse. After some unsuccessful run-throughs, the following dialogue occurred:

Rachel: Do you want to play a different instrument?

Ross: Do you not want me to play it?

Rachel: I just feel like we don't have a lot of time

Ross: Is it any easier on the piano--you want to play my part? [demos]

Nathan: No you should stay with your part. [Rachel tries to simplify the octave part for him]

Rachel: I think that's better for him. Since we're already playing that, I think it would sound better. [Ross tries it, still struggling.]

Nathan: Do you want a solo or something?

Ross: Guys can we play the song? [others ignore initially—perhaps wary of how he will fit it] Can we play the song to see what it sounds like all together? Alright let's try it [He counts in but no one follows]

At this point I intervened as teacher, and recognizing that there was an issue of synchronization, I worked with Ross to try and bring his part in coordination with the others. I quickly realized however, that he was not hearing the pulse of the music, so after some effort I offered a scaffolded solution. Switching his keyboard to a strings sound, I showed him some notes to hold while his band mates played the more rhythmic motifs. The result was a fairly compelling musical blend and Ross's partners expressed some relief with the solution. The group performed this idea in progress for the rest of the class and at that point I felt that I had successfully scaffolded their process toward a collective sound. [Figure 5-4]

Figure 5-4: Killer Kowz song with Ross on the strings

The musical score consists of two systems of four staves each. The first system includes S. Metallophone, A. Metallophone, Synth Strings, and Drum. The second system includes Sop. Met., Alto Met., Syn. Str., and Drum. Each part is written on a five-line staff with a treble clef and a common time signature. The S. Metallophone part has a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The A. Metallophone part has a similar melodic line. The Synth Strings part has a sustained bass line. The Drum part shows a complex rhythmic pattern with various note values and rests. The second system follows a similar structure with different melodic and rhythmic elements.

It was surprising then that the group stagnated for the next several weeks. Ross went back to exploring on the keyboard—this exploration perhaps a proxy for his discontentment with the proposed “definition” of the group’s sound; a desire to exert his vector’s pull in a different, yet undetermined direction. The rest of the group showed growing frustration with Ross, but mostly pushed him to the sidelines as they continued to work with their composition, expanding the form and tightening the transitions. Collective identity was clearly not being achieved in this case.

On the eighth day I was quite surprised to find Ross playing the drum for the group, which was completely undermining the rhythm of the song. I intervened and tried to delicately

insert Chad back onto the drum, and offered Ross an alternative of playing the bass bars. This part was also quite challenging for Ross but he stayed with it for the remaining weeks. The group began to speak more openly about Ross's lack of ability to fit into their collective sound:

Rachel: Let's do the song without Ross, and see how good we can go.

Ross: Yeah, you can probably do really good. [Run through]

Chad: See how good it was without Ross?

Ross: Looks like you don't need me. I'll quit.

Rachel: You're fired. [Run through. Final form reached]

Chad: That was good!...No Ross we were just kidding—you could have played that time
[Ross pretend crying in the background]

Chad: You could have played that time Ross, we were just kidding.

Ross: I know. But I never said I didn't quit.

By this time the teacher in me was feeling a desperate need to change the course for this group—to help them achieve a collective identity that included all of the group members. I thought that the only way to do this was to convince Ross to take on a non-rhythmic part, so I renewed my earlier campaign to move him onto the keyboard strings, leading to this excerpt in my journal:

I had a pretty direct intervention with the *Killer Kowz*. I listened and they were all together except Ross was wildly off. It was like the rest of them had just come to accept it. I wasn't sure how to handle it. I had suggested previously that he try something else—actually it was me who got him off the drum so that Chad could take over again...but

then I got him on the bass bar which was probably a bad choice. This time I more forcefully suggested the keyboard, on the grounds that it provided more contrast with the other parts (which are all rhythmic). I also said to Ross quietly that it seemed like this part was frustrating. When he got on the keyboard strings and got right onto the right notes I asked “how did you know which notes to play?” Others [Rachel and Chad] were saying “he’s got a good ear.” I’m hoping he feels validated by this process. I suppose it’s also useful to confront one’s own challenges, like how he is exceedingly rhythmically challenged. But there is a need for SO much scaffolding for him—more than is possible in a project like this. The strings seem like a good choice.

My assumption in this intervention was that moving the group toward its best achievable collective sound was the ultimate goal. The *Killer Kowz*, like so many of the other groups however, had a different idea. Their ultimate goal was to find everyone a job that they could be happy doing, and as such, Ross stayed on the bass bar. [An excerpt of the final version is notated in figure 5-5] In all my efforts to support this group in constructing a collective identity, I was unaware that for them, collective identity hinged on social considerations just as much as musical ones. This is perhaps why no one in the group made any effort to direct Ross toward different instrument choices along the way. It seems that it was most important for the group was that Ross got to choose a role that he felt excited about, and that this in itself was integral to their definition of collective functioning.

Figure 5-5: Excerpt of Killer Kowz’ final song “Smooth Groove”

The musical score is divided into two systems. The first system includes S. Metallophone, A. Metallophone, Drum, and Bass Bar. The second system includes Sop. Met., Alto Met., Drum, and B. Bar. Each instrument part is written on a five-line staff. The S. Metallophone and A. Metallophone parts use treble clefs and contain melodic lines with eighth and quarter notes. The Drum part uses a drum clef and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth and quarter notes with 'x' marks. The Bass Bar part uses a treble clef and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth and quarter notes with 'x' marks. The Sop. Met. part uses a treble clef and contains a melodic line. The Alto Met. part uses a treble clef and contains a melodic line. The B. Bar part uses a treble clef and contains a rhythmic pattern of eighth and quarter notes with 'x' marks. The score is organized into three measures, with a double bar line at the end of the second system.

What is notable from this example is the degree to which Ross’s rhythmic challenges defined the identity of this group. Ross’s band mates seemed poised to go far with their composition—it is easy to imagine them handing Ross a small pair of finger cymbals or a quiet set of shakers and moving on with their work (music teachers can be prone to such decisions to quiet the incapable). Yet they persisted in trying to incorporate him—in a way that he felt good about—into the balance of vectors that they had established, no matter how much it dragged upon and stagnated their process. Through their evolution into a musical group, the members of

the *Killer Kowz* were asserting that social collectivity trumped musical precision, despite my concerted efforts to steer their course otherwise.

C'est La Vie

In the all-girl band, *C'est La Vie*, it quickly became apparent that Erin could not sync rhythmically in the way the others (Evelynn, Madeline, and Karen) could. At first this discrepancy led to humorous episodes like this one:

Madeline: Ok I have an idea: Because we're so loud maybe Erin doesn't have to play because she doesn't understand...maybe you could like sing or something.

Erin: Ahem!

Madeline: Or you could play drums or something.

Erin: I can play drums: BANG BANG BANG! [mimicking a drum set]

Madeline: No like a hand drum.

Evelynn: No, you could go [drums a long short short long pattern on her uke] OK. let's try it.

[All start to play. Erin drums then gets way off the beat. Laughter]

As the group moved beyond explorations and began to establish a musical direction, the discussion took on a more serious tone. Now Erin's band mates desperately tried to find her "something to do," and this became an all-consuming part of their process:

Madeline: Guys! I think we need to hold up, because Erin doesn't have anything to do. So we need to figure out something for Erin because she has nothing.

Karen: She could go [single strum] You know we go...it may be lame, but it's really...

Madeline: Karen, I think you should do this [ukulele] and Erin should do this. [drum]

Karen: It's so much better with the beat.

Madeline: Erin, would you feel more comfortable doing that than that? [Points to ukulele and drum]

Erin: Well no, it's easier on that.

Evelynn: Why don't you go get a bongo?

Madeline: Everybody's abilities for doing that is probably average—

Evelynn: Just get a bongo.

Madeline: That won't go though.

Karen: Erin, stay here, stay here...

Evelynn: No, but she can't play the ukulele.

Karen: But we need to get this done, so you do the beat.

Madeline: Let's just try this, this doesn't have to be our final decision.

Erin: Sure, I can try.

Evelynn: We have to at least try.

[Ukulele strumming. Stops...Karen doesn't know the chords.]

Karen: I can't do that.

Madeline: Why is this not working? I feel like...

Evelynn: Erin, you're doing the beat. Do you want to do the beat?

Madeline: Why is this not working? Hey Karen, Erin's going to do the ukulele thing.
Right?

Karen: You sure?

As was the case with the *Killer Kowz*, teacher intervention became a factor for *C'est La Vie* as they grappled to navigate the squeaky wheel phenomenon. However, unlike in the case of the *Killer Kowz*, teacher input in this case did ultimately steer the outcome. As *C'est La Vie* got deeper into the quagmire of finding a role for Erin (to the point where they could no longer proceed with their composition), I stepped in and suggested some two-note chords on the glockenspiel for Erin. This eventually switched to a tone bell part, so that the chords could be laid in successive groups, and with coaching Erin developed visual strategies for landing her mallets on the right beats, even in the absence of an internal pulse. [An excerpt of the final version is notated in figure 5-6]

Figure 5-6: Excerpt of C'est La Vie final song "Round and Round"

The first system of the musical score consists of five staves. From top to bottom, they are: Voice, Ukulele, Glockenspiel, Bass Bar, and Cajón. The Voice staff contains four measures of whole rests. The Ukulele staff features a rhythmic accompaniment of eighth-note chords. The Glockenspiel staff plays a series of sustained chords. The Bass Bar staff has a simple bass line of quarter notes. The Cajón staff provides a steady drum pattern with quarter notes and rests.

The second system of the musical score consists of five staves. From top to bottom, they are: Voice, Uke., Glock., B. Bar, and Cajón. The Voice staff contains a melody with lyrics: "I re-mem-ber the sum-mer when we were all a do zen ru mor on the stre-et that you". The Uke. staff continues with the same eighth-note chord accompaniment. The Glock. staff plays sustained chords. The B. Bar staff has a simple bass line. The Cajón staff provides the same drum pattern as in the first system.

Voice
no lon - ger li - ke me

Uke.

Glock.

B. Bar

Cajón

Miracle

For the band Miracle, the squeaky wheel phenomenon was particularly contentious. For much of the initial phase of the project, Nigel was disengaged from his partners, exploring on a keyboard or even just sitting on the side. On the sixth week of the project, Nigel’s band mates Derek and Rory began to express concern and entered into a discussion of “what to do” with Nigel (even while he was present in the room):

Derek: You could ask if you could switch groups.

Rory: Noah could be the M.C., or the dancer.

Derek: No, that's not—

Rory: He could be the director—directors don't need to do anything.

Derek: No, he needs to be part of the...music.

Rory: So what are we going to do?

Derek: He could do anything—we'll let you do anything!

Matt: But isn't that what you're playing?

Rory: Well, we can't decide if Derek's going to be the piano. [Derek plays the pattern on the cajón or "box drum"] But we wanted Nigel to be on that. [the cajón]

Matt: Well, let's find something that can go with it.

Rory: Well, Derek had something for the second part of our song, but he can't switch from this to this. And I'm not sure what Nigel can do 'cause he's not telling us anything.

Nigel: Well, you're not telling me anything.

Rory: Also Nigel really wants to move groups.

Matt: Too late for that.

Once Nigel admitted that he did not know what to do, perhaps because he was not feeling the pulse of the music, Derek and Rory tried to coach him to play the beat on the cajón (Peruvian box drum):

Rory: Now try it without Matt. [Rory and Nigel play together]

Rory: Just keep practicing Nigel...Try closing your eyes. [They play together again—see figure 5-7]

Derek: Maybe a little quieter. [all three play again]

Rory: Let's get this polished.

Nigel: I don't know what you mean...I'll do this and you do this. [switches to the piano while Derek moves to the cajón, and then switches back]

Rory: Just keep practicing, you'll get it.

Figure 5-7: Basic pattern for Miracle’s song “School’s Out”



While this did represent some progress for this group, the next week Nigel once again disengaged from the group. It wasn't until he identified his desired role—the drum set—that things turned around. After landing on a combination of a bass drum and a high hat, Nigel's disposition transformed entirely. Though he continued to struggle to sync rhythmically, his social interactions with his partners were no longer out-of-sync. The collective identity of *Miracle* was clearly hinging on Nigel's attainment of an acceptable role within the group, as was the case for Ross in the *Killer Kowz*, and Erin in *C'est La Vie*. Though the rhythmic integrity of the music was certainly compromised by Nigel's choice of roles, the cohesion of the group was greatly strengthened once Nigel was given the opportunity to play drums, however far from the beat.

Figure 5-8: Excerpt of Miracle’s final song “School’s Out”

Vocal

To-day we'll just have fun 'cause there's no school and we'll run a-round for- get.

Piano

Drum Set

The first system of the musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is for the vocal line, written in bass clef, with lyrics: "To-day we'll just have fun 'cause there's no school and we'll run a-round for- get." The middle staff is for the piano accompaniment, also in bass clef, mirroring the vocal melody. The bottom staff is for the drum set, in treble clef, showing a simple rhythmic pattern with snare and bass drum hits.

Vocal

— all the rules now we live our lives 'cause that's—

Pno.

Dr.

The second system continues the musical score. The vocal line (top staff) has lyrics: "— all the rules now we live our lives 'cause that's—". The piano accompaniment (middle staff) continues the melody. The drum set (bottom staff) maintains the rhythmic pattern.

Vocal

— what we do next day do it a - gain start like— it's new

Pno.

Dr.

The third system concludes the excerpt. The vocal line (top staff) has lyrics: "— what we do next day do it a - gain start like— it's new". The piano accompaniment (middle staff) and drum set (bottom staff) continue their respective parts.

Conclusions from the Squeaky Wheel Phenomenon

It is an unexpected outcome that for these groups the process was so driven by their least capable members. One might expect that in a band the people with the all the skill or all the ideas would dominate the trajectory, leaving the less capable on the sidelines with nothing more than tambourines in hand. The *Killer Kowz*, *C'est La Vie*, and *Miracle* did not “sideline” their rhythmically challenged members, however. Quite the contrary—in each of these cases the “squeaky wheels” exerted a dominant force on the group process, and in each case they ironically ended up on rhythmically integral parts.

This squeaky wheel phenomenon brings forth some interesting conclusions with respect to collective identity. First, notable is the degree to which rhythmic coordination is integral to the enactment of collective identity. Secondly, children in this study addressed discrepancies in musical ability with a great deal of attention to social factors, often at the expense of musical considerations. There was a clear tendency to prioritize “taking care of one’s band mates” over the optimization of the musical material at hand, an orientation that the students in this study adopted without adult coaching (often in spite of adult coaching, actually). Perhaps for the children, the formation of a shared “we” was as much about kinship and connection as it was about musical results. In this way, the expression “the chain is only as strong as its weakest link” might be reoriented to describe this project as follows: “The chain is only as strong as its ability to take care of and incorporate its weakest link.” Such an outcome seems to reflect the school mission to “respect others,” and may indicate that children at Alder Park Elementary have internalized this respect—both in their home and school lives—at a profound level.

The Forking Path: Gender and the musical compass

By the time that the final 14 bands took the stage at the Songwriter's Ball, their invented songs had diverged in wildly different directions. Eight of the songs were vocally driven and 6 were instrumental, and though they defied rigid genre categorizations, they generally traversed a wide spectrum ranging from acoustic pop to anthemic rock; from cinematic to classical; from dance pop to rap. The wide variety of endpoints in this project certainly reflected the open-ended nature of initial prompt "form a band, compose a song," but it also reflected the variety of musical knowledge that participants brought to the experience (from both inside school and out of school), as well as the distinct pathways that unfolded for each group as they struggled to merge their musical selves into a collective. Despite the divergent nature of these pathways, there are some common, key factors (to be defined and elaborated in the following section) that played out across the different groups with respect to the determination of their musical direction or sound, namely:

- The decision to include or not include vocals
- The delineation of genre
- The orientation toward "school music"
- The definition of boundaries

In general, an interesting gender narrative played out with respect to these factors: That the same-sex groups were more likely to include vocals (for both girls and boys); they tended toward stronger genre delineations (often with gendered pop orientations), and tended to define themselves in opposition to the perceived idea of a "school music sound." On the other hand, the

mixed groups tended toward instrumental pieces, with less delineation of genre, and a closer approximation of the classic “school music” Orff sound, with xylophones, glockenspiels and hand held percussion. The following discussion explores these factors as they played out in the narratives of different groups, aiming to shed light on the relationship between musical decision-making and collective identity formation in the student-formed bands.

Vocal versus Instrumental Directions

In the initial meeting of *Enough Said*, consisting of two boys (Ajay and Oliver) and three girls (Shanice, Isobel, and Alicia), the group quickly seemed to coalesce around the idea of a rap about school:

Shanice: Let's do it about school—what's your favorite subject? [goes around] So we have PE music and art. [degenerating into chatter]. So what about PE—It's active? [Shanice and Ajay are trying to make verses. They come up with the original two lines "PE Spanish music and tech, don't forget science, it's the best, Library we read, art we paint, everything is great if we get good grades."]

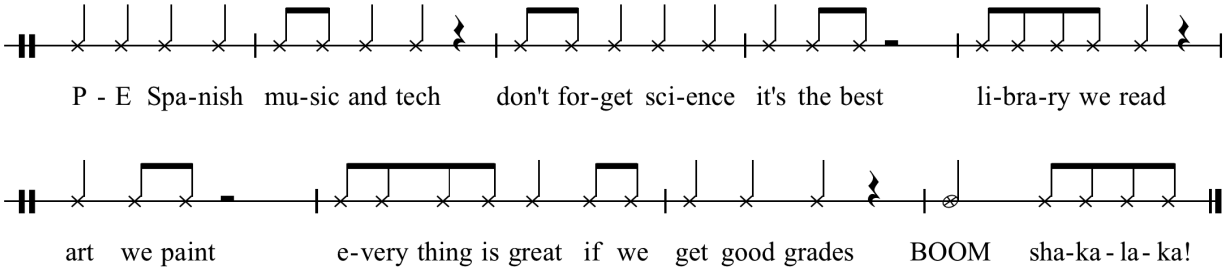
Shanice: We should make this a rap. [demos the idea—Alex jumps in, adding 'boom shakalaka' at the end] Ok, that's awesome—we got that done. What's another part? [Ajay does the rap again—see figure 5-9] Ok, that could be the chorus, and then we just need two or three more verses.

Ajay: I'm going to say the 'boom shakalaka'!

Shanice: In PE we run and jump.

Ajay: In Spanish we say “ola.”

Figure 5-9: Enough Said’s rap about school



After this initial surge of inspiration, the group stagnated for several weeks. They tried to arrange some instrumental parts to accompany the rap, but the results were limited and much of their time became mired in silly chatter (mostly off the topic of their song) and distracted instrumental wanderings. As was the case for many of the groups, this period of stagnation seemed to be symbolic of a failure to find a common vision or collective identity as a band. Though the children didn’t necessarily have the awareness or the language to articulate what was holding them back from pursuing a given direction, their demeanor and their actions (or sometimes their inaction) would express resistance to a collective definition that was being proposed. In the case of *Enough Said*, the hidden impediment to progress eventually presented itself: The decision whether to include or not include vocals. As Shanice shared in an interview, the final decision came down to a vote:

Well, we didn't get to write a song but when we were trying to, we went from—one person writes a word and then somebody else writes a word, and we try to see if we get a first verse on there. If we do, great and if we don't, try again. And that didn't work and eventually we just said forget it. Two of us said: “Yeah let's have lyrics”; three of us said “no let's not have lyrics.”

This episode illustrates a conclusion that was reached (either explicitly or implicitly) by many of the mixed-gender groups: That the inclusion of vocals was potentially too polarizing to allow for individuals' different aesthetic preferences to coalesce around a shared vision of the sound. In the case of *Enough Said*, it could be speculated that the original rap idea was perceived as “too far” in a particular direction for some of the band members to “buy in.” However, attempts to pursue other vocal possibilities were also met with resistance from factions of the group. So the decision was made to retreat to a more neutral, safer space; One that offered greater potential square footage in terms of common ground. In the words of Alicia:

Well, we all hardly have any musical experience except for Nadine—she is a beautiful singer, but we voted for no lyrics so our song became instrumental. Obviously we have all taken music class, so we know how to do xylophone and hit a drum, so that was sort of the inspiration for our song. See what you can come up with the things you already know.

In this quote she implies that the instruments of the music classroom—the traditional Orff assemblage including xylophones and drums—represented a common musical language upon which they could orient their collective efforts. Perhaps the music that defined their lives outside of the music classroom was too disparate in sound and thus irreconcilable in terms of any sort of shared action plan. They could come together, however, in the same way that they had experienced musical activity in the past—in the shared space or perhaps what could be referred to as the “common tongue” (Small, 2011) of K-6 “classroom music.” Though this decision did

afford the possibility of a collective identity as a band, the strength of the shared vision was noticeably reduced in this negotiated middle ground. In a later rehearsal, the following dialogue occurred between the three girls as the group was supposed to be rehearsing their final product:

Alicia: You're just like talking through the whole thing.

Isobel: It's boring. I don't really like this.

Shanice: We told you to put some lyrics in there but you all said no, right?

In this case, the compromises toward a mutually agreeable product led to a fairly lukewarm collective investment. The final song [see figure 5-10] was entitled “The Unknown,” which was a fitting title since they had almost no discussion of the genre or sound they were seeking. In the “neutral space” of instrumental music chosen by a majority of the mixed gender groups, the need to define the genre seemed to be less important than it was for the vocally-driven groups.

Figure 5-10: Excerpt of Enough Said final song “The Unknown”

This musical score is arranged in five staves. The top staff, labeled 'Bass Xylophone', uses a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a repeat sign. The second staff, 'Ukulele', also uses a treble clef and features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment of chords. The third staff, 'Synth Bass', uses a bass clef and provides a steady, rhythmic bass line. The fourth staff, 'Drum 2', uses a drum clef and shows a sparse drum pattern with occasional eighth notes. The fifth staff, 'Drum 1', uses a drum clef and shows a more consistent drum pattern of eighth notes. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

This musical score is arranged in five staves. The top staff, labeled 'Bass Xyl.', uses a treble clef and contains a melodic line with a repeat sign. The second staff, 'Uke.', also uses a treble clef and features a complex, rhythmic accompaniment of chords. The third staff, 'S. Bass', uses a bass clef and provides a steady, rhythmic bass line. The fourth staff, 'Dr. 2', uses a drum clef and shows a sparse drum pattern with occasional eighth notes. The fifth staff, 'Dr. 1', uses a drum clef and shows a more consistent drum pattern of eighth notes. The score concludes with a double bar line and repeat dots.

A similar trajectory and outcome unfolded for the *Killer Kowz*. The decision of whether or not to include vocals was confronted on their first meeting, and prompted a vote of sorts:

Sarina: We need to decide whether we want vocals or not...but we do because the girls want to do it.

Rachel: Stop speaking for me!

Ross: What Nathan and Chad were doing was really cool.

Sarina: I have a question: What are we doing? [Laser sounds/machine guns on keyboard]

Ross: Rachel, you were doing really good!

Rachel: I know thanks! [demos wood block pattern] Listen to me and Ross's idea cause we're not feeling respected. [demo] Do we want vocals in this song!?

Sarina: I want to sing--I don't care what they say. I'm singing.

Rachel: But we have to have a compromise. [Rachel takes tally: A lot of no's]

Sarina: They sound really good (the other group, *Gravity*)--why do I always end up in a group that...

Rachel: We've been arguing for 15 minutes. If we really want to be a group have to—

Sarina: Can someone answer my question. Can I sing?

Many: Yes!

Sarina: Ok, I'm good then.

Though this interaction was inconclusive about whether or not there would be vocals, the underlying resistance to a vocally-driven song was already emerging. After Sarina and Rachel explored vocal possibilities for the first two weeks, it became clear that these possibilities were remote from any sort of common ground, and the group retreated to the less polarizing terrain occupied by the classroom instruments. Similar to *Enough Said*, the *Killer Kowz* never expressed any clear understanding of what kind of song they were creating (rather they let the sonic

material all emerge from one spontaneously-composed metallophone riff) [see figure 5-3], and similarly for this group the collective investment in the “classroom instrumental” zone was fairly limited (and was further strained by the squeaky wheel phenomenon described above).

Defining Genre and Sound

For the group *Say Something*—one of the only mixed-gender groups that did end up incorporating vocals—there was also a distinct lack of clarity about the genre or sound that they were seeking, as illustrated by the following dialogue between Joey and Molly, who were talking about their band mates who were off writing lyrics:

Molly: They're singing about snow coming down on trees 'cause they're really lonely or something.

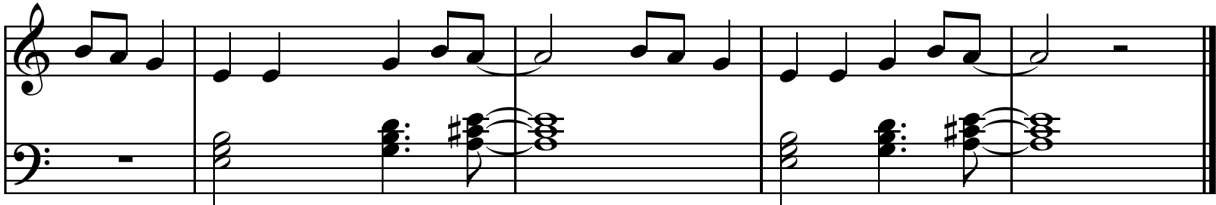
Joey: They'll never learn that this is a rock song.

Molly: It is?

Joey: You never learned that? [demos on the electric piano (see figure 5-11)][Does that sound like rock or hip hop? Or classical?]

Molly: Sounds like pop.

Figure 5-11: Joey’s piano riff



Initially *Say Something* shied away from the idea of vocals, even though one of its members (Helena) was one of the strongest singers in the school. Helena dabbled on instruments like the ukulele and the glockenspiel for many weeks, and the group seemed to be heading in an instrumental direction, though there was no intentionality or conversation about the direction they were moving. Even after a great deal of teacher prompting and encouragement, Helena resisted taking on a vocal part—perhaps partly due to the polarization issue discussed previously, and partly due to shyness about singing alone. Once Marie joined the group, then the vocal part emerged and the song took shape (see Figure 5-12—note that the awkward text setting is a testament to the late arrival of the vocal part and the challenge of fitting with a predetermined instrumental melody).

It seemed important, however, that the genre of the song was uncertain to the end. As Joey said of the two singers in his group: “They’ll never learn that this is a rock song”, implying that only he knew what the song *really* was. There was a certain advantage to this ambiguity: Joey could rest assured that it was indeed a rock song, which resonated with his interpretation of the “shared definition,” while others could base their membership in the collective on a different definition—one more in line with their own aesthetic sensibilities. This seems to echo one of the key strategies used in many of the mixed-gender groups: By maintaining a nebulous definition of the song being created, it allowed for a greater number of access points, such that children with disparate musical preferences could find a degree of common ground.

Figure 5-12: Excerpt of Say Something’s final song “A Seattle Life”

The first musical score is for the song "A Seattle Life". It consists of four staves: Voice, Piano, E. Guitar, and Drum Set. The lyrics are: "Co-o-me see Mac-kle-more per form— o-on the roof o - of Dicks". The music is in a 4/4 time signature. The piano part features a steady bass line with chords, and the guitar part has a rhythmic melody. The drum set provides a consistent beat.

The second musical score is for the same song, "A Seattle Life". It consists of four staves: Voice, Pno., E. Gtr., and Dr. The lyrics are: "— Thi - is is where the Heist was born". The music continues in the same 4/4 time signature. The piano part has a similar bass line, and the guitar part continues its rhythmic melody. The drum set maintains the beat.

In contrast to the ambiguity about genre in the mixed-gender groups, in the single-sex groups definitions around genre were a focal point of discussion. In the all-girl group *C'est La Vie*, the conversation often included specific genres and even specific artists. Even though these

discussions were often contentious, they suggested a gradual pinpointing of the type of sound they were hoping to achieve. The following is a transcript from their fifth week of working together:

Evelynn: You doing a rap?

Karen: I don't know...

Evelynn: What did you try? [Karen rapping about "biking to the fair"]

Evelynn: We have 15 minutes left.

Karen: Well we need to work. [Starts writing. Rapping "I take a bike to the fair"—see figure 5-13]

Evelynn: I don't want it "rappy."

Karen: Well, too bad. [Keeps playing with it]

Evelynn: You have to sing the rap to me. [Karen demonstrates] No, it doesn't go with the song.

Karen: It's a rap.

Evelynn: I don't think it fits with the song. [Karen keeps rapping]

Madeline: Guys, Earth to people. Wait, Evelynn, do you want to do a rap?

Evelynn: Sort of, but not like "Yu-yu-yeah" but it should be like one of Niki Minaj's like how she does like [Karen demos something fast and muffled] Yeah, like fast, kinda like that [Karen tries the bike part faster. Keeps changing her voice]

Madeline: See this is like not working because Evelynn wants it country and you're making it like a rap.

Erin: I don't want the rap. I never wanted the rap.

Evelynn: Guys, who wants the rap?

Karen: You wanted me to write a rap.

Evelynn: Karen, do you want to do a rap? [no answer]

Madeline: Guys, Karen do you want to do a rap? [sound like a shrug]. Erin?

Karen: We already know her answer.

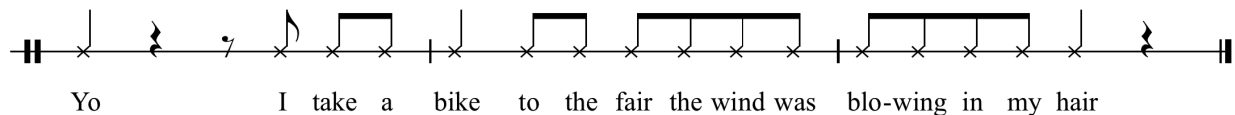
Erin: Well I like the Nicki Minaj idea... a little bit. I'm not saying I'm in love with it, but let's give it a chance.

Karen: Well I already crossed it out, so I don't...

Erin: You can rewrite it.

Karen: I don't want to.

Figure 5-13: Karen's Rap



Despite the disagreements around genre, there was still an overwhelming stylistic alignment for *C'est La Vie*, which Karen attributed to the all-girl composition of the band in an interview [note that the final song is notated in figure 5-6]:

Matt: In this school we're always saying it needs to be mixed-gender, mixed-class and that's normally how we do things. So this was a little bit unique. Do you think it was a good thing that you guys were able to work together on this?

Karen: Yeah. I think it was fun because we happened to have the same ideas and we liked the same type of genre I think... so it kind of worked well.

Matt: What do you think the genre is?

Karen: Mostly pop, yeah.

The process of defining the genre of the music was similarly prominent for the all-girl group *Third Dimension*. After a period of rapid compositional productivity Aisha, Dede and Gina became locked in a heated exchange about the direction of their song:

Aisha: We each have really different expectations for the song.

Dede: And voices.

Aisha: I thought we were going to do like a pop song.

Gina: My expectation is that it would be a pop song.

Aisha: Like you hear on the radio...Soulful and cheerful, but it's also pop.

Dede: Gina, the voice that you just said is like a sassy voice, and we shouldn't do it.

Gina: Aisha, you ok?

Alicia: Nobody agrees with me with anything about this song right now.

Dede: I was like that in the beginning with that We Will Rock You idea, and I was like "this will not work with this band!"

Aisha: I think it's the exact opposite of what I was thinking for this band.

The clarification of genre was also evident in the rehearsals of the all-boy duo called *Double Trouble*. Early in the process the two boys (Mark and Dominic) made implicit decisions

about genre, choosing the rock instrumentation of electric guitar and drums, and experimenting with strong beats and rapid strumming. It wasn't until the idea of vocals emerged on the fourth session of the project, however, that genre became a specific topic of conversation:

Mark: We should add some lyrics...I don't want it to be like a weird song...like 'spaghetti-o...'

Dominic: Like the 'Why did the Chicken?' song [from another group] is kind of cheesy.

Mark: I have some lyrics, I think. Want it to be like rock, or like classic rock? Rock like ACDC or rock like Michael Jackson?

Dominic: Like normal rock.

Mark: Like Michael Jackson, like classic rock. [confusion over genre definitions]

Dominic: Yeah classic...like regular...So what could be in the background.

Mark: Let's have lyric time! What time is it? Lyric time! [Singing "just beat it, don't eat it"]

Dominic: Thinking positions [Mark singing Michael Jackson still] Mark—thinking positions! [i.e. time to get to work]

Though Mark and Dominic shared a degree of confusion about the genre terminology that they were using, through use of specific artist references they were able to establish a shared alignment of the direction they wanted to go. For *Double Trouble*, such an alignment seemed prerequisite to the decision to move forward with a vocal part.

Figure 5-14: Excerpt of Double Trouble’s final song “Fame”

The image displays two systems of musical notation. The first system features a voice line and an electric guitar line. The voice line is in treble clef with a key signature of one flat and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are "Dou-ble trou - ble the best band in the world". The electric guitar line is in treble clef and consists of a steady eighth-note accompaniment. The second system also features a voice line and an electric guitar line. The voice line lyrics are "They worked their way u - up from Se-a - ttle". The electric guitar line continues with the same eighth-note accompaniment.

For the all-girl group the *Poptarts*, the exact opposite occurred. After starting in an instrumental direction, Tanja made a plea for a vocally driven pop song. After the following discussion with her band mate, Piper, it became clear that there was a lack of alignment in terms of genre preference, and the idea of vocals—which prevented the possibility of forging a “neutral” ground in terms of style—was abandoned:

Piper: Violin totally sounds bad.

Lona: Maybe we shouldn't use violin.

Tanja: No we need to use violin...What about a happy song? By like a pop artist?

Lona: Like Roar?

Tanja: No, I don't like Roar. How about Olly Murs' Dance with Me Tonight. I love that song.

Piper: Just sing the first note of it. [Tanja trying to sing it, doesn't know it well] You can't copy a song.

Tanja: But we could take off the lyrics and put in our own.

Piper: No, we can't do parodies.

Tanja: Lona, what do you like? We could try to do Roar.

Piper: I don't know any of these songs.

Tanja: Girl, you better start listening--get with the 21st century!

Piper: I am, I just don't like pop music.

Tanja: How is that even remotely possible?...Can you guys do country? I can do like any country.

Lona: We had such a great start—why can't we just stick with it!?

Tanja: We can't—It's not good.

Piper: We're not going to get anywhere if you keep downgrading everything.

Tanja: What we had was good, but I think we should do it without the violin.

Piper: What am I going to do then?

Tanja: You can sing. You're good at it.

Piper: *You* should sing.

Here the lack of any shared footing in terms of stylistic preference prevented the idea of moving forward with a vocally-driven song. Piper enjoyed singing Broadway show tunes and listening to classical music; Tanja listened to primarily Top-40 pop music and was less comfortable as a singer. The notion of crafting a vocal song that could bridge this stylistic divide was not tenable. An instrumental piece, however, once again held that “neutral” connotation that made it a safer

direction to choose. Interestingly the composition that they created occupied a space that was outside all of their listening preferences—something of a Zimbabwean-styled marimba piece with drum, bass xylophone, metallophone, and ukulele. [See figure 5-15] This may have represented a musical zone in which they could share equal footing, perhaps because it was a style from which they were all equally distant. Stated differently, it could be all of theirs precisely because it was none of theirs.

Figure 5-15: Excerpt of The Poptarts’ final song “Megarun”

The image shows a musical score for an excerpt of the song "Megarun" by The Poptarts. It consists of four staves, each representing a different instrument:

- Bass Xylophone:** The top staff, written in treble clef, features a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes.
- Alto Metallophone:** The second staff, also in treble clef, plays a more sparse, harmonic accompaniment with quarter and half notes.
- Baritone Uke:** The third staff, in treble clef, provides a harmonic foundation with chords, primarily triads and dyads.
- Drum:** The bottom staff uses a drum clef and shows a rhythmic pattern with quarter and eighth notes, including some syncopated rhythms.

The score is organized into four measures, with repeat signs at the beginning and end of the excerpt.

Defining Boundaries

One of key aspects of forming collective identity is developing the ability to “bound and distinguish the collectivity both internally and externally by accenting commonalities and differences” (Snow, 2001). The process of delineating clear boundaries in this study was largely the purview of groups incorporating vocals (which, again, were primarily the single-sex groups). For these bands it was important to know *what* they were creating, while simultaneously maintaining a definition of what they were *not* creating. For the band *Miracle*, this separation was pronounced. After a contentious break-up with lone female band member, the three remaining males were clear about what lay “outside” of their collective sound, though they

lacked the vocabulary to express it. In the following interview excerpt, one of the boys tries to explain how the girl's singer songwriter sound was outside of their collective identity:

Matt: You mean that the sound that she was going for was different than what you guys were going for?

Rory. Yeah. It was a good idea in the first place but that tune was really different, it was really quiet, and you probably wouldn't have been able to hear it over all that we were doing...and it was a lot slower.

Later in the interview I asked Rory about the break up:

Matt. Do you think there was something about that boy girl thing that was happening there? Or was it more just personalities?

Rory. Maybe they just have different ideas. I can't speak for the girls, I don't understand...

Matt. Well, you've heard some of their songs.

Rory. Some of them yeah...Definitely the *Moose and Yak* song—that's definitely what I would have expected from them. It's good and it's kind of a neat idea, but I guess...It's way different than our song.

Matt. A different style then what you were thinking?

Rory. Yes! [laughs] Much different.

In this case, a boundary was being drawn based on perceived differences in the stylistic choices of boys and girls. For the all-girl group called *Third Dimension*, a boundary was instead drawn to separate their sound from the idea of “school music.” The following is an excerpt from an interview with Gina, as she described her group’s process:

Both me and Aisha were like "we want to do this and like this and it will be awesome!" Like a pop song, but then Dede wanted to do something totally different—kind of more of a “musicky” song and then we kind of compromised almost a little bit: An original yet kind of mellow, yet kind of pumping with drum song, and it's kind of...We're all better now.

Here the idea of a “musicky” song—another reference to the hypothetical classroom sound and instrumentation—is set up as antithetical to the “awesome” pop song that they hoped to achieve. In the end their collective identity oriented around separating themselves from that “musicky” sound. Through the combination of a thumping bass beat (a large mallet playing the cajon or Peruvian box drum), a sustained pop organ keyboard sound, and highly stylized vocals, they were able to achieve a sound that they perceived as entirely distinct from their school music experience.

Figure 5-16: Excerpt of Third Dimension’s final song “Around the World”

The musical score consists of three staves: Voice, Organ, and Cajón. The first system covers the first two measures of the excerpt. The Voice staff is in treble clef and contains the melody with lyrics: "Go go go a-round the wo - o - orld to see the si -". The Organ staff is in bass clef and shows two chords. The Cajón staff shows a rhythmic pattern of quarter notes. The second system covers the next two measures. The Voice staff has lyrics: "i - ghts o - o - o - o - oh". The Organ staff features a long, sustained chord. The Cajón staff continues with the same rhythmic pattern.

For the group *Face the Sparkles*, delineating boundaries meant moving away from the idea of “children’s music.” After creating a song about fruits and vegetables (see figure 5-17), tensions began to surface. Valerie started to incessantly sing “I Would” by One Direction, and referencing all sorts of pop songs, to the annoyance of her partners. She also began to express discontent with their current compositional effort. Finally, her band mate Mina prompted the followed interaction:

Mina: Valerie, why are you embarrassed? I know it's a lame song but why are you embarrassed?

Valerie: [inaudible] Anyway, it's just embarrassing.

Mina: I know, but it's what we came up with.

Valerie: Mina...it's like we go like this [silly dance] in front of little kids. [Silly singing]

In response, Mina broached the idea of writing down alternate ideas:

Mina: Can we please just write a little song...Cause this song [the veggies song]...we would not be singing this at a rock concert. We'd probably sing this at a little kids concert--know like 'Tater Tots'. Know that? It's a symphony for kids.

Figure 5-17: Veggie song by Face the Sparkles

The musical score consists of three systems, each with a voice part and a violin part. The voice parts are in treble clef, and the violin parts are in treble clef. The lyrics are written below the voice staves.

System 1:
Voice: You got me rock-in and a rol - lin rock - in it's a real po - ta - to to to ta_
Violin: (rest)

System 2:
Voice: _ ta ta to tom-a to to to ta ta ta to je - e lo lo lo la_
Vln. (rest)

System 3:
Voice: _ la la lo Win-ter squash got all o - ver my ba - by sis-ter's face Hey!
Vln. (rest)

In an interview Valerie explained the conflict as follows:

Valerie. I think all of them think that we can't do love songs or something 'cause we are 4th graders or I don't know...

Matt. So you were kind of pushing to do something different?

Valerie. I was trying a little bit because I felt like...that it kind of sounds like something that we would make up when we were four or something so... I don't know.

A similar resistance to “Kiddie” music emerged in a lyric writing session of *Third Dimension*:

Dede: Actually if we talk about animals, this would be good.

Aisha: Animals is so lame.

Dede: No, around the world.

Aisha: That's like a baby song, Dede. [Gina starts singing the “Eye of the Tiger”]

Dede: That's not a baby song!

Aisha: Unless you talk about one specific animal throughout the whole song...Like Katy Perry's Roar.

For these groups it was critical to delineate a boundary between their “mature” musical creations and the children’s music that they had known in their younger years. The children in this study fit Bickford’s (2011) descriptions of “tweens” (a mix of “teen” and “in between”)—they had neither fully grown out of childhood or fully embraced the complexity of adulthood. As far as the music industry is concerned, however, children in the upper elementary years tip the scale

into adulthood and are thus targeted as consumers for a great deal of mature pop, whether in the form of Disney pop idols, Kidz Bop (sanitized versions of adult songs), or the songs they hear straight off of Top 40 radio. It is not surprising then, that with the accelerated maturation of musical tastes prompted by market forces, the participants in this study were looking *up* the developmental ladder for musical inspiration, and actively trying to separate themselves from what lay below.

Breakups and Breakdowns

Not surprisingly, as groups moved through the treacherous terrain of age delineations, gender dynamics, genre definitions and ability discrepancies, (all equipped with different prior experiences and preferences), their trajectories unfolded in ways that were both turbulent and irregular. In some cases these variables collided to create a perfect storm of conflict, leading to the breakup of a band. In other cases, groups experienced an interplay of plateaus, peaks, and valleys—moving through jolts of compositional intensity, periods of stagnation, and moments of rapid renewal. The anecdotes that follow convey the unpredictable nature of each band’s progress through the 15 fifteen weeks, seeking to highlight patterns in the movement of the groups over time.

Getting in the “Same Key”: The Collapse of Gravity

The band Gravity (composed of Jared, Jason, James, Fay and Eva) seemed poised for success. Two of the boys had substantial instrumental skill: James was an experienced violinist who played with the youth symphony; Jason had played classical piano for five years. One of the girls (Eva) had experience on guitar, and both of the girls enjoyed singing pop-styled tunes. On

Fay: No, stop when I'm singing--it doesn't work!

Figure 5-20: Gravity song (minor version)

The musical score for 'Gravity' (minor version) consists of three staves. The top staff is for the Voice, with the lyrics 'Gra - vi-ty it pu - ulls me - e down_ while I'm try-ing to get there'. The middle staff is for the Violin, playing a continuous eighth-note pattern. The bottom staff is for the Piano, with a right-hand part playing chords and a left-hand part playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

The next week the band members discussed their discomfort with the minor progression in the following dialogue (it is notable that I was not present for this conversation, and that the members of the band never raised these issues to me directly):

[Jason plays minor chords]

Jared: We're not doing that anymore.

Jason: It was the “Wrecking Ball” thing [reference to a Miley Cyrus song]

Jared: That's not the “Wrecking Ball.”

Jason: It's the piano in back of “Wrecking ball” [Jason plays chords again]

Jared: No!

Jason: No, Matt actually made me do that for the piano, but I don't think he knew...[that it was from Miley Cyrus]

Fay: That it was like a “Wrecking Ball” thingy...well don't use it!

Clearly there was something about this correlation with a known (and possibly disliked) popular song, or perhaps with the overall sound that these chords conveyed, that was not resonating with their burgeoning collective vision for the band. At this point James and Jason began to retreat back to the original major progression, and the run-throughs with the vocals became disastrous:

Jared: You know what, I think we have this part done.

Fay: No we don't—we sound terrible together.

Eva: It keeps falling out of tune. [Argument ensues]

Jason: Shut up shut up shut up shut up. Jon and I are going to practice with no interference. [Jason and James play the major progression from the first day. Squabbling follows. People shouting about how Ella needs to sing “higher”]

Eva: Singing is meant to change piano chords—I can't change my singing, it's easier to change piano chords, or violin chords.

[Falling apart. Matt entering. Lots of questions. Matt trying to get Eva to match with the beat.]

Jared: Guys, can we stop this whole process and move on to something different? The song we're trying to do is too hard. Let's get rid of...it would be way more fun if we had other things like little instruments...

By the following week, the process of *Gravity* had dissolved into a constant argument, and the possibility of making forward progress was seeming increasingly remote. Teacher intervention

was also proving to be futile, as my attempts to find a middle ground between their different musical ideas were quickly set aside in the flurry of debate:

[Jared, James, and Jason discussing how hard it is to work with the singers]

James: It so hard to change the key, but it sounds so much better if we change the key.

Jared: Like Sapphire and Lillian are working so well together because they only have piano and that [full on argument! Everyone overlapping. Can't hear individual voices]

Jared: No--we're getting rid of the vocals.

Fay: Then we'll have nothing to do!

Jason: We need to make up a whole new thing?

James: I'll just make up something on the violin and then you play the chords [long pause of inactivity. Stalemate] We can change it...

Jason: We quit!

The next week (the seventh week of the project), *Gravity* had reached the breaking point. With me serving as mediator, a tense discussion led to the agreement that the three boys would form their own trio (the 3 *J*'s), and the two girls would join *Moose Named Yak* (they had apparently already discussed this possibility with Sarina and Liana). Part of this discussion offered some clues into what caused *Gravity* to break up:

Fay: I think part of the problem is, we all feel like "I don't want to do this" when we're with this group, which just makes us feel very inflexible.

Jared: We all have super different ideas.

In an interview with James, I tried to dig deeper into what had really caused the break up:

Matt: So can you tell me a little bit about what happened with that group?

James: Well, the things that we were playing were in a different key and we were like arguing about everything and it wasn't really working well as... like their song was... their lyrics were in a different key from our song.

Matt: So that was the main thing that you were disagreeing about? Was the key? Like you think if the lyrics moved to the key you guys were playing in, would that have fixed it, or was it something else?

James: I don't know if... I think it was like... I don't know.

As mentioned previously, James was quite a skilled violinist who played with the youth symphony, and presumably the mechanical issue of getting two ideas into the same key would not have been an insurmountable challenge for him. Additionally, there was a great deal of teacher support that was being offered toward bringing the musical ideas into alignment. As I wrote in my journal after the third week:

If it was just an issue of musical obstacles (i.e. getting in the same key literally), then teacher guidance would have solved the problem. I offered numerous strategies for overcoming those obstacles. Clearly there was something more going on here... They are unable to uncover what is truly holding them back—at opposite ends of a rope, trying to run in opposite directions!

Perhaps the idea of “getting in the same key” was a metaphor for a larger issue: That is the inability to find a shared definition of their sound. And in the absence of collective identity, they were unable to move forward toward a collective action, and thus they broke up. Being “out of key” in the metaphorical sense was a fundamental issue—such that merely addressing technical details such as chord progressions were insufficient to move the group forward. The band members were “out of tune” with each other from early on in the process, and in some ways it seemed that on the descent into the break-up, the band members were merely acting out what they saw to be inevitable. Perhaps James and Jason, as classically-trained instrumentalists, were having difficulty reconciling their playing with the pop vocal styling that Eva and Fay were offering; or perhaps Eva and Fay were having trouble bringing their melodic ideas (composed in with a slower, ballad-like sensibility) into correspondence with the male instrumentalists, whose percussive chords were edging toward a faster sort of “rock” sound. Interestingly, once the boys became the 3 J’s, they created a slower, classically-styled piece—indicating that the collective identity that they established as a trio was quite distinct from the identity they were working to create in the original quintet.

It is impossible to ignore gender in this case. There was a clear divide through the process, with the girls becoming vocalists and the boys instrumentalists. Even Jared, who moved between the two sides in his self-proclaimed role as manager, was beginning to take over the guitar part that Eva had originally contributed. In this gendered divide that emerged, it was clearly the vocal part that was so divisive. As mentioned previously, the presence of vocals seemed to be a polarizing factor for so many of the groups. It stands to reason that if *Gravity* had managed to stay together, they might have only been able to find some sort of common ground in

an instrumental piece.

The Break up of Miracle

A similarly gendered conflict over vocals led to the break up of the band *Miracle* on the third week of the project. After the lone female member Liana had removed herself from the rest of the group (Rory, Derek, and Nigel), I intervened to see what was wrong. She shared that the boys had been looking in her songwriting journal and “making fun” of some of the words she had written. With encouragement, she returned to the group to share her ideas, prompting the following exchange:

Liana: So this is a song I was working on [Liana demos her song. A slow “singer-songwriter” style ballad. Strumming C and G chords on the ukulele. Singing: "However far away"... "When we're together"... "Every night I glide across the ocean." Boys clapping at the end (an excerpt of the song is included in figure 5-21)]

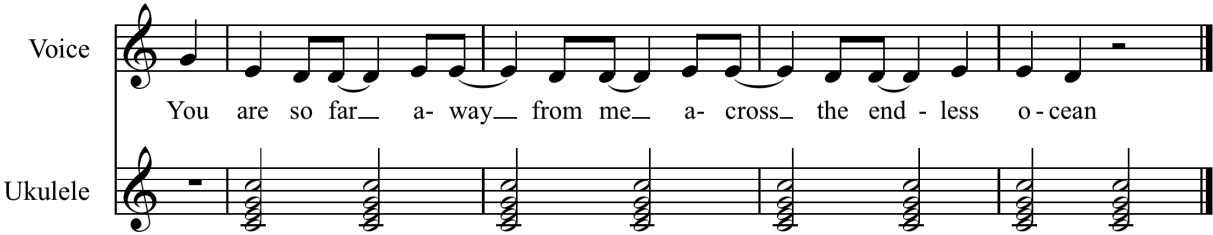
Rory: Um...I think we could put that in here.

Derek: Yes...Even though that was a lot longer than ours

Rory: I'm not sure I could keep doing that [drumming] THAT long, I mean your hands do get...really sore.

Nigel: Anyway, I can't play the saxophone that long, so I won't be...

Figure 5-21: Liana’s song idea



Despite the boys attempts at politeness following Liana’s demonstration, their expressions and glances during her performance spoke volumes about their discomfort with the “love song” subject matter, the slow tempo, and the poetic lyrics (this was corroborated in the interviews later). The musical direction that Liana was proposing was completely at odds with the faster, beat-driven instrumental idea that the boys had been discussing in her absence. Like *Gravity*, they were “in different keys” with respect to their visions for the collective trajectory, and the irreconcilable nature of this divide led to a band break-up on the third week. Though the issue of vocals had been so divisive when Liana was in the band, after she left to form *Moose Name Yak* with Sirena, the new collective identity that took shape with the three remaining boys allowed for a new vocal direction, and Rory became the group’s “rapper.”

Reinventing the Wheel: The Importance of Drafting

In my interview with James, I posed a hypothetical question about his group *Gravity*: “What if I had said ‘no, you guys can’t split up--you guys have to stick together and work.’ What would you guys have done?” His response was as follows:

James: I think we would have started over.

Matt: And you think there would have been some compromise that could've happened there?

James: Yeah, I think that everybody said if we can't split up then we'll just start over cause our song is sort of like... We were all arguing and it wasn't sitting together so we were just kind of like, let's start over.

This idea of “starting over” was an integral part of children’s process through the course of this project. Though most of the bands were not stretched to the point of breaking like *Gravity* and *Miracle*, there were countless instances where it became necessary to cast aside previous ideas and set off in a new direction. In my role as a teacher, this was quite a vexing phenomenon. I would work so hard to support the student groups in the development of their ideas, that their decisions to change course sometimes felt like a tremendous step backward. After supporting the band *Third Dimension* over the course of several weeks in the pursuit of harmonic, melodic and rhythmic correspondence between their ideas, they shifted in a whole new direction, prompting the following journal entry:

In Gina, Dede and Aisha’s group, there was a bit of backtracking. I thought the melody and chords were set for the chorus, but they were totally reworking the melody. Where it once was simple and perfectly aligned with the chords (due to my help), it was becoming more melismatic and virtuosic, but not fitting so well with the chords. My assumption of straight line trajectories is obviously false. I’ve been trying to establish ‘base camps’ along the way, so that they can continually work from higher and higher points until they reach the summits. What seems more intuitive to them however, is a bit of

acclimatizing—descending below their present height in order to strengthen their direction. Hopefully this analogy holds, and their ability to thrive in the final summit push will be strengthened by all these regressions!

What emerged from these encounters was an interesting interaction between teacher intervention and collective identity formation. So often I was trying to rush the groups in their process toward a finished product. I would hear an idea or a combination of ideas emerge from a group and, seeing the potential for development, I would attempt to crystallize these into something that the group could move forward to the finish line. At times I was perplexed (as in the case of *Gravity*) when these suggestions were discarded or ignored. What I did not understand at the time was that the process of collective identity formation was not to be rushed. I had not yet grasped that an amalgamation of ideas had to represent the collective vision of all individuals involved; if it did not, no amount of scaffolding or “selling” an idea could convince the group to embrace it. The attainment of a shared vision was not something that was easily “sped” along through adult intervention; rather it needed to evolve organically, through fits and starts, and through a succession of “new beginnings.” This echoes the conceptualization of collective identity as something that is “invented, created, reconstituted, or cobbled together” (Snow, 2001, p. 5)—a messy, time-consuming process that I had neither imagined nor allowed time for in my previous facilitation of small group composition.

Face the Sparkles

The process of evolving toward a shared definition was particularly apparent for the group *Face the Sparkles*, composed of three girls (Inga, Mina, and Valerie) and one boy

(Michael). Initially this group mostly explored different sound effects, using instruments like chimes, shakers, guiros, and a rain stick to cast the image of a beach, inserting the refrain “Face...The...Sparkles” at random intervals. It wasn’t until the fourth week of the project, when Inga brought in her violin, that they came together in any unified way. This transcript captures the moment of the breakthrough:

Inga: Is it supposed to sound like a country song? [plays the a riff on the violin]

Michael: That's like real country.

Mina: That's ok, we can do a song about potatoes...[Conversation starts about squash, bananas...others coming to hear Iska's violin. She is hesitant to play, finally does.]

Valerie: "You got a rockin' and a rollin', rockin' it's a real...potato-to-to-to-to-to"

Inga: [singing and along with her violin] Winter squash went all over my baby sister's face. [others join]

Mina: This is kind of random we should probably do it like—

Valerie: No it's a vegetable song!

The vegetable song drew upon the chorus to the Regents’ song “Barbara Ann,” which Valerie had been singing to herself prior to the interaction above. It is notable that these children found inspiration in a popular song from a half-century ago, a fact that certainly highlights the disparate sonic origins of the “songs in their heads” (Campbell, 2010) and the important influence of shared listening experiences with parents (i.e. Custodero, Britto & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Roulston, 2006) and perhaps even grandparents in this case. Regardless of its origin, the vegetable tune prompted a whirlwind of lyric writing. It seemed that there was a mutual investment among band mates in moving this idea forward, as I noted in my journal: “There

strong examples of the collective process are demonstrated here—almost like the song is growing independent of the individual songwriters.” After two weeks the “Veggies” song had taken shape, complete with three verses, a chorus, violin accompaniment, and drum accents (see figure 5-17 for notation).

On the following week (the sixth week of the project) a total breakdown occurred, as I described in my journal:

They are clearly at a standstill—after the whirlwind of productivity, they are now faced with a sort of identity crisis. Conversation is characterized by 'diversions' and efforts to get 'back on track', but the musical interludes are pointing them in a very different direction away from the veggie song.

One might imagine a “break down” as an explicit conversation about the need to change directions, but this is not all what occurred for *Face the Sparkles*. Rather, as illustrated in the transcript that follows (and as referenced briefly in a previous section), it was a series of subtle musical interjections and comments that emanated (while they were still working on the veggie song), which eventually led to a confrontation and a change in course:

[Mina and Valerie singing “I Would” by *One Direction*]

Inga: That has nothing to do with veggies or fruit.

Valerie: I know, but I like it—It's cool.

[Valerie sings veggies song half-heartedly, then switches into another pop song]

Michael: Let's go—we've wasted 14 minutes.

Mina: Valerie, that's enough!

Michael: That's so annoying.

Valerie: But it's such a good song! Don't accuse *One Direction*.

[Someone singing a parody of “Thriller” with the word “graffiti”]

Valerie: But we can't do that.

[Multiple voices singing now, with different ideas intertwined: “Veggies,” “I Would,” and “Thriller” all happening at once—then switching into “Don't Stop Believin”]

Inga: Guys, we are getting nothing done!

Valerie: Hard rock—I love it. Have you ever heard the song “Teenagers,” it's such a good song!

Inga: Look at the time—we've spent like half an hour doing nothing.

Michael: We've wasted 23 minutes.

Mina: You know that song “Life is a Highway” [Mina and Valerie sing] We could write a song about our favorite Disney movies.

Inga: No guys we are not doing that!

Valerie: Awesome idea Mina.

Inga: Guys we are not doing that...Valerie—Is there a way I can make you stop?

Valerie: Singing One Direction?

Inga: Yeah.

Valerie: No.

[Mina sings “Finding Nemo he loves mangos!” (starting to bridge toward new ideas)]

Inga: We are not doing that.

Mina: Can we please just write a little song...Cause this song [veggies]...We would not be singing this at a rock concert. We'd probably sing this at a little kids concert--know like 'Tater Tots'. Know that? It's a symphony for kids.

Michael: Yeah, well you want to sing about Cinderella?

Valerie: Yeah I do!

Inga: Can we not do this?

Valerie: We're just writing it down ok? Chill.

The frequent comments of “we’re wasting time” from Inga and Michael mirrored the same assumption I had made about progress needing to proceed in a linear direction. The frequent musical references, however, asserted a clear discontentment about the path they were on, and highlighted the need to instead spend their time on reassessing the fundamental elements of the song they wanted to create. These interjections from pop songs, though appearing to be a distraction from the “real” task at hand, ended up defining the task at hand. Even as the group members continued to scribble down ideas in the vein of Disney characters, the frequent singing and humming of *One Direction*, prompted a sort of stylistic merging of their emerging song with the sonic characteristics of their pop idols.

Though this interaction constituted a break down for *Face the Sparkles*, in no way were they starting from scratch. The following week, as they were furiously writing lyrics for a renewed, pop-infused idea, I wrote in my journal:

For the first time since the veggie song, they are all working on the same thing at once. Collective functioning was already established with the first veggie song, now they are humming along again (the first songs could be seen as exercises necessary to solidify

group identity and allow for subsequent success). I wonder if this restart was really all about the group finding its identity. They had to explore genres, instrumentation, etc. before they could land on their true trajectory.

Later, after they had undergone another breakdown, restarting with a soaring anthem about “stars in the night” (which only came together on the thirteenth week of the project, just in time for the culminating performance and recording), I continued with my reflection on their process:

My take is that they so thrived on the “high” of creating (putting to use the collaborative machinery they had worked so hard to assemble), that they would experience a “letdown” every time a song neared completion. Rather than focusing on polishing the initial song ideas, they used each song as a stepping stone of sorts to reach to the next level. As such they weren’t necessarily climbing toward higher “musical” results, but they were reaching for higher levels of “collectivity.”

Though *Face the Sparkles* did not follow any straight line trajectory of musical progress, they took from this project much more than I ever could have imagined: Rather than simply learning how to write a song, they learned to “become a band” that could write songs together. For them, and all of the student-formed bands, learning how to forge this common purpose and common process was much of the work of this project—certainly it represented the cutting edge of the learning curve for a vast majority of the participants.

Race and Ethnicity Questions

Issues around race and ethnicity were difficult to pinpoint in this study, as they were seldom explicit and were usually entangled with other factors such as musical ability and gender. Eleven of the participants in this study were students of color. Of these children, five were mixed-race with one Caucasian parent: Aisha's father was black Jamaican while her mother was white; Nigel's father was African American and his mother was white; Rachel's mother was Japanese American and her father was white; Ajay's father was Pilipino while his mother was white; Martin's father was Mexican and his mother was white. Four of the children were non-mixed-race: Ivanna's parents were Mexican-American; Sabreen's parents were Ethiopian-American; Melissa's parents were Chinese-American; Mackenzie's parents were Korean-American. Two of the children—Angela and Shelly—were adopted from China by white parents. Negotiations of racial identity were potentially quite complex for these students. For one, they inhabited an educational climate at Alder Park that was white-normative, with an almost entirely Caucasian faculty. This is fitting with the experience of students of color in the broader picture of American education (Picower, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2001), and is the source of a frequent disconnect between their home and school lives. Mixed-race children are often faced with tensions surrounding their racial ambiguity (Dalmage, 2000), with the quagmire of the loaded “what are you?” question complicating their school experiences. Children in trans-racial adoptions can also experience tensions between their apparent racial identity and the cultural norms and understandings gleaned from their parents and communities (Westhues & Cohen, 1998).

These issues were difficult to discern within the present study. This may be because, according to Cross's (1978) five-stage model of racial identity development, these children were in the first stage of "pre-encounter," summarized by Tatum (2004) as the following:

In the first stage, the individual absorbs many of the beliefs and values of the dominant White culture, including the idea that it is "better" to be White. Simply as a function of being socialized in a Eurocentric culture, the role models, life-styles, and value systems of the dominant group may be more highly valued than those of one's own cultural group, and the person may seek to assimilate and be accepted by Whites. The personal and social significance of one's racial group membership has not yet been realized.

The subsequent stages—encounter, immersion/emersion, internalization, and internalization-commitment—are found to typically occur between adolescence and early adulthood (Cross, 1978). As such, the participants in this study were not yet actively grappling with their racial identity, but rather were internalizing the white-normative structures of their surroundings. The fact that Alder Park elementary was populated almost exclusively by white teachers and white students, combined with the fact that the majority of the students of color had one white parent, meant that these dominant-culture structures were inescapable for the participants in the study—forming the proverbial air that they breathed. In working to form a collective identity with a group of peers, they were less asserting their particular racial and cultural identities, and more reflecting the cultural norms of the school community and the broader ethos of wealthy, white Seattle.

Nonetheless, there were instances that ever-so-slightly hinted at racially or culturally-driven tensions, which suggested a possible cross over into the “encounter” stage of racial identity development (Cross, 1978). In the band Miracle, the word “racist” emerged in the confrontation about the butcher (described earlier in this chapter). Though it is an apparent misuse of the term, there are hints of a possible underlying racially-driven tension. The confrontation between Nigel (mixed-race African American and Caucasian) and Rory and Derek (both white) unfolded as follows:

Rory: Which song are we going to use? ‘cause I have like ten in here and they're all kind of okay.

Derek: Okay, let's use the “Fronut” [an earlier draft of a song about a donut with an afro] and the first song. [called “School’s Out]

Rory: No, how are we going to smooch the Fronut and the first song—

Nigel: Guys, don't use the butcher, we don't need it.

Derek and Rory: Yes we do.

Nigel: You know it's kind of offensive.

Derek: How is it offensive?

Rory: I give up!

Derek: No, how is it offensive?

Nigel: It's offensive.

Rory: To vegetarians?

Nigel: Obviously, thank you Rory. My brother is a vegetarian.

Rory: Is he going to be listening to this?

Nigel: Obviously he is.

[Indiscernible comment about who some other vegetarians are]

Derek: Oh my god, you are really good at finding out how things are racist for people, 'cause I have no idea how that is...ask your mom if that's racist, or offensive to vegetarians.

Nigel: I have a brother...It's obvious that it's offensive to any vegetarian.

Rory: I'll call Grafton [unclear reference] on the phone and sing that and see what he thinks...Anyway, so the last verse is [Moving on, ignoring. Singing the verse]

Derek: That's not racist. Or it's not racist to vegetarians.

Rory: Vegetarian is not a race dude.

Derek: Tell me how it's offensive. Not that it's obvious, but how it is? Like how is that limiting them, how is that saying bad things about them.

Rory: Oh ignore that, ok? We're just going to keep bowling right on with this song.

As discussed before, musical ability was certainly a factor here. The conversations and interactions that followed highlighted Nigel's rhythmic limitations and the extent to which these drove his ability to form a collective identity with his bandmates. And yet, based on the transcript above it is possible to glimpse another underlying factor in the tension. Perhaps Nigel was beginning to confront the racial discrepancies between himself and the world that surrounded him. Perhaps this is what caused him to retreat from the group for so many weeks leading up to the confrontation. Perhaps he did not have the language to express the disequilibrium that he was experiencing, and the "butcher" became a proxy for the incongruity he felt with his partners.

A similar tension may have been underfoot in the band Third Dimension. Recall the conversation between Aisha (mixed-race African American and Caucasian) and Gina and Dede (both white):

Aisha: We each have really different expectations for the song.

Dede: And voices.

Aisha: I thought we were going to do like a pop song.

Gina: My expectation is that it would be a pop song.

Aisha: Like you hear on the radio...Soulful and cheerful, but it's also pop.

Dede: Gina the voice that you just said is like a sassy voice, and we shouldn't do it.

Gina: Aisha you ok?

Alicia: Nobody agrees with me with anything about this song right now.

Dede: I was like that in the beginning with that We Will Rock You idea, and I was like "this will not work with this band!"

Aisha: I think it's the exact opposite of what I was thinking for this band.

It is also possible that race and cultural background contributed to the discontentment expressed by Isobel (Mexican American) and Shanice (Ethiopian American) in the band Enough Said. Recall the interaction that took place on the periphery of a treacherous rehearsal:

Alicia: You're just like talking through the whole thing.

Isobel: It's boring. I don't really like this.

Shanice: We told you to put some lyrics in there but you all said no, right?

Given the transcripts gathered in this research, however, these assertions of racially-driven tensions are speculative at best. In each of these interactions, the very subtle hints at race are overshadowed by clearly emergent themes of musical ability, gender, genre, and vocal considerations. Further research will be needed to untangle race and ethnicity from other dimensions of collective identity formation in small group composition with this age group.

Collective Conclusions: Coalescing as Bandmates

Though the groups of two to five students I've described from this study are a far cry from the large-scale social movements in the sociological literature, the results indicate that it may be possible to achieve some level of collective identity at this micro-level and in the somewhat contrived scenario of this project. Certainly, the sociological framework of collective identity provides a rich lens for viewing the complex web of social and musical activity that unraveled over the span of three months. In many ways, the navigation of collective identity defined the processes of the groups: For some, the impossibility of attaining it defined their demise; for others, the necessity of attaining it defined their renewal. The concept also provides a shared space for seamlessly integrating factors that are both musical and non-musical—musical ability alongside social pressures; genre considerations alongside gender dynamics—allowing for a more holistic conceptualization than has often been applied to a compositional project of this nature. Additionally, by recognizing “the experience of collective action itself as a fertile seed-bed for the generation of collective identities” (Snow, 2001, p. 6), the collective identity framework also accounts for the emerging quality of many of the outcomes described in this chapter.

Ultimately, through the process of developing oneness with their groups, participants in this project were attempting to produce new definitions of themselves and their peers, “integrating the past and the emerging elements of the present into the unity and continuity of a collective body” (Melucci, 1995, p. 49). For many of the children, this meant gaining a new level of understanding of their interactions with their band mates. As Gina concluded about her work with *Third Dimension*:

We'll take away a better friendship and a better point of view and we'll definitely think about the phrase whenever we do groups: "don't judge a book by its cover". Because Dede is a really nice girl and I know her as a friend, not as a musician—a band member...Because like before we didn't really...well I knew Dede and I knew Aisha, but I didn't know them together... After a couple of weeks we started to get more as a group and we started to build up our song and then we kind'a changed our whole point of view.

Similar conclusions emerged from many of the children in the interviews. Michael summarized his main takeaway as “getting to know my band mates a lot better.” Even where previous friendships were involved, the process of forming a band required a whole new level of collectivity and mutual understanding, as expressed by Dominic:

Dominic: Well I kind of picked someone I knew—like one of my friends because I thought it would be easier to do a song with them...But I guess it doesn't really make a difference, you just don't know...

Matt: Do you think you got to know Mark a lot better from doing this project?

Dominic: Yeah.

Matt: You guys have spent a lot of time together and you were trying to make all of those decisions along the way too.

Dominic: It's a bumpy road.

Matt: Yes a bumpy road but in the end you get to where you're going, right?

Dominic: Yeah.

This interaction, which prompted the title of the eventual album, reflected the unique experience of forming a band and the heightened levels of mutual understanding that are required in the process. Derek also summarized this idea in the following exchange:

Matt: Is it important to work with people you disagree with—people that are challenging?

Derek: Well I mean...you have to know them well before you actually... You need to know well...you can't just form a band with people you don't know.

Implicit in Derek's statement is the notion that "forming a band" is not a guaranteed outcome of composing in a group. Before a collection of individuals can start to compose meaningfully, in a way that resonates across a shared fabric of social and musical understanding, there is a prerequisite for building a mutual platform for joint action, and a collective sense of purpose. Such outcomes, which occurred to varying degrees for the groups in this project, represent the essence of collective identity, and the core of what separated these children from their typical school experience, as is elaborated in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 6: Distinctions and Takeaways

The Project in the Context of Alder Park Elementary

One of the principal thrusts of this research project, established in the opening chapters, was to investigate the *unique* collaborative potentials of a small group composition project, and such is the focus of this chapter: In the highly collaborative context of Alder Park Elementary, what was it that “stood out” about the process of forming a musical group and composing an original song? For one, the process of forging a collective identity with a group of peers—determining musical roles, coalescing around a sound or genre, and evolving toward a final product—emerged as singular and distinct amidst the educational experiences of the student participants. Perhaps this why Dominic responded as follows to the question “what will you take away from this project”:

Dominic: Like teamwork...it actually shows how hard teamwork can be at times.

Matt: Do you think it's been harder working with a team in this case than other times that you worked with a team?

Dominic: This is one of the hardest.

This response, and other similar statements expressed in the student interviews, reflects several unique aspects of collective identity formation and the participants' experience of this project:

- The large scope and open-ended nature of the project
- The dual means—both musical and verbal—of establishing a platform for shared action
- The focus on a collectively-shared product

- The democratic nature of musical performance

The following discussion explores these themes, attempting to delineate The Bumpy Road from the broader happenings at Alder Park Elementary and highlight what such a project might uniquely offer to the larger enterprise of schooling.

The Matters of Scope and Freedom

As mentioned previously, the timeline of one hour per week for twelve weeks was unprecedented for a project of this nature with this age group. When I asked students to distinguish this project from others they had experienced in the classroom, several did mention the length of time as a unique feature. Surprisingly however, the length of time was never identified as a challenge. Not once did a participant express that they wished they could “just be done,” or that the project could just be wrapped up sooner. To the contrary, the overwhelming response was “we don’t have enough time,” or “we only have five weeks left!”

The remarkable endurance and perseverance displayed by the students was not unique to this project, but rather reflects a school culture that embraces prolonged, in-depth threads of academic inquiry. Through interviews, observations of broader school happenings, and review of curriculum documents, I uncovered that in fact the songwriting project—though longer than average in scope—was not entirely unique in terms of time frame. During the year of the study, the same students were deep into an investigation of theater in their classrooms, helping to create scripts based off of Greek mythology, designing sets, and putting on plays for the annual school Theme Fair. This process, woven through interdisciplinary study, was spread out over the course of about eight months. The previous year, younger children in second and third grades (age 7-9)

went deep into an exploration of toy design, designing toy products over many months to meet the desired specifications of a peer-turned-client. In the year following the study, third and fourth graders (age 8-10) embarked on a study of photography that also spanned much of the school year.

Amidst such a school program, the three month-long composition project was not unique in its timespan, nor did it pose a particular challenge to students' attention spans. What was perhaps a bit unique was the singular format of activity throughout the three months—the classroom examples just mentioned were usually much more segmented, shifting the format of activities according to different layers of the projects. In this way, much of students' previous work might be characterized as disparate threads of activity unified around a singular focus of inquiry. They were used to focusing on a theme or concept for a sustained period, but maintaining the same *process* for three months was a fairly new experience.

More than the span of time, what truly separated the songwriting project from classroom activity was the degree of freedom and openness. The sole structure of “form a group and create a song” stood in stark contrast to the projects that the participants had taken on elsewhere. For example, the process of creating plays began with a teacher-chosen read aloud book and proceeded through a series of teacher-scaffolded steps. The vision and structure for the play project had been to a degree already determined in teacher planning meetings, and the role of the students was to participate in pieces of the process. In contrast, the participants in the project under study were charged with creating the very structure within which they would work. In a sense they were planning their own curriculum, deciding what they would focus on, what they use, and how they would proceed. Such a process was quite challenging for many of the groups,

and there was a great deal of struggle in the determination of that big picture structure. As I reflected in my journal:

There does seem to be a tendency to get bogged down in the idea generation process. Clearly it's a hard thing to just come up with ideas. This is a product of the open endedness of the project—it took many of the groups three sessions and a lot of support to get an inkling of direction for their music. If I had just offered clear parameters from the start—i.e. composing within a box—this time might not have been necessary. Was the time valuable? I believe it was in terms of allowing kids to freely draw upon the ideas in their heads. In a sense that had to create their own parameters before they could move forward. It strikes me that creating parameters for a project is a much higher level skill than composing within a box. This is why such a process is generally reserved for an adult teacher/expert. If my students were able to do this for themselves—even with significant support from me—then this was a demonstration of high-level thinking and independence.

Not only did participants face the challenge of creating their own structure for musical exploration, but they had to do so in a collaborative context, with a group of peers that they would stay with (in most cases) for over three months. This was unprecedented on multiple levels. First of all, the students had not previously engaged in a sustained collaboration with the same partners for such a length of time. Given this, the process of forming a collective identity with a small group of peers (and all of the accompanying complexities discussed in the previous chapter) was novel for them. They had certainly experienced the formation of collective identity

at the classroom level, with each school year bringing a new configuration of 17 or 18 children, 1 teacher, and 1 resident (assistant) teacher. However, the identities of these more populous collectives were steered to a much greater degree by the teachers, and did not present the same level of opportunities for input (or the same requirement for input—as discussed later in this chapter) from each individual student.

Secondly, the participants had heretofore never experienced such a degree of freedom with respect to group formation and configuration. This conclusion was gleaned from conversations with teachers as well as student interview transcripts such as the following:

Matt: Can you think of a big project where you worked with a group to make something?

Erin: I think the “New, Glue, and Moving On.” [Team-building project for 3rd-5th graders]

Matt: And what did you guys do?

Erin: This year we had to make something that would lift a box. Hopes, skills... and one other thing.

Matt: And how many other people were in your group?

Erin: It was me Phylline, Nigel, Beatrice and Jason.

Matt: And did you guys pick those groups?

Erin: No, the teachers picked.

Matt: And how long were you guys working on that project?

Erin: That was like two or three meetings.

In contrast to such previous group work, the freedom to choose partners, even with parameters in

place like “some gender mixing,” was a unique aspect of this project. Even more than this, the freedom to disband and reform groups (which was neither intentional or anticipated, but rather flowed naturally through the course of the project) emerged as especially unique. In an interview, 4th and 5th grade teacher Deryl expressed his surprise with this flexibility, and went on to reflect on the ramifications:

Deryl: Moving around is something they’re probably not so familiar with—you know having a breakup and splitting up is something that we really don’t let them do too much, so that was probably a newer experience for them. What to do about that and how to make it work, because they don’t necessarily end up in that spot, so that was probably a neat and new learning experience...How to deal with a work group where things fraction out...how do we make it work with the three of us, or who can I join who are already in progress, and how can I make that work. That is unique for our kids, because very little of what they join is mid-process, including admission to the school. You know like something like 95 percent of the kids here start by kindergarten and carry through, so while they are really accepting of new groupings, and they are always pushed into those situations, they’re always with the same folks one way or another.

The freedom that the children had to navigate the groupings, coupled with the freedom to negotiate their own parameters and musical directions, led to an overall package that was far more open and comprehensive than anything they had experienced in school previously. This unprecedented independence certainly required an adjustment period, and in the initial weeks the teacher in me experienced a great deal of discomfort with the amount of “aimless wandering”

that characterized the working environment in my classroom: The laughter, the chatter, the constant switching of instruments, the arguments, and the infrequency of musical coherence—I had to hope that this rampant chaos that had taken over my classroom was all part of a larger trajectory toward fruitful results, but I was not at all certain. By the fourth week I had glimpses that this hope might be justified, and I scribed in my journal a hypothesis that was ultimately confirmed in the analysis:

Perhaps the initial “non-productivity” of groups is really focused on “group building” and finding common vision, and that with those things in place the group is able to more efficiently move forward as a collective.

In subsequent weeks it became clear that wide-open layout of this project, though it had appeared nearly untenable in the opening sessions, was precisely what was allowing this project to stand out from the considerable backdrop of the Alder Park program. The stretch that it offered to me as a teacher and to the students as learners was palpable and sometimes uncomfortable, but it could be seen as a stretch into a higher arena of collaborative functioning and musical negotiation. Though many students struggled with the scope and level of responsibility in this process, ultimately the freedom to collectively set and pursue their own goals emerged as a highlight of the project. For Michael, the freedom meant the opportunity to try out musical possibilities that he had coveted for years:

Matt: Do you wish that I had given your group more direction at the beginning? Or do you think it was good for you guys to get to decide everything by yourselves?

Michael: I liked kind of deciding things for ourselves. That we could make up a song...I've always kind of liked music, especially when I was in the labyrinth. When I first came in here I was like “woah...instruments,” ‘cause there are so many instruments—there was the frog scraper and the drum there's all these things that make different sounds and there are so many possibilities!

For Rachel, having an open and collectively constructed process was both a highlight and an avenue for attaining the best end product:

Matt: So is this project different than other group projects you’ve done at school?

Rachel: Definitely because this is something where there is no real set guidelines...like you have to do this and then this and then this. It's sort of just “make it up as you go along.”

Matt: Do you like that aspect of it?

Rachel: Yes.

Matt: You liked having it pretty open?

Rachel: Yeah, because you can put in a lot of ideas that you want, and other people get to put in ideas, and sometimes you take your ideas and it makes an even better idea, and then you mix it all in and it works.

According to Dominic, the freedom to choose aided the process of becoming a band (or in other words forming a collective identity):

Matt: Do you wish that maybe at the beginning I had said ‘alright so these are the instruments you're going to use this is the kind of song you're going to make’ and just make it a much shorter project or do you think it was valuable to—

Dominic: Well, if it's going to be our kind of song...like it needs to be this hip hop or rap thing, then sure it would be easier, but I think it would be a lot harder for Liana though. And if you said you know Liana's style then I think it would be a lot harder for us.

Matt: Oh you mean it was important for you to be able to kind of choose the genre of a song that you did.

Dominic: It helped.

In other words, the flexibility to choose a direction was part of what allowed groups to negotiate a middle ground that appeased their individual interests and priorities. This was the hard work of collective identity formation, but it was also the heart of the learning process, and one of the key facets that delineated this project from the general education curriculum.

The Beat is the Driver Seat: The Importance of Semantic Grounding

Another aspect that set this project apart pertained to the notion of *grounding*, which draws from language sciences (e.g. Clark & Schaefer, 1989), and refers to the shared knowledge, beliefs and assumptions that enable an interaction to proceed in a mutually productive manner. Baker, Hansen, Joiner & Traum (1999) interfaced language science research with cultural history activity theory (e.g. Vygotsky, 1978; Cole & Engestrom, 1993; Wertsch, 1994) to create a two-tiered conception of grounding: As summarized in chapter two, while *pragmatic* grounding uses language as a medium for orienting interactions, *semantic* grounding occurs “on the level of the

medium itself' (Baker, Hansen, Joiner & Traum, 1999, p. 46). In other words grounding can be achieved not only in the way of verbal discussion, but also in the way of action through the medium. Action in this case referred to the musical utterances, wanderings, rehearsals, and performances that formed the noisy soundtrack of the twelve songwriting sessions. The tension between these two levels of grounding—between verbal and musical conversations—was a major theme of this project, and is illustrated through the stories and encounters that follow.

Shadow's Shadow

The gulf between verbal and musical modes of communication was particularly pronounced for the group Shadow's Shadow. In their first meeting, just as the group members were pulling out instruments and starting to explore, Zachary exclaimed "Guys, let's brainstorm, let's not play music!" Later in the meeting, when the sounds of instruments were starting to overtake the dialogue, he reiterated: "Can we like not play the instruments for a minute and just look at each other and talk?" As his band mate Lucas continued to explore on the keyboard, Zachary took on a more exasperated tone: "Stop touching it. we're never going to get anywhere if we keep playing!" These interactions clearly reflected the assumption that Zachary was bringing to this process based on his previous experiences with collaborative work: If the group was to move forward toward productive results, then there would need to be an organized verbal discussion, and the determination of a master plan, only *then* to be followed by a realization of said plan on musical instruments. In their second meeting, Zachary convinced his partners to commence with a verbal discussion, beginning with the determination of the band name, and followed by a selection of the musical genres that would be represented (it should be noted that

the idea had already emerged to create a “mash-up” of different genres, hence there multiple genres that are chosen in the following conversation):

Lucas: I think we should have a name.

Zachary: Yeah the top priority right now is getting a name.

Lucas: I think we should be the Pink Fluffy Unicorns of Death.

Zachary: What do you want?

Gavin: I'm going to have to have some time I think. Sophie, what do you want?

Shelly: I don't know.

Gavin: I got mine—the Black Panthers.

Lucas: Unicorns of Death!

Shelly: Scary Black Cats.

Zachary: It could be a question, like “Where Are We?”

[laughter]

Lucas: No, “How Did I Get Here?”

Zachary: Yeah that's a good one. Do you want to do that? or...

Gavin: Hmm...I'm fine with that.

Zachary: Let's have a vote. [counts votes] Wait do you want to add one.

Shelly: I was thinking something about black cats, but making it more scary.

Lucas: "How did we get here. A Panther--Aahh!"

Zachary: Yeah, do you want to do that guys? Ok we got our name.

[laughter]

Zachary: That's vote number one. The next vote we need to do is “sort of song.” For the start of the song we either want classic or scary.

Lucas: Classic.

Shelly: Scary.

Zachary: Or...

Gavin: Disco.

Zachary: Disco.

Lucas: No dramatic.

Zachary: Yeah, dramatic.

Shelly: Dramatic is kind of scary.

[others singing jaws theme]

Zachary: And suspense.

Lucas: And then we should go right into disco and— [sings high notes]

Zachary: I totally agree—I think we should do...let me put these in order. These are the ones we are going to include in our song. Do you guys agree with that?

Shelly: Yeah.

Zachary: Classic, scary, disco, dramatic and suspense.

Shelly: Yeah, but we need the order.

Zachary: I think suspense should be first, we should have it be suspenseful and then break into something funner.

Lucas: No we should also have rock.

Zachary: One, that's going to be our first. Now dramatic, we should do that later. So then disco is next.

[Others express agreement]

Zachary: And then what's next? Dramatic scary or classic?

Gavin: Classic.

Zachary: No but we shouldn't go from disco to classic.

Shelly: We should go to scary or dramatic.

Zachary: Let's go to dramatic.

Shelly: OK.

Zachary: Then scary, and then classic.

Gavin: No guys, then we should—

Shelly: It should end on—

Lucas: Then we should—

Shelly: If we end on scary it will be kind of like a cliff hanger, and if we end on classic it'll be like a happy ending.

Zachary: So then we'll go scary is four and five is—

Shelly: If you want a cliff hanger we can do scary last. Who wants a cliff hanger? Raise your hand.

Zachary: Oh, ok. We're going to do a cliff hanger. So this meeting is being much more productive!

Lucas: And guys, we should have right in between here we should have—

Zachary: Random breakdown.

Gavin: No random break with cricket sounds.

Zachary: Yeah, ok.

Gavin: And then a kid talking.

[And then off they go]

Zachary's statement of "this meeting is being much more productive!" captures the energy of the group in this session. There is a sense that they've broken through the roadblocks that held them back in the first meeting. If this were a project in their classrooms, perhaps they would be lauded for their organization, focused discussion, and democratic decision-making process. There was clear leadership (Zachary), but there was also an effort to include everyone's voices, and to arrive at decisions that were mutually agreeable. Through these processes they were able to develop a "master plan" in a relatively short timespan. With this plan in place, Shadow's Shadow seemed poised (at least in the typical sense of collaborative work) for an efficient completion of the project, perhaps needing only to delegate the different sections, assemble these in teams, and compile them into the final product. Such a trajectory certainly intimates a successful collaborative process—high functioning from the perspective of the classroom or the boardroom—and points to the years of practice with group work that these children have experienced at Alder Park Elementary School.

By the third meeting of Shadow's Shadow, however, it became clear that this was neither the classroom nor the boardroom, and that in the context of this creative musical space such tried-and-true collaborative processes were falling flat. Despite sincere efforts to realize the master plan, the group's exploration on instruments kept tugging in different directions. Zachary's attempts to "micro-manage" the different sections of the imagined song became increasingly muffled beneath the cacophony of instrumental wanderings. Though the group was *pragmatically* grounded, with a solid verbal plan in place, there was as of yet no *semantic* ground to stand on. That is, on the level of the medium itself—the musical level—they had reached no

consensus or common vision (nor had they had much in the way of meaningful interactions at this point). There was no common understanding of what the terms “disco,” “classic,” or “scary” really meant and how those translated into a musical medium, and hence these ideas held no traction in the interactions that followed.

By the fourth meeting, the original master plan had dissolved, and the group had begun to orient around a series of syncopated piano chords that Zachary and Lucas co-developed. Gavin and Shelly found their way onto metallophones, and with teacher support they added a melodic line. Zachary tried to learn some ukulele chords to accompany but then landed on a bass xylophone, where he learned some broken chords to accompany the main progression. In later sessions a second section emerged, and significant teacher support was needed to both generate musical ideas and bring them into correspondence.

Figure 6-1: Excerpt of Shadow’s Shadow final song “Elevator Music 1”

The image displays two systems of musical notation for the song "Elevator Music 1". Each system consists of three staves: Alto Metallophone (top), Bass Xylophone (middle), and Keyboard (bottom). The top staff uses a treble clef and contains a melodic line with eighth and quarter notes. The middle staff also uses a treble clef and contains a melodic line with quarter notes and rests. The bottom staff uses a bass clef and contains a series of chords, some with dotted rhythms. The second system is a shorter version of the first, ending with a double bar line and repeat dots.

From the point of the third meeting onward, Shadow's Shadow shifted from a dominance of verbal interactions to a dominance of musical interactions, and this shift was a dramatic one. While their verbal processes had been swift and agile, their musical processes were disjointed and sluggish. There were countless attempts to play their ideas together, but quite often their run-throughs would fall apart or dissolve into chaos. Clearly musical ability was a factor here, with fairly limited skill among the group members. On the other hand, all of them had taken some piano lessons, and Zachary had demonstrated his ability to play somewhat complex, intermediate level pieces. What was missing was a solid rhythmic sense—the band members could perform their parts individually, but in collective performance there was a lack of internalized pulse and the parts would quickly fall out of correspondence. Similar to the groups that experienced the “squeaky wheel phenomenon,” rhythmic awareness became a key factor for Shadow's Shadow. Though there was not one outlier or squeaky wheel in their case, the overall loose temporal orientation of the group members was a prescription for musical conversations that were often uncoordinated and incoherent.

The example of Shadow's Shadow clearly highlights the ways in which collaboration on this composition project stood in contrast to the collaborative work students had experienced previously at Alder Park. Their “go to” strategies of planning and task mastering through collective dialogue were ineffective in this case. Though they began to come around increasingly to musical forms of communication in their later practices, it is not clear if they were ever cognizant of this strategy. Even in their last practice, they fell back into a long verbal discussion about adding a vocal part (with Zachary once again taking the lead), and the decision was reached to add a background vocal part that was, in Zachary's words “not really singing...just

kind of blandish, like [da da da].” Following this renewed flurry of verbal activity, Zachary exclaimed “we’ve been productive!” And yet, once again, as this *pragmatic* (verbal) conception was enacted on the *semantic* (musical) level, it quickly lost its luster and dissolved. To the very end this group was grappling with a dissonance between their previous notions of collaborative functioning and the needs of this particular project. There was a feeling that they “should” be successful given all the familiar collective machinery that they were putting in place, and yet the results of this machinery were consistently being “lost in translation” to the musical medium. This was a disappointment for some of the group members—that in the end their performance on stage was not a reflection of their high-functioning, fluid verbal conversations, but rather showcased their somewhat clumsy and confused musical processes.

Miracle

A similar discrepancy occurred for the group called Miracle. On the first day the three boys and one girl that comprised the original group found their way out to the adjacent lunch room, sat at a table, opened up their journals, and launched into a verbal discussion of what their song would be. Rather than addressing genre choices like Shadow’s Shadow, the members of Miracle focused on instrument selection and structural considerations, taking careful notes as they discussed:

Derek: When we get to the vocals, start building up instruments and then when we get to the climax all of them go back to vocal.

Rory: Instruments going up and then vocals and then instrument going down and then vocals.

Liana: So why can't we do it together—vocal and instruments?

Derek: We do at the very end.

Liana: Why can't we do it during the rest of the song?

Derek: We could maybe do that.

Nigel: But not like on full blast, because if we are going to have a ukulele and a saxophone and a piano than that will be like -29 decibels.

Derek: We should do it only on ukulele.

Rory: Only ukulele at the beginning and then in the middle saxophone comes in, at the end.

In this first session Miracle's song was theorized entirely in this abstract sense, in the absence of any musical input. The second session began in a similar vein, even as tensions began to surface between Liana and Rory. At one point I came to check in with the three boys, having a sneaking suspicion that their verbally conceived ideas might not play out in musical reality. Liana had excused herself to the other side of the room (after the journal reading incident mentioned in chapter 5):

Matt: How's it coming along?

Many Voices: I have my part down!

Matt: So how do you know these parts work together?

Rory: So...we don't know if Liana's works at all.

Derek: And she won't tell us but...

Rory: But we have a part where Nigel starts and then I start doing it, and Derek can you tell me what you're doing so I can put it down?

Derek: Using only three notes and it go like [da da da]. I'll just think of something along the way, it'll sound good.

With that, Rory scratched out Derek's rough description in his journal, exclaiming: "Okay, this is coming out pretty well!" Like Shadow's Shadow, the members of Miracle shared the notion that a song could be collectively composed in the abstract—that as long as ideas were discussed and written down, that compositional productivity was being achieved. As was also the case for Shadow's Shadow, this conception came unraveled rather quickly.

The first significant musical input for Miracle was Liana's soaring ballad with accompanying ukulele chords (described in chapter 5, and notated in figure 5-21). Although the boys made niceties about how Liana's idea could be incorporated along with their theoretical groovy drums, saxophone, and piano, it was clear that they had no idea how that could happen. Such verbally-imagined correspondence was never enacted on a musical level (nor could it be, really, as the boys' parts didn't yet exist on a musical level). This potentially disastrous musical conversation was in fact mitigated before it could ever occur, and the group split up, with Liana heading off to work with Sirena.

At this point Derek, Rory, and Nigel embarked on a compositional stage similar to what Shadow's Shadow experienced in week three and beyond. Their carefully conceived master plan quickly became irrelevant as they got to actually playing music. Nigel had only just begun to play the saxophone and had no agility to enable the give-and-take of a musical conversation. The lack of technical skills meant that they could scarcely all play simultaneously without quickly

dissolving into chaos. Such dysfunctionality in terms of sonic interchange did not afford a very smooth or rapid evolution toward a collective sound. In fact, the process stagnated for some time. Nigel abandoned the saxophone, then became disengaged from the process for a number of weeks (as discussed in the “squeaky wheel” section). Along the way, Derek and Rory established a means for musical communication, with Derek playing a repeating piano riff and Rory “rapping” some verses about school that he had written at home. It should be noted that this was not an idea that was planned and discussed a great deal; rather it evolved and emanated from their independent work and musical interactions.

With *semantic* grounding underway, the challenge then became to bring Nigel into the conversation. As discussed previously, his lack of rhythmic awareness became a significant obstacle. Even though their basic idea was figured out, it took right until the very end of the project before the three of them could have a musically meaningful dialogue. And Nigel’s eventual placement on the drums—though it was necessary to bring him into the fold—led to sometimes shaky musical interactions and a somewhat tenuous collective identity.

Save That Thought

The relationship between pragmatic and semantic grounding was quite different for the group Save That Thought. The group was made up two boys and two girls, all with significant experience on instruments outside of school: Josh, Martin, and Melanie had all taken piano lessons, and Adrian was a violinist. Their initial conversations were short, disjointed, and punctuated by a great deal of musical exploration. When discussion did occur, it was characterized by the frequent use of musical terminology, as opposed to vague structural terms (reflecting their musical experiences). One of their first interactions unfolded as follows:

Josh: It'll be in the key of c major...no c minor--it's more dramatic that way.

[Deciding between major and minor with rock, piano, scissors]

Josh: You have to be flexible.

Melanie: It could be a mixed key.

Adrian: I've never played in a minor key...my teacher doesn't—

Josh: It could be A minor and C major...simple—all you have to do is go up from A.

[Josh and Melanie arguing about who will play piano "who has more experience?" "I've been playing since I was like 2"]

Melanie: How about we try playing on the piano?

With this the group took to the piano, with all four of them on the same keyboard at times. It was noisy, silly, and chaotic with frequent insertions of classical repertoire by Melanie. From my vantage as a teacher it certainly looked like “messing around,” and I worried about the direction of this group. There is an irony here that the groups who were engaged in discussion appeared “productive” from a teaching angle, whereas the groups like Save That Thought who jumped right onto instruments appeared to be “messing around.”

This exploratory, playing-centered approach continued into subsequent sessions, and amidst the noise and silliness, melodic ideas emerged one after another. Martin became an engine of creativity on the glockenspiel, and Josh quickly learned the new melodies on the metallophone. Melanie and Adrian started to notate their own melody, but then shifted their attention to what Martin was creating. Teacher support was required to help Melanie find corresponding chords on the piano and for Adrian to learn the melody on the violin. [An excerpt

of the final piece is notated in figure 6-2] What became remarkable for this group was the sheer amount of playing that characterized their sessions together. As they engaged in run-through after run-through, they were grounding themselves semantically, and using relatively sparse verbal conversations to clarify their musical understandings and move along their process. Much of the verbal exchange focused on musical technicalities such as form and tempo, with far less attention given to bigger picture matters like roles and genre (which were so integral to conversations of many other groups). Unlike Shadow's Shadow and Miracle, they did not begin with a lengthy discussion and an organized master plan; rather they evolved toward a sound through musical experimentation. Perhaps their verbal understanding of what they were creating was not as clear as a result, but their musical understanding was strengthened with every practice. In the end, their relatively polished performance was reflective of the firm semantic ground upon which they were standing.

Figure 6-2: Excerpt of Save that Thought final song

This musical score features four staves. The top three staves are for Violin, A. Glockenspiel, and S. Metallophone, each with a treble clef. The bottom staff is for Piano, with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The Violin, A. Glockenspiel, and S. Metallophone parts play a melodic line of eighth notes. The Piano part provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords.

This musical score features four staves. The top three staves are for Vln. 1, A. Glock., and S. Met., each with a treble clef. The bottom staff is for Pno., with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The Vln. 1, A. Glock., and S. Met. parts play a melodic line of eighth notes. The Pno. part provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords.

Grounding, Musical Ability, and Teacher Scaffolding

The three examples just presented illustrate the different ways in which grounding unfolded for the groups. It seems that for all the groups, whether or not they realized it at first, it was necessary to place the emphasis on semantic grounding. Though pragmatic grounding was the familiar tactic from their classroom experiences, it proved time and time again to be a limited strategy in the case of this small group composition project. Indeed, it would take quite a high level of musical knowledge, skill, and experience for a group to “pragmatically ground” toward a musical composition. The group would need a great deal of shared understanding to communicate verbally about matters such as harmonic structure, melodic variation, form, feel, and tone. This might be reserved for the likes of a professional ensemble. However, it is very unlikely that a professional ensemble would ever try to exclusively “talk” their way to a new piece of music. Rather, they would use their very precise and efficient verbalizations as a way of strengthening and streamlining the musical interplay between their different ideas.

For the 4th and 5th grade children in this study, the notion of verbally planning and creating a musical piece was an utter impossibility—they simply did not have the musical vocabulary and shared understandings to facilitate such dialogue. A number of groups tried such a strategy (particularly Shadow’s Shadow, Miracle, Enough Said, and Third Dimension) and in each case their pragmatically grounded conceptions broke down on the musical level. Thus, out of necessity, every group found itself wading through the quagmire of musical exploration, and in this semantic swamp, musical ability became a key determinate of each group’s navigational success.

For *Save That Thought*, the challenge of communicating on musical terms was lessened by their relative fluency on their instruments, their ability to adapt to their partners’ playing, and

their ability to express possibilities on their instruments. This group was unique in terms of the fairly even distribution of skill between the group members. Most of the other bands were much more heterogeneous in terms of skill, and as demonstrated by the “squeaky wheel phenomenon,” the groups tended to orient their processes around the limitations of their weakest members. To use an analogy, this phenomenon might be likened to a conversation in which one or two people have only limited language skill (a handful of phrases from a phrasebook perhaps), while the others are relatively fluent. The flow of the conversation would necessarily be guided by those of lesser facility. Their limited bank of stock phrases might fuel some exchange, with the more skilled speakers doing most of the responding, but the complexity of a back and forth exchange would not be possible. This was precisely what occurred for Nigel and his brand new saxophone. As he shared: “The notes that I know are A, B, C, D, So I can play “Cadre by the Sea.” Should I play that, and then we can make up a piece?” This was not a good starting place for a musical dialogue that was supposed to spawn an original musical composition. Clearly Nigel didn’t have the flexibility to adapt to new ideas on the saxophone, and once the group decided that “Cadre by the Sea” was not going to be the basis for their song, the only possibility was to abandon the instrument.

Many of the children in this project chose instruments that were fairly new to them (reflecting the desire for novelty). That included Dominic on the electric guitar in Double Trouble, Gabriel on ukulele in Rainfire, Gina on keyboard in Third Dimension, Liana on drums in Moose Named Yak, Lola on ukulele in Poptarts, and Oliver on keyboard in Enough Said. In all these cases, the children’s ability to communicate musically through their instrument was quite limited. For the many children who chose familiar instruments from their school music experiences—xylophones, metallophones, glockenspiels, drums, ukuleles (in some cases),

vocals—the playing field was more level and there was a basic proficiency to meet the needs of a music composition project. Still, the necessity of communicating on a creative, semantic level was a significant challenge for many and required significant teacher support. Even in cases where students possessed particular skills on their instruments, the challenge was formidable. Joey was quite a skilled pianist in the band Say Something, and created and notated a series of chords early on in the process. He was determined to communicate these chords to Molly on the guitar, and he could even identify them by their basic names, but for Molly this was insufficient information to learn the chord progression and thus teacher assistance was required. For Joey and Molly to truly communicate on a musical level, they would have to have a shared understanding of the musical material that crossed instrument boundaries. This shared understanding was also what was necessary for the group Gravity to get “in the same key” with all their different ideas. For the most part, even among the most skilled participants, the prospect of independently connecting material across instruments was just out of reach (part of what kept me so busy as teacher in this project). So though grounding semantically was a necessary step in the process—integrally connected to their formation of collective identity, and indeed what allowed them to ultimately create and perform successfully—the groups were neither able to nor expected to achieve it independently. I fully recognized that this was quite an advanced skill (likely out of reach of many adults even) and offered scaffolding appropriate to the needs of each group.

Leadership as a Musical versus Verbal Process

In many ways the process of small group composition redefined the nature of leadership for the student participants, and a number of students struggled to find their foothold as leaders in this new context. Many gravitated toward the verbally driven approaches of facilitating

organized conversations, task mastering and delegating, which were proven strategies in collaborative contexts outside of music. As Zachary found in Shadow's Shadow however, these pragmatic orientations to grounding were often at odds with the requirements of the project.

Jared struggled with these same tensions in his band Gravity:

Jared: Guys I think we should start focusing.

Fay: How bout the middle is like a guitar solo?

Jared: No Eva is playing guitar the entire time.

Fay: No not the entire time because she is going to sing too.

Jared: I think it should come in with Ella doing her thing and then Jake should play violin and then...and then Jordan should play piano, and then Jake is going to play a violin solo and then it will go back into the chorus.

Fay: What's the chorus going to be... What's the song about? You can't make lyrics until you know what the song is about.

[Everyone talking at the same time]

Jared: I'm going to be the manager. I'm the only one coming up with any of the ideas.

I'm too talented to do anything in the song. Jason, do that thing that you were doing.

James, just try to do something that goes well with that.

A similar dynamic played out through countless interactions in this group. Jared explicitly asserted himself as leader many times and worked tirelessly to try to organize his partners around a common song structure and work itinerary. His efforts were to no avail though. Over and over again the band would resist his attempts to crystallize the group around a verbally expressed

structure or action plan. As discussed in the previous chapter, there was a collective dissonance at play—every attempt to bring musical ideas together resulted in tension and arguments. The group was unable to establish a common ground on a semantic level, and in recognition of this fundamental incompatibility, the group members were impervious to Jared’s attempts to pull them together on a pragmatic, verbal level.

Similarly, Madaline asserted herself as a leader throughout the entire process with her band C’est La Vie, though her attempts at “task mastering” and organizing were often overshadowed by a different sort of leadership: Musical or semantic leadership. This form of taking charge through nonverbal means was unique to the project and unfamiliar to the students. The children who steered the ship were those who could generate musical ideas. So while Madaline was delivering organizational imperatives, others like Karen and Evelyn were busy playing with melodies, rhythms, and lyrical ideas. Once again, this was the kind of exploration that appeared to be “messing around” from the traditional paradigm. The perception of non-productive exploration drove Madaline to exasperation at points. At one point she exclaimed: “I feel like we’re going nowhere, because we’re not like talking to each other, and trying to make a decision!” What she couldn’t see, however, was that the real productivity was humming along below the surface of the pragmatic interactions, in the playful experimentation of the semantic level.

This contrast was quite a common occurrence for C’est La Vie. In one instance, while some were busy discussing lyrical ideas about “going to the fair,” Karen was busy grabbing bits of text and “riffing” with them, singing all the while: “Cotton candy getting’ on my faaace, when I win a dunk contest against my arch enemyyyy.” As the discussion continued about the length of the verse, Karen kept on singing “I go running down the street, can almost smell the sweets.” In

the following transcription Karen’s vocal explorations are woven into the dialogue to capture the flow of the interaction:

Evelynn: No, we need to have a little transition.

Karen:

The candy corn I can almost see

Madeline: We should talk about the treats, you know whenever you go to the—

Karen:

The cotton candy I can almost taste

Evelynn: We should do...what’s it called...a ferris wheel.

Madeline: Or a dunk tank.

Karen:

The cotton candy I can almost taste when I
win a dunk contest against my enemy

Madeline: And we need to do another one that goes to this beat, and then transition.

Evelynn: We can’t do a different beat. We need to—

Karen:



Evelynn: Wait Erin, what are you doing?

Erin: This is how long the verse is...before we have the chorus.

Ironically Karen’s band mates would later plea for her to stop “messing around” and focus on helping the group. This tension was also present for Double Trouble, where Mark would tend to sing or “riff” on vocal ideas and Dominic would implore him to stop, talk and make a plan.

In this way, the project turned traditional power dynamics on their head, with leadership often lying in the hands of those who tried least to insert themselves. This context required a playful form of leadership, and favored those who could generate creative ideas easily. In Save That Thought, Martin became a clear leader, spinning out a steady stream of melodic lines that defined and moved the group forward. He was quite an introvert, and not a leader in the traditional sense of collaborative work, but his creative prowess afforded him the opportunity to lead the way musically—to be a capable and “vocal” leader on the semantic level. On the flip side, some children who were used to being leaders in classroom activities found themselves relegated to “back seat” roles due to their limitations in musical creativity or proficiency. Erin was quite surprised to find herself off of the throne of leadership in C’est La Vie:

Matt: In groups do you usually observe more, or are you pretty vocal.

Erin: Normally I try to be like the boss, but yeah...

Matt: But not in this project?

Erin: Not really.

Dede also struggled with her status in Third Dimension. When I asked her about her role in the group she offered the following description, hinting at her recognition of the importance of musical competency and her insecurity in her own abilities:

Dede: Aisha and Gina like to be the head, like on top of it. And that's not a bad thing—that's actually a good thing, cause I'm lost usually. And Aminta likes writing stuff, like making stuff at home. And Gina and Aisha are really good at collaborating with each other... I'm usually...just...

Dede was clearly a bit mystified by her subordinate status in the group, as this did not reflect her status in other groups. Such flips of leadership are indicative of just how unique this process was for the students in the context of Alder Park Elementary. In some cases they uncovered propensities for leadership that had not been visible in previous activities. In other cases they were forced to recognize limitations that had not previously held them back in collaborative work. In every case they experienced a new form of convergence into a collectively functioning body—setting aside the typical intentionality of planning and organizing a solution to a problem, and instead embracing (to different degrees) a kind of playful, exploratory evolution into something unpredictable; something truly collective; something grounded on an entirely different level of communication.

Products in Action: Democracy through Performance

The requirement in this project for each group to deliver musical products (in the way of a final performance and recording) had a significant influence on the nature of interactions that transpired. In many cases the product focus was the catalyst that brought groups together and drove their collective functioning, as comes across in the reflections of Helena from the group Say Something:

Helena: We each have our thing that we are pretty good at. Me and Mari are the lyric writers and the singers. Usually people who did instrumentals would work together while we were off making lyrics, but when we came together we would all work as a group. I think what really helped drive us forward was the laughter that we all have together. We all have a special talent and we are willing to work together to teach each other things...we are just a really collaborative group and we all just really care what the outcome is, and we all really want to have a good show.

The desire to “have a good show” was shared among the groups. In some cases, however, the pressure to create and share a discreet product fueled tension and sometimes stressful interactions. As Dominic expressed in an interview: “Everybody knows that were performing at for the whole school so everyone wants it to be perfect, and everyone has a different idea of perfect.” Such tensions are certainly what transpired for the Killer Kowz during their last days of working together:

Ross: How about you guys go over there and...

Rachel: No we have to work together! We're a group!

[Ross and Nathan still not agreeing on the rhythm of the second part]

Rachel: Ross you're not playing the keyboard!

Ross: I know I'm trying to find the beat.

Rachel: Why don't you put on the headphones?

[Lots of yelling at Ross. "Ross you can't keep changing instruments!" Others getting frustrated]

Rachel: We only 45 minutes to figure out our whole second part! What are we going to do with the bass?

The expectation for a cohesive musical product was a “tall order” for those groups who already struggled to communicate effectively on a musical level. The shortcomings of familiar verbal, pragmatic strategies left these groups feeling sometimes unequipped to bring their musical ideas over the finish line to a performance context. Nonetheless there was a unanimous weight and value given by the students to the culminating components of the project, as recognized by one their classroom teachers:

Deryl: They were very excited to put on a public performance. I think they realized the importance of that kind of a statement in a project, versus doing it, putting it to rest, and moving on. They needed that closure and that recognition and having the public acknowledgement and the risk of putting it out there, they were looking forward to that and also equal parts nervous which means it's important.

Some aspects of the performance were familiar to the participants. Alder Park Elementary certainly strives for a “culture of performance” with opportunities abounding for students to showcase their skills and thinking in a public format. As an example, all of the fifth grade participants were involved in service learning projects, which frequently required presentations in classrooms, assemblies, and teacher meetings. So the idea of standing in front of a group and sharing the products of one’s thinking was a consistent expectation at the school, embraced by some and accepted by others.

The collective and participatory nature of musical activity, however, really separated this composition project from the culture of performance to which students were accustomed. As Deryl articulated, in a musical context, everyone *truly* has to participate:

Deryl: There's also a level of responsibility to their group, because in a music group everyone has to carry their weight. When kids work on service learning projects and they go to a class about helping with the food bank, sometimes one kid will take the lead and do all of the talking. So that is where that level of personal responsibility can fall out a little bit. Look, no drums means no drums [laughs]; you can't drop it out so easily, so everybody has to rise to the challenge, and in the way the project is built there is kind of no way out of that. There's a way to meet it, but you can't say I can't do it.

In this way, the musical products offered by the 14 groups at the Songwriter’s Ball were uniquely collective in their performance. Unlike presentations in other areas of the school—where a particularly skilled group member might “go it alone” or carry the weight for the rest of the group—in this context a successful performance depended on a synergy between all the

group members. Each group presented in essence a musical, or semantic, conversation on stage, which was less about perfecting individual parts and more about attending to the interactions between them. These interactions were defined by negotiations of tempo, intensity, and feel, and by the navigation of infinitesimal timing differences, or “participatory discrepancies” (Keil, 1995). In this way, each performance embodied democracy in action—a fluid, evolving conversation toward the execution of a collectively realized whole.

Such moment-to-moment responsiveness and mutual adaptation to the nuances of others’ musical expression is reminiscent of the idea of *accommodation* in communication studies (Giles, 1973). Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) posits that individuals adjust the parameters of their speech—such as utterance length, speech rate, vocal intensity, response latency, pauses, and gesture—according to characteristics of their interlocutors (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991). Building onto the “similarity-attraction theory” (Byrne, 1961) that states that people are attracted to those who are similar to themselves, CAT introduces the notion of “convergence.” This idea suggests that speakers adjust their speech to increase their similarity with their listeners, thereby augmenting the attraction their interlocutors feel toward them. In this way, convergence promotes “interactional synchrony,” which has been suggested as a universal phenomenon (Giles, Coupland & Coupland, 1991), even at very young ages (Street, 1983).

Even though the bands in this study composed their songs entirely before the Songwriter’s Ball (such that there was no intentional improvisation at the concert), there was a great deal of accommodation and convergence—in the musical sense—that did take place on stage. All of the groups experienced increases or decreases in tempo, often wrought by a single group member playing ahead or behind the beat, and such changes required each member to adapt accordingly. In many instances dynamics, melodic phrasing, vocal styling and tone were

also negotiated in real time. In some cases the musical conversations on stage were characterized by unintentional changes to the actual composition that required accommodation on a dramatic scale. This is what occurred during Double Trouble’s performance of the song “Fame.” As the lone instrumentalist, Dominic had trouble maintaining the four-beat count of his electric guitar part, and would at times “drop beats” spontaneously. This meant that Mark was forced to “accommodate” his vocal lines to maintain correspondence between the parts, and was able to do so given his relatively keen musical intuition. This led to a musical conversation that was “tuned-in” and full of surprises. An excerpt of these convergent interactions is notated in figure 6-3 (which can be compared to the intended composition in figure 5-14).

Figure 6-3: Mark’s adaptations to Dominic’s guitar playing

The figure displays three systems of musical notation, each consisting of a voice line and an electric guitar line. The time signature changes from 3/4 to 4/4 and then to 2/4. The lyrics are: "Dou-ble trou", "- ble the best band in the world", and "They worked their way u - up from Se - a - ttle".

System 1:

- Voice:** Treble clef, 3/4 time. Rests for the first two measures, then a quarter note followed by two eighth notes in the third measure. Lyrics: "Dou-ble trou".
- Electric Guitar:** Treble clef, 3/4 time. A steady eighth-note accompaniment throughout the three measures.

System 2:

- Voice:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. A quarter note followed by two eighth notes in the first measure, then a quarter note followed by two eighth notes in the second measure, and a whole note in the third measure. Lyrics: "- ble the best band in the world".
- E. Gtr.:** Treble clef, 4/4 time. A steady eighth-note accompaniment throughout the three measures.

System 3:

- Voice:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. A quarter note followed by two eighth notes in the first measure, then a quarter note followed by two eighth notes in the second measure, and a quarter note followed by two eighth notes in the third measure. Lyrics: "They worked their way u - up from Se - a - ttle".
- E. Gtr.:** Treble clef, 2/4 time. A steady eighth-note accompaniment throughout the three measures.

Such democratic engagement was partially enabled by the lack of an adult conductor or accompanist. Levinson & Brantmeier (2012) discuss adult authority and the “power differential between student and teacher” as dampening influences on students’ experience of mutualism and democracy in group-based processes. A conductor, positioned at the front of the group and elevated by the podium, might well be seen as the ultimate visual expression of adult authority. An accompanist, on the other hand, might be seen as a *musical* expression of authority, setting the musical parameters of tempo, key, dynamics and phrasing. Removing these kinds of adult participation from the Songwriter’s Ball allowed students to perform as a collective of musicians on equal footing, without the presence of a higher status adult musician. This democratic format echoes the work of conductorless chamber groups like “A Far Cry”, “Spira Mirabilis”, and the “Ars Nova Chamber Orchestra”. As Sawyer (2003) describes, in these kinds of groups the musicians have to create their own “interactional synchrony,” a process that requires a democratic give-and-take.

Standing out in a Culture of Collaboration

Alder Park Elementary is certainly not a typical elementary school. A walk through the hallways, or through the colorful classrooms, or the specialist spaces reveals a school culture that stands apart from much of the American educational system: For one, it’s noisy. Children are engaged in energetic conversations as they work collaboratively in circular table arrangements. There are no individual desks, no organized rows, no teacher lecturing at the front of the room, no worksheets, no set curriculum, no standardized testing, no teachers working in isolation, and certainly no students working in isolation. In fact, apart from some of the basic structures like classrooms and recess, there is very little in common between Alder Park and the typical

elementary school. True, at both places there are students and there are teachers, but at Alder Park the relationships between these entities are qualitatively different. There are academic commonalities as well, such as a basic priority of literacy and numeracy, however at Alder Park these disciplines are not exclusive focal points, but rather are launch points for project-based and collaborative investigations. The school has really positioned itself as an educational vanguard, a “think tank” of sorts where teachers and students alike can collectively construct new understandings of how learning works. Underpinning this educational experiment is an acceptance of basic Vygotskian theory—that learning cannot be separated from social context (Vygotsky 1978)—and this drives the facilitation of a program where students collaborate on projects, share their results, perform or produce final projects, and actively participate in a collaborative community of learners.

Given this context, it seems that a small group composition project would merely blend into the progressive, socially-constructed educational milieu at Alder Park. Indeed, many aspects of the project drew upon structures and philosophical understandings that were already in place. However, as this chapter has endeavored to illustrate, there were several dimensions of the project that resounded above the already substantial collaborative activity at Alder Park. First, the opportunity to build a working relationship with a small group of peers over a sustained period and with a consistent focus of activity was novel for the participants. Secondly, the freedom to choose a group and craft both a process and a product from start to finish was unprecedented at the school. Third, the dual channels of establishing common ground—semantic as well as pragmatic—were quite unfamiliar to the students; decidedly counter to Vygotsky’s foundational assertion that *language* is the primary avenue to the development of thinking and reasoning skills (Vygotsky 1978). Finally, the focus on a collective product, democratically

enacted through a synergy that was shared evenly among the participants, was distinct from prior projects at Alder Park. These aspects defined an experience that was uniquely musical—one that diverged from classroom activity and afforded opportunities for new levels of collective convergence.

It is logical to wonder how this project might have unfolded differently in a more typical educational setting. This is certainly a question for future research, however the original rationale for the location of this research remains clear: Rather than being “wowed” by a revolutionary experience that completely upended every facet of prior schooling (creating the shock value that might be imagined in a standard educational setting), students at Alder Park were faced with a seemingly familiar process, only to discover that in certain specific ways this process diverged from their previous learning experiences. In this way the results were held to a high bar of understanding—the substantial collaborative toolkit of these participants, though it may have in many ways enabled the project to proceed successfully, also posed a challenge to the novelty of this project. Based on the assertions of the preceding pages, this challenge was amply met along the Bumpy Road.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

The bumpy road upon which the 14 student bands in this project traveled was long, sometimes arduous, and full of twists and turns. The intent of the study was to examine the social, collaborative dynamics, as they interfaced with musical processes, over the course of this sustained and complex journey. The preceding two chapters have unfolded a mosaic of themes from the students' collective experiences, and the intent of this concluding chapter is to re-weave these many strands into a cohesive picture of the project's outcomes. The chapter begins with the presentation of a theoretical model as a tool for thematic summary and a way of orienting the discussion that follows. The next section overlays the findings of this study with the broad educational aims outlined in the opening chapters, with particular focus on democratic citizenship, cooperative/collaborative learning, and 21st century skills. Finally, the discussion utilizes the present research to cull together lessons for music education, and for the field of education as a whole.

Collective Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model

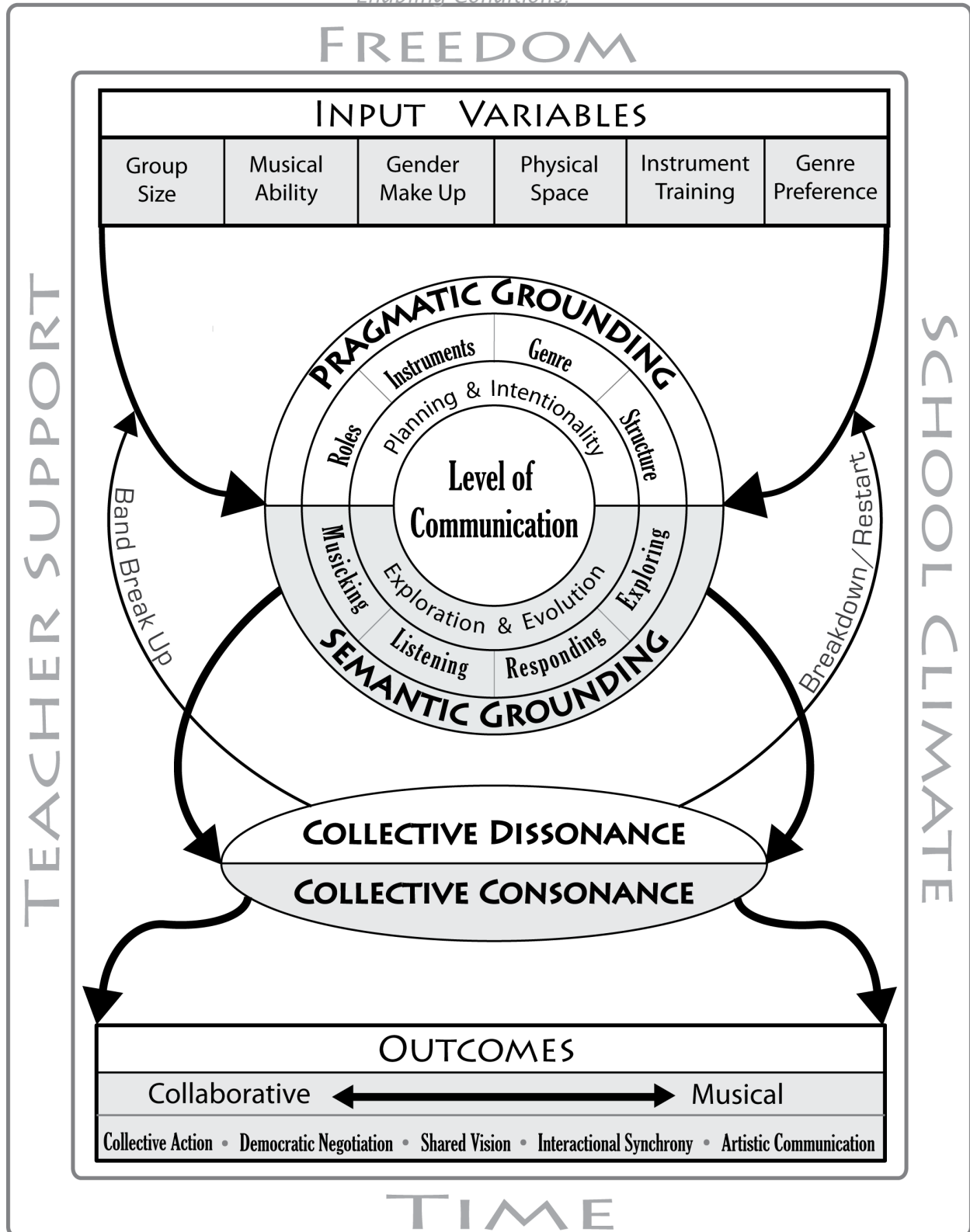
Though the study began with the intent to investigate group dynamics in general, and democratic processes in particular, the interactions that unfolded over 15 weeks began to point to a slightly recalibrated and more focused theoretical umbrella: That is the emergent framework of collective identity. This sociological concept was unique in its potential to encompass the diverse array of interactional dynamics—both social and musical—that defined the experiences of the participants in this project. Collective identity is thus used as an overarching frame for the theoretical model that follows (figure 7-1). Harkening back to Melucci's (1995) conception of collective identity as a *process* that unfolds within a field of collective actors, the model presents

a processual orientation, graphically organizing the formation of collective identity as it manifested for the student groups.

Figure 7-1: Theoretical Model of Collective Identity Formation

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY FORMATION

Enabling Conditions:



There are numerous aspects of this model that merit further description. First, it is notable that the complexities of collective identity formation are insulated by an outermost rectangle of “enabling conditions.” This is to say that the dynamics that transpired depended to a degree on having these conditions in place. Certainly *freedom* was prerequisite, as the ability to choose a group, instruments, and a musical direction was really heart of what allowed a naturalistic evolution of group identity to occur. *Time* was another key condition, with shared concepts of “we” developing slowly through a series of fits starts (or even break-ups) over a span of months. It is important to note that it took the groups on average nine weeks to coalesce around a shared purpose—it is hard to imagine compressing this weaving of social and musical fabric into a shorter time frame. Though the musical ends could possibly be achieved in a shorter project, the collective ends would most certainly be out of reach. Another enabling condition was *teacher support*. Given the monumental scope of this task, significant teacher guidance was required for the groups to navigate the crucial elements of the process. In particular, the challenge of finding a shared platform for musical communication necessitated a great deal of teacher scaffolding, as a way of overcoming technical limitations and communicating across an array of instruments and styles. Finally, *school climate* was very much at play in the execution of this project. As Allsup (2002) concluded, democratic values such as respect, equity, and honesty necessarily precede the implementation of collaborative learning experiences. Though the uniquely collaborative climate of Alder Park Elementary School may not be entirely prerequisite for a small group composition project of this scale, it is important to acknowledge that it was integrally linked to the dispositions and work habits of the students involved. Thus, barring further research at a contrasting school climate, it is necessary to maintain the particularities of the atmosphere and approaches at Alder Park as enabling conditions for the study that took place.

Shifting the attention inside the outer ring of enabling conditions, at the top are a series of *input variables* that constitute the raw “ingredients” brought together by each group before entering the compositional kitchen. The list—including group size, musical ability, gender make-up, physical space, instrument training and genre preference—is not intended to be exhaustive, but rather represents some of the key facets that defined the experiences of the groups under study. Certainly other factors like cultural background, learning style, or even birth order may have also come into play. Given the massive scope of observation in this study, however, it was necessary to focus on the principal factors that emerged, leaving other variables open for further study and analysis. The input variables on the model are intentionally located beneath the enabling condition of freedom. This proximity highlights the importance of student independence in assembling the raw ingredients for their collective work. A teacher might tend to mix children to create a diversity of musical ability or genre preference, and would also tend to offer considerable input variables in the way of project guidelines (i.e. compose a piece using a pentatonic scale and ABA form). These sorts of teacher inputs are purposively denied access to the model, as they would hamper the child-driven evolution that defined this process.

The raw ingredients are moved by way of arrows to the communicative process of grounding, or finding common ground. As discussed in the previous chapter, many groups (such as Shadow’s Shadow and Miracle) gravitated toward the familiar pattern of *pragmatic grounding*, or verbally driven communication. This tactic, driven by planning and intentionality, was mobilized as a way of determining practical considerations like roles, instruments, genre and structure—in essence “who is doing what?” (roles); “what are we using?” (tools); and “what is our song going to be?” (genre, sound, or structure, insofar as these can be imagined in the abstract sense). The *pragmatic* approach was used hand-in-hand with the less familiar strategy of

semantic grounding, or musically-driven communication. Interactions on this musical level were driven by exploration and characterized by a sonic evolution of sorts. The model includes active musical processes such as “musicking” (Small, 1998), listening, responding, and exploring vocally or on instruments. These action-based approaches certainly led to the solidification of conceptual matters as well (such as the genre or structure), but did not include the same intentionality as the pragmatic avenues to communication. As numerous researchers have found with regards to informal learning (i.e. Campbell, 1995; Green, 2002; Jaffurs, 2004; and Miel and Littleton, 2008), student-driven processes tend to be exploratory, aural, idiosyncratic, and even haphazard. They *discovered* their songs along the way, and they were never quite what they imagined at the outset.

The two different levels of grounding are purposefully joined in the same circle on the model, as a way of highlighting the fluid interplay between them. Student groups jumped back and forth from the pragmatic to the semantic level, though usually in a way that was not very seamless or intentional. Often an interestingly antithetical relationship emerged between the two levels: Those who pragmatically engaged with their partners perceived themselves as “trying to get something done” (e.g. Madeline in *C’est La Vie*, Inga in *Face the Sparkles*, or Jared in *Gravity*), while those who explored and interacting on a semantic level were seen as “goofing off” or “messing around.” As the bands’ songs became mostly solidified they necessarily shifted to the lower semantic side of the circle, recognizing the importance of playing together in the way of rehearsing for the final performance.

The model illustrates only one clear exit strategy from the communication circle—the arrows heading outwards emanate from the semantic grounding hemisphere. This illustrates the finding that groups had to musically interact and play together to discover “who they were” and

“what they were creating.” Several bands like Shadow’s Shadow and Miracle attempted to define themselves based on verbal conversations, but it wasn’t until they got to acting in musical ways together that their actual group identities started to take shape. Thus, a bands process might alternate fluidly between musical and non-musical forms of communication, but ultimately it is only through musical activity that can they progress toward collective identity.

Moving down through the model, the next step is a bifurcated representation of collectivity; where groups either encountered collective dissonance or collective consonance. What each band experienced here was a largely a factor of their unique combination of input variables. Of particular importance was the distribution of musical ability among the group members, especially in terms of rhythmic awareness. In bands where one member had a lower rhythmic perception than the rest, the group would experience collective dissonance in the form of the squeaky wheel phenomenon. Reconciling this dissonance became a process of building a song around the musical shortcomings of the weakest member—precisely what occurred for the Killer Kowz, Miracle, and C’est La Vie. In groups with a fairly low musical ability or rhythmic awareness overall, the inability to communicate clearly through musical means became a source of dissonance, as was the case for Shadow’s Shadow and Rainfire. These groups required substantial teacher support to translate their ideas into cohesive musical possibilities, and to the very end their musical limitations often dampened the degree of collectivity they experienced through the project. On the other hand, groups with a consistent spread of medium to high musical ability (like Save That Thought and the Poptarts) experienced a relatively rapid trajectory to collective consonance.

The gender composition of each group was also an important determinant in the level and rate of collective identity formation. In the mixed gender groups there tended to be dissonance

with respect to the inclusion of vocals (e.g. Enough Said, Say Something, and the Killer Kowz before the departure of Sirena), with vocal parts seen as associated with stronger genre delineations which were thus polarizing with respect to the gendered spectrum of genre preference. In order to mitigate this dissonance, the mixed gender groups often gravitated toward instrumental pieces, with less delineation of genre, and with a rough approximation of the classic school music Orff sound, with xylophones, glockenspiels and hand held percussion. This compromise allowed for a degree of consonance and collective ownership, but it did tend to decrease the degree of collectivity. In contrast, same sex groups (e.g. Third Dimension, C'est La Vie, and Double Trouble) had an easier time coalescing around a vocal style and corresponding genre delineation. They also tended to define their compositions in opposition to the perceived “school music” sound. These mechanisms enabled a more rapid progression to collective consonance. The band Gravity illustrated this discrepancy—as a mixed-gender group they were constantly mired in dissonance, but once they split up into two same sex groups they proceeded quickly to a relatively consonant collectivity.

Of course gender “sameness” did not always correlate with a shared vision of genre and sound. Piper and Tanja experienced stylistic dissonance in the all-girl group The Poptarts, with Tanja preferring Top-40 pop music and Piper favoring Broadway musicals and classical music. In the end they achieved consonance by choosing a direction outside of both of their zones of familiarity (a Zimbabwean-styled marimba piece). In contrast, the mixed-gender group Save That Thought was on a pretty even keel from the beginning in terms of genre preference, with their individual experiences with classical instrument lessons enabling a rough acceptance of a classical sound, and a relatively early attainment of collective consonance.

Structural variables such as group size and physical space were also somewhat at play in the quest for collectivity. The groups of five (Enough Said, Say Something, and Gravity) tended to have a harder time assembling a shared vision, but the trend was not as clear for the smaller groups—it seemed that group sizes of four and under, the other factors of musical ability, gender, and genre preference were of greater importance. Physical space was a multifaceted variable: On one hand the spaces in the music room and back room were often so noisy that it was difficult to semantically ground toward a shared vision and achieve collective consonance. On the other hand, these spaces housed some of the “cooler” instrumental that were more antithetical to the perceived “school music” sound—such as keyboards and drums—which in some cases accelerated the establishment of common ground.

Returning to the model, where groups experienced collective dissonance there were two possible trajectories. In cases where the dissonance was pronounced and prolonged, a break up occurred (as took place for Gravity, Miracle, and Rainfire). This is represented by an arrow moving upward. Following their break-ups, these groups had to return to the input variables, recalibrating the composition of the new groups with respect to gender make up, musical ability, and gender preference, among others. For many bands, collective dissonance was side-stepped by discarding the current idea and returning to the interplay of pragmatic and semantic grounding to uncover a different, more consonant possibility. In this way, their progression through the model became more cyclical than linear, with each successive draft affording greater opportunities for collective identity.

Arriving at the bottom of the model, where collective identity is achieved, the outcomes are highlighted as both collaborative and musical. Truly, the outcomes from this project were vast, occurring on a huge number of levels (some of which are addressed in the next section).

Rather than offering a comprehensive list, the model highlights the unique and synergistic outcomes with respect to musical and collaborative processes: By stepping onto the stage to perform their original compositions, the 14 bands were showcasing a propensity for collective action, a facility with democratic negotiation (even on a semantic level), a capability for forming a shared vision with a group of peers, interactional synchrony (responsiveness on a moment-to-moment basis), and an ability to communicate effectively through non-verbal, artistic channels. These takeaways were distinct; much of what separated these experiences from other domains of school activity.

Zooming Out: Revisiting the Rationale

Though the outcomes of a small group composition project are intrinsically interesting to practitioners and researchers alike in the field of music education, the original justification for this study situated these outcomes in broader questions: What can collaborative composition offer to education at large? How might small group composition orient music education with respect to schooling as a whole? Addressing these questions requires a brief revisiting of the rationale for this study, zooming out to the very purpose of education as an institution.

Discussions of purpose in the educational literature are fraught with tension. As Cohen (2006) summarizes, what is popularly conceived and historically recognized about education is often at odds with what is manifested in policy and practice:

There is a paradox in our pre K–12 schools, and within teacher education. Parents and teachers want schooling to support children’s ability to become lifelong learners who are able to love, work, and act as responsible members of the community. Yet, we have not

substantively integrated these values into our schools or into the training we give teachers. In fact, driven by federal mandates, the primary focus of teacher education and pre K–12 schools is increasingly on linguistic and mathematical literacy. (p. 201)

Though philosophers and educational theorists—from Plato to Dewey—have written across the millennia about the duty of education to cultivate responsible, thoughtful, and ethical citizens, the minutiae of accountability has often reduced educational practice to its most basic elements of measureable skill-based outcomes. It could said that as a field (in practice), not only have we lost sight of the proverbial forest through the trees, we have busied ourselves with cutting down the trees so we can better count the number of rings on each trunk.

A similar gap between what is known and what is practiced exists in music education. On one hand, there is a general perception that musical activity enhances quality of life and participation in society, as evidenced in the recent New York Times article entitled “Is Music the Key to Success?” (Lipman, 2013). As she writes:

Consider the qualities these high achievers say music has sharpened: collaboration, creativity, discipline and the capacity to reconcile conflicting ideas. All are qualities notably absent from public life. Music may not make you a genius, or rich, or even a better person. But it helps train you to think differently, and to process different points of view. (p. SR 9)

On the other hand, music educators have in many ways fallen prey to the fixation on measurable outcomes. The logical way to measure musical involvement is through the quality of sound of

student ensembles and choirs, and the natural path to improving this quality is by focusing on the skills and techniques requisite for reproducing the idealized sound. While these are obvious goals of musical study, they are myopic in scope, ignoring the societal and cultural dimensions of musical participation. Outside of academia, there has been little room for a consideration of these larger, non-musical objectives, or for a recognition that the seemingly extra-musical outcomes and experiences are in fact inseparable from the musical outcomes (Bowman, 2002; Westerlund, 2002).

One of the purposes of this study has been to utilize the microcosm of small group composition as a vehicle for orienting and navigating the tensions in the discourse. The efforts of 52 upper elementary students organized into 14 groups have been highlighted as ripe with collaborative potential, such that they could serve as a possible response to these queries:

- How can a music project reassert broad, societal-level goals within education?
- How might this work highlight music education as a potential leader in the shift toward more holistic conceptions of schooling?

The following discussion addresses these questions, revisiting the educational models from chapter 2 (collaborative learning, 21st century skills, and democratic citizenship) as points of reference.

Cooperative/Collaborative Learning

The call to develop an array of socially-driven dispositions in students has reverberated through many domains of education. Social constructivist perspectives have asserted the importance of open-ended group work in the development of collaborative and creative problem-solving skills across disciplines (Palincsar, 1998). Ironically, while disciplines like math and

science have endeavored (with copious work in the literature) to figure out how to impose group structures from the cooperative and collaborative learning models on activities that have traditionally been individual, music has largely stayed out of the discourse, despite the fact that it functions quite naturally as a group activity. According to the tenets of the collaborative learning model, music—and particularly the musical activities in this study—in fact have a great deal to add to this theoretical momentum.

Collaborative learning asserts “consensus among the members of a community of knowledgeable, interdependent peers” as a point of departure (Bruffee, 1999, p. xii), and implores collaborators to “labor together in order to construct something that did not exist before the collaboration, something that does not and cannot fully exist in the lives of individual collaborators” (Peters and Armstrong, 1998, p. 75). In a math project, a group of students might labor together to ascertain a solution to a problem—using their collective process to overcome barriers that might be insurmountable for each individual—and yet the product of their work might be individually recorded and presented; or, if presented collectively there is no guarantee that the work would be shared evenly among the participants. In other words, collectivity might be enacted through a mathematical process, but there is no mechanism for collectively enacting the product. In contrast, one of the defining outcomes for the participants in the musical project under study was the necessity for each group to collectively enact their musical product. They could talk at length and socially construct an agreeable solution to the problem at hand, but unless they could put this solution into mutual action, they did not achieve successful results (as experienced by Shadow’s Shadow and Miracle). This finding suggests that the combination of musical composition and performance is really a higher bar for cooperative and collaborative learning than are the likes of scientific inquiry or mathematical investigation. As cooperative

collaborative learning structures continue to take hold in the field, music educators should not be absent in the dialogue; rather they should be leading the way (drawing upon work that is similarly generative and group-oriented to the “bumpy road”) and presenting possibilities for a higher plane of collaboration that can occur on the level of the medium itself.

21st Century Skills

Recognition of the need to widen educational practice to cultivate social and creative dispositions has prompted large-scale policy initiatives like the Partnership for 21st century skills, which again has been enacted in 19 states and echoed in policy documents across the globe. The P21 framework lays an extensive list of skills (with accompanying sub-skills) that are proposed to be essential in the 21st century workplace and society: Learners are implored to “think creatively, work creatively with others, implement innovations, reason effectively, think systematically, make judgments and decisions, solve problems, communicate clearly, collaborate with others, adapt to change, be flexible, manage goals and time, work independently, be self directed learners, interact effectively with others, work effectively in diverse teams, manage projects, produce results, guide and lead others, and be responsible to others” (P21.org). This framework was intended to encompass all of education, posing the challenge for schools to meet the diverse and complex spectrum of needs in 21st century professional and public life. Given this broad scope, it seems hard to imagine that a single project, or even a single discipline could adequately address a majority of these targeted skills. And yet, overlaying the experiences of the participants in this project with the tenets of this framework reveals a shocking correspondence.

With respect to the major headings—creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication and collaboration, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and

self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, and leadership and responsibility—as well as the specific skills listed above, the participants in this study were unanimously stretched. In fact, a successful navigation of each of these skill sets was crucial for a positive outcome. For example, a student might have had excellent creative ideas, but unless she could communicate them effectively they did not find traction with the group; or perhaps a child might have been organized and goal oriented, but unless he was flexible and adaptable to the evolving ideas of the group he was not an effective leader. Success in this project really depended on a synthesis of these skills. The skills could certainly be balanced between the members of the group, with different individuals displaying strengths in particular areas, but still there was a need for every person to achieve a certain minimum proficiency in every area of the framework. Thus, though it was not intentional, this project emerged as something of an allegory for participation in the team-driven, innovation-seeking career world of the 21st century. Given the traction that the P21 framework has found in the educational politics of this century, music educators could find themselves—especially by way of small group composition—at the cutting edge of educational reform.

Democratic Citizenship Education

The results of “the bumpy road” are also quite intriguing with respect to democratic citizenship education, as theorists in this field present a decidedly *verbal* orientation to negotiation and problem solving. For example, Habermas (1984) postulated that “argumentative speech” was the basis for democratic action. Johnson & Johnson (2009b) advocated for “constructed controversies,” which used verbal discussion as the medium for “building coherent intellectual arguments, giving persuasive presentations, critically analyzing and challenging

others' positions, rebutting others' challenges, seeing issues from a variety of perspectives, and seeking reasoned judgments" (p. 48). Parker (2003) put forth the notion of deliberation as "discussion aimed at making decisions about what action to take" (p. xxii). In these conceptions, it is the spoken word that holds sway in the negotiation of ideas.

In the initial framing of this research I embraced these discussion-based models as entry points to the complex interactions that might unfold in the small groups of composers. I wondered how participants might arrive at consensus: Would they employ debate, where positions are preplanned? Or voting, where no meaningful interaction was required? Or would they find their way to Parker's notion of deliberation, where "one group engages in the collective construction of an action plan, which it reaches through consensus building" (Parker, 2003, p. 80). I assumed that argument and verbally-navigated negotiation would be the primary avenues to consensus building and common ground, and hypothesized that these verbal processes might emerge as interesting ends-in-themselves worthy of independent study. On the third day of the project, after the first band break-up occurred, my perception began to shift, as reflected in this excerpt from my journal entry that night:

Some interesting developments with the Nigel, Derek, Rory, and Liana group. They came up to me right at the beginning adamant that they needed to switch groups. First they were saying that Liana and Nigel could be together, but then it sounded like they just thought that Liana's ideas were incompatible with 'the rest'. Really I think the main conflict was between Rory and Liana—neither showing an ounce of flexibility, or admitting the possibility that their ideas might change according to the best interests of the group. I was very conflicted about what to do. Certainly keeping the group together

would allow for a ton of ‘juicy’ conflict that could be interesting for the purposes of my project. On the other hand, the teacher in me questioned the learning that would emerge from all these conflicts. It seemed to be a trajectory toward thoughtless heel dragging and I wonder if there is a point of diminishing returns even from the perspective of democratic citizenship and collaborative learning. No doubt the battles that would ensue would be reflective in some ways of the current polarized state of politics in this country. But is that really the kind of democracy we’re striving for here? That seems like a pretty low bar for democracy—more akin to Walter Parker’s descriptions of ‘debate’, where parties lobby for preformed positions until one sides gains more clout or numbers sufficient to win. The kind of democratic learning that we’re working towards here is a higher-functioning variety. I think that the groups have an opportunity to truly deliberate—to set aside personal agendas in favor of a group course of action. Perhaps with much, much coaching Liana and Rory would set aside their agendas in favor of the group, but they are so far apart in their ideas that I think there would be crippling frustration involved. Scaffolding could come in the form of helping them navigate this frustration (toward a product that they might only be minimally excited about); or alternatively scaffolding can take the form of reworking the group so that the initial ingredients are not SO far apart. In other words, if the former grouping was exceeding their capacity to compromise effectively, perhaps a new grouping would bring them within their “zone of proximal development” [Vygotsky, 1987] for compromise. The teacher’s job then is to “scaffold the deliberation” to a degree of difference that is most productive for the individuals involved.

The tremendous internal struggle I faced in these moments comes through in my writing. Holding onto the assumption that “conflict is to student learning what the internal combustion engine is to the automobile” (Johnson & Johnson, 2009b, p. 38), I felt that by allowing these break-ups to happen I was letting go of the most potent opportunities for students’ democratic learning. As I wrote, however, it was starting to seem disadvantageous to try to “drag” groups like Miracle through ongoing deliberative exchange—that the potential results, both musically and collaboratively—seemed meager at best.

The “higher functioning variety” of democracy that I postulated in my journal entry was starting to emerge at this point in the project. In contrast to the argumentation and deliberation that I had anticipated, the real currency for consensus-building was starting to present itself on musical, semantic level. There were certainly ample verbal exchanges, and these were in themselves intriguing, but I was observing that collective action was often proceeding in different directions (often contrary to those formulated through verbal dialogue) according to the semantic explorations and “jamming” on the musical level.

As it turns out, the democratic interactions that occurred amongst the groups in this project were qualitatively different than what has been described within the domain of democratic citizenship education. In many ways, the experiences of the children were embodying the essence of democratic engagement on a much more fundamental level than would be possible in a policy discussion or a debate on a controversial issue. Whereas deliberative discussion has a goal of action (Parker, 2006), collective composition *is* action itself. It would be as if the members of congress, instead of deciding on a bill to approve funding for a new bridge project, had to march down and actually build the bridge, achieving interactional synchrony as they passed sacks of cement in rhythm, and working in concert to pour each successive slab of the

superstructure.

The above scenario is highly unlikely in reality, as the polarization of the parties in the political realm would prevent this kind of sustained collective action. Such action requires a deeper level of collectivity and a stronger shared sense of purpose than might be possible across such an ideological span. Such a fantastical example does, however, illustrate an important point about the unique nature of musical activity: In the musical realm, in contrast to the assertions of democratic citizenship educators, there seem to be limits to the benefits of plurality in the pursuit of collective musical ends. The experience of the group *Miracle* illustrates this point well: Only once they were working within a scaffolded degree of difference (after I allowed the break-up to occur), were they able to bring their divergent ideas into a convergent whole, form a “new we,” and act collectively.

Forming a shared identity that can be enacted in synchrony is a high bar to reach—and it may not be possible in all cases—but I would argue that it is a critical experience for members in a democratic society. Achieving collective identity through musical creation and performance is not a replacement for the intense deliberations that must occur across party lines and across huge swaths of difference; it is a complementary process, one that showcases the full potential of democratic engagement at a deep level, offering a glimpse of a sort of microcosmic democratic utopia. In many ways, this form of democracy is more akin to Sawyer’s (2003) notion of collective functioning, which he terms “group flow” (building upon Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). In order to achieve group flow, there has to be a delicate balance between “specific extrinsic goals” and “shared structures” such as common conventions and clearly defined roles (Sawyer, 2003, p. 168). Sawyer’s model draws upon the emergent world of improvisatory theater, where collective identity is manifested in the micro-adaptations and moment-to-moment interactions of actors on

stage, and shares much in common with the negotiations of timing, pitch, and dynamics that characterizes musical performance. In both contexts, a high degree of shared purpose and mutual understanding are necessary to engender a successful performance. If all children, and adults alike, had the opportunity to experience democracy at this profound level, it might nudge toward a paradigm shift with respect to group interactions at all levels of society, conjuring up a vision for collective functioning that was previously unimaginable.

Lessons and Reflections

Embarking on a project of this magnitude was a huge risk for all parties involved; one that required a suspension of expectations, an openness to possibilities, and an unprecedented level of patience in the search for unknown destinations. On that first day, the 52 children could sense the start of something big and new, but they could not possibly imagine the complexities, challenges, and rewards of what was to come. Nor could I as teacher fathom the lattice of pathways that would unfold for each of the groups, and the kinds of support that would be required to support them. There were certainly hypotheses entering into the project, and many structures and school “climactic” conditions to enable its success; but even with all this in place there were many unforeseen outcomes and emergent themes; and a constant sense that one could not possibly predict what would come next. This dissertation has endeavored to amalgamate the many thematic threads of this compositional undertaking, framing an argument that the *educational* experiences of the participants held many unique potentials—not separate from their *musical* experiences, but rather intrinsically connected to them in many ways. As the field of music education shifts toward a wider adoption of informal and compositional strategies, it is important to consider some of the lessons learned from this project: The on-the-ground realities

of facilitating this kind of work with students; matters of scope and structure, potential benefits, and questions that have come forth along the way. The following section lays out these takeaways, beginning with the reflections of a teacher in a state of cognitive disequilibrium.

Teacher Reflections: Lessons from a Perceived Failure

Though at the outset I was excited about the prospects of this project, and confident that things would work out well in the end, there were numerous points along the way where I began to doubt the feasibility of the whole endeavor. On the sixth day I penned this somewhat exasperated journal entry:

This was a hard day, and I was starting to feel like the project could possibly combust. Though there a few groups that made positive leaps (like I was able to work with Shanice's group and make a mock up on Garage Band [recording software] with a melody (that I created). Many groups seemed stuck, discouraged, and unable to progress without my help. Feeling pretty discouraged myself, I scheduled some time on Wednesday to meet with some groups and was able to see Rainfire as well as Double Trouble. Rainfire was tough to work with because Simone is so inflexible (and has a very limited musical sense) that attempts to help her ideas conform to a regular beat or key are met with resistance. Double Trouble was hungry for help and they were super pumped about the mock up we made. Teacher intervention is certainly emerging as a theme. What would they be able to do without intervention? Sometimes it seems so limited, but then maybe I'm giving myself too much credit. To what extent am I helping them realize their own vision, and to what extent am I exercising my own vision? I try to be so

flexible and such a good listener in order to pick up the essence of their ideas, but sometimes their ideas seem impossible, undefinable or just impractical. For example, I really want to understand what it is that Simone is hearing for the ‘chorus’ part: “If you run, far enough, you can escape from this old town, it’s no secret it’s keeping you down.” I listened to her recording so many times and could not seem to lock it into any regular meter. How then would we help her group members play along with her? So we tried adding in some space in between each phrase, but they weren’t crazy about it, so we were a bit stuck. These are the dilemmas I keep running into.

In these challenging situations, my attempts to offer support walked a tightrope between student agency and teacher control. I was mindful of the wise words of Wiggins (2011), that “even in the healthiest of learning situations, students and teachers find themselves in a constant state of negotiation, seeking a productive mutuality that will enable all parties to move forward toward their goals” (p. 89). At this stage of the process, I was struggling to find this “productive mutuality.” In cases like Rainfire (as well Third Dimension, Gravity, and others to a lesser degree), my attempts to bring clashing ideas into rhythmic or tonal correspondence, or to interpret an individual student’s idea into something that conformed to musical conventions of pitch and meter, were met with resistance or indifference. I was confounded. If I could not deliver the sort of musical support that seemed so targeted and necessary, then what was my role in this process?

With the benefit of hindsight, I later realized that the issue in these cases was that I was trying to crystallize a musical direction before the groups had achieved collective identity. In a sense, I was trying to force them to decide “who they were” before they were ready for this to

occur. With collective identity established, my musical coaching was dramatically more effective. This was certainly the case for the Poptarts, C'est La Vie, Third Dimension, and Double Trouble (for the latter two my support actually coincided with the attainment of collective identity in the “lunch meetings”). These groups knew what they wanted in terms of sound, and I was able to structure and streamline their path to realizing it.

In the earlier stages of the project, however, when groups were struggling to define themselves collectively, I was involved in a parallel struggle to find effective strategies for offering appropriate support. Much of the time I found myself almost running around, forced by the pressures of the clock and calendar to industrialize my interactions—sometimes cutting short the careful listening and responsive feedback that I had hoped for in favor of “getting them to do things” or even “doing things for them.” The following note in my journal, crafted in fragmented, telegraphic fashion, captures the sometimes frantic pace of my experience in these sessions:

Developing “Dance Dance Dance” idea with Third Dimension. SIGNIFICANT input from Matt—moving at 100 miles an hour, trying to GIVE each group what they need in short order. Sometimes leads to teaching that is short on inquiry/critical thinking.

Necessary given time constraints and need for product? In the end they need to make it their own anyway. Maybe I'm just giving them the tools to go on and create their own.

My struggles in these sessions—when the honeymoon of novelty and excitement was waning and the weight of product expectations and deadlines was setting in—echoes conclusions by

other researchers about the challenges of teacher support in small group composition projects. As Fautley (2002) noted about a composition effort with lower secondary students in the U.K.:

The role of the teacher in the process was one of making rapid formative assessments whilst working ‘on the hoof’, moving from one group to another. However, there was a tendency for teachers to be concerned with organizational matters, tending towards a view of task completion, and a concomitant lack of ontological commitment to making musical judgments about pupil composing (p. 215).

This suggests a gap in the preparation of teachers; one that leaves them unequipped to support children through the challenging process of group composition. As Faulkner (2003) reflected, “the rationale for group composing remains primarily a practical and logistical one, dictated by the needs of the classroom, a widely used teaching strategy remains poorly informed and badly grounded” (p. 104). Music teacher preparation programs have provided inadequate instruction on matters of small group facilitation, or even none at all. External entities such as *Musical Futures* have offered training and curricula related to small group, informal learning structures, but these have been critiqued for a teacher orientation that is often characterized by “staying out of the way and letting the students teach themselves” (Allsup, 2008). There is certainly a middle ground—one encouraging student independence but also providing necessary support for the requisite musical skills and expectations—and music teacher preparation programs are charged with providing instructional time to develop these capacities in future teachers.

This middle ground was certainly the zone I was striving to reach in this project, and I achieved results that were both successful and unsuccessful. A key finding pertains to the

shifting demands of teacher support throughout the evolution of the process. In the first phase, before collective identities were in place, there was a need for fewer interventions to “rush along” the process or solidify the compositions, and more encouragement to explore, listen, and consider possibilities. Certainly, given the technical limitations of the students, it was helpful for me to clarify their ideas on instruments and offer additional possibilities, but attention was needed to minimize teacher control of the creative material and to really focus on equipping them to realize their own vision. Later in the process, once collective identity was established, teacher support took a more familiar form—characterized by more explicit technical assistance related to group performance.

In the final weeks of the project, as the Songwriter’s Ball began to loom large on the horizon, my doubts were reinvigorated and I began to again question the feasibility of this project. There were many groups that were still struggling to play together in the most basic sense and their rehearsals would rapidly dissolve into chaos. I had committed, with some trepidation, to the performance being entirely student-led. This had never happened during my tenure as music teacher. I had always been there for performances and rehearsals, accompanying, conducting, keeping the beat, providing starting notes, bringing sections into correspondence. I was used to being *part* of the students’ musical experience; my playing, instructions, and gestures were always there for them—even with a change in the expression of my face I could change a musical parameter in real time, or right a musical wrong that was occurring on stage. And now, in order to remove the “power differential between student and teacher” (Levinson & Brantmeier, 2012) and to allow students to experience mutualism and democracy in their group-based processes, I presumed to step down off the podium, find a spot out in the audience, and let them deliver an entire performance on their own. I was terrified.

Much of what was taking place in my internal dialogue pertained to letting go and relinquishing control. Perhaps I worried that students would utterly fall apart on stage, unable to complete their pieces. Perhaps I worried that their playing and singing would be uncoordinated, out of key, and lacking in musicality, and that this would reflect badly on my program to the school and parent community. What actually transpired on stage at the Songwriter's Ball on February 7th, 2014 was quite surprising, and provided some of my most powerful lessons as a teacher.

There were indeed moments of out-of-tune singing, rhythmic discrepancies, missed notes, or the occasional student forgetting to play something at the right time. What really stood out, however, was the musical independence and intuition that these children were exhibiting. There were the rhythmic corrections (as mentioned in chapter 6) where parts would go out of phase with each other, and then through careful listening and adjustment, come back into correspondence. There was a tremendous convergence of vocal styling. There were adaptations to missed notes or forgotten lyrics, and these enhanced the spontaneous nature of the musical conversation that was occurring on stage. As I watched from the audience, I was stunned. There were no cues from me, no count-ins, no reminders, and yet these 52 children were delivering this performance. The music was truly theirs, and they were exhibiting an unprecedented level of independence with it. (It should be noted that the *independence* I'm describing does not carry the individualistic connotations that are often associated with the word. Though the musical interactions exhibited at the Songwriter's Ball were characterized more by *interdependence* between the various vectors of each collective, I'm arguing here that what made each performance remarkable was its *independence* from adult control). I realized that despite my fears, this was perhaps the most important musical takeaway for the participants—the element

that was most potent for them to grapple with, because it had received the least attention in the previous activities of my program. Removing the teacher from the performance and rehearsals allowed children to become their own musicians, and to share their own constructed repertoire in a public forum, in their own way and on their own terms. They were demonstrating what Faulkner (2003) referred to as “non-verbal, socio-musical agency” (p. 115).

Following the Songwriter’s Ball I created a medley of the 14 songs to be performed at the spring concert, and again I was struck by the musical independence of each collective. As I reflected in my journal:

In a performance context they are better able to sync, adapt to tempo changes, switch keys, and they certainly need fewer visual cues from me (beyond basic structural cues like which song comes next). This has been quite a successful culmination (or outgrowth) of the project from my teacher perspective.

This latter experience was a suggestion that the participants might be able to transfer their learning from the small group composition project to other activities. They were in a sense more musical or at least more independently musical than when they started the project. This independence has the potential to influence their musical decisions and self-concept in the years to come—no doubt a significant outcome of this project, and one that teachers might take heed of, no matter how hard it is to let go of the control that we are traditionally accustomed to maintaining.

Scope

As reported in the opening chapters, the scope of this compositional exercise was unprecedented for this age group. It is therefore of value to consider the benefits that emerged from this long timespan. First, it is quite notable that it took on average nine weeks (of working one hour per week) to achieve a level of collective identity. This is not something that has previously been documented. Indeed, collective identity is not something that music educators have really thought to look for in a group composition project, perhaps partly because previous projects have not been long enough to achieve it. Given time constraints, teachers have had to place limits on seemingly aimless explorations, or on the type of repeated drafting exhibited by some of the groups in my study. If there were only three weeks, or even six, the groups would have had to narrow in those original ideas and focus on refining them to a performable level in short order. As demonstrated in this study, often the original musical directions were not what the groups really wanted to pursue, or not reflective of a shared sense of purpose. Expediting the process and forcing students to focus on those initial “knee jerk” ideas (as the raw materials for further refinement), would remove the kind of mutuality experienced by many of the groups on the bumpy road. The initial pieces were often generated by one or two individuals and were not “bought into” by the rest of the group members. Proceeding through successive drafts and iterations allowed the groups to coalesce upon something that was shared. Removing this natural evolution would render group composition more similar to group activities elsewhere in school—allowing the creative flow to be dominated by the few and leaving others as bystanders to the process. For the participants under study, this openness to grow together into something truly shared was one of the key outgrowths of the experience.

The long timespan was also conducive to the growth of musicality and independence—necessary to deliver a student-led performance like the Songwriter’s Ball. In most cases it took many weeks for the groups to bring rhythmic ideas into correspondence. The weeks of struggling with things being out of phase were perhaps really a process of establishing the musical lines of communication. Learning how to hear ones part in relation to others, without the guidance of teacher cues, was a slow process but was also an integral part of building musical independence. Many groups became more adept as composers in the later weeks of the project. As I observed in one of the final sessions:

I seem to view their work as somewhat ‘plateaued’ and the only way it can go further is with my intervention. This was not the case though. Save that Thought, even though they had been stuck with the same arrangement for weeks, spontaneously created a whole new section today and rearranged the structure! This certainly helps justifies the span of this project—it really does seem to take a long time to get to that level of independence.

The large scope of the activity fit within the ethos of the school, as came across in an interview with the principal Paulina. As Paulina reflected on the merits of taking time to discover things in depth, she in many ways encapsulated one of the most potent lessons from the bumpy road:

Paulina: It has occurred to me that we are giving them [students] the time to see things, and that I never really had that in school. You know, I was fast in some things, so sometimes I would have the epiphany in class, like ”yeah I see this,” but rarely because I wasn’t that fast...because if you don't get it in so many minutes they are going to swoop

in and show you—they don't wait for you to actually have the epiphany. So I think the thing with kids here, if things are hard for them, that is so unusual is that we are giving them time to have those endorphins release when they see it. Even if it means that they get extra time or an extra day, we still don't show it to them. We'll coach them or maybe we'll scale the problem for them, or whatever we do, but we are going to let them honestly get it.

The participants in this project certainly had the opportunity to “see it” in Paulina’s words; to make the important musical and collaborative discoveries that were necessary to fulfill the prompt to form a band and compose an original piece of music. This perspective poses a question to music education as a whole: How often are we giving students the time and space to figure things out and make discoveries? The skill-based approaches of many performance-driven programs don’t leave room for such independent and deep-level learning. As the findings of the present project suggest, there are many potential benefits for slowing down and letting students take the driver’s seat from time to time. This may be reason for music teachers to pause and reconsider the tendency to rush or “cover” material at the expense of student agency or critical thinking.

Freedom

Beyond the span of time, one of the defining characteristics of this project was its open-endedness. Children were constrained by configuration of spaces, by the availability of instruments, and by their own technical abilities, but beyond that, the parameters were wide open. This open design had many advantages that have been outlined previously. For one, it gave

groups the “wobble room” and mobility to find a common ground of collectivity. Secondly, it allowed them to pursue an area of stylistic interest and assemble their own configuration of instruments and roles. It also posed the requirement the design their own parameters for composing and working together—a formidable endeavor that defined the independence and deep musical and social learning that occurred for many of the participants.

The freedom of this project also opened up doors for a reconsideration of informal learning practices in the music classroom. The informal structures that have taken hold in the field, by way of organizations like *Musical Futures* in the United Kingdom and *Little Kids Rock* in the United States, have taken a decidedly Anglo-rock-driven approach, providing students with the likes of electric guitars, drums, and keyboards. On one hand, these efforts have brought musical opportunities to many who would have otherwise been denied them. On the other hand, such structures have brought a fairly narrowly-defined avenue to musical participation, which has been ground for their critique (Allsup, 2008). There is an interesting irony here. The informal learning model has constructed itself on the basis of student autonomy and freedom, and yet what it has offered as tools have been quite narrow in scope. The underlying assumption is that “what the kids really want” is to perform pop-styled music on the traditional rock configuration of instruments.

The present project has offered a challenge to this assumption. While the theoretical underpinnings of the informal learning model have remained in tact—such as peer-to-peer learning, aural strategies, and idiosyncratic approaches (Green, 2006)—the confines of genre and instrumentation have been removed. Students were free to choose their instruments and musical directions, and the results of these choices challenged the notion of “what kids want”: Though electric guitars, keyboards, and drums were available, they fell in right alongside xylophones,

pianos, and glockenspiels, as well as violins from home. Also, many of the songs that the groups created were not popular-styled tunes, particularly with respect to the 3J's, Save That Thought, and The Poptarts. These results highlight the importance of allowing children and adolescents to choose their own directions and parameters, and not making assumptions about their musical identities.

Opening the doors to the free exploration of sounds and styles allows learners of diverse backgrounds to “find themselves” in the music curriculum—an antidote to the age old multicultural music education question of: “Whose music do we teach?” Instead of focusing on what we are teaching, or even how we are teaching it, Karlsen and Westerlund (2010) suggest that the debate might be better framed in terms of what students are actually experiencing. Specifically they target immigrant youth, highlighting immigrant students’ identities as complex and multifaceted, such that an individual student may take on multiple cultural identities simultaneously (Hall, 1992). While a well-meaning teacher might present a traditional Vietnamese song in order to reach a group of immigrant students from Vietnam, these youth might identify more strongly with mainstream popular music, or perhaps one might identify with Brazilian music because of a close Brazilian friend. Rather than trying to *reach* youth through repertoire choices and pedagogical approaches, it is more useful to consider what the students themselves bring to the table. Allowing children to express themselves musically, as this composition project did, allows learners to find relevance in the activities at hand. Though the context under study had a relatively low level of cultural and socioeconomic diversity, there was still a considerable diversity in the resulting compositions. If this population of students occupied such a considerable spread in their musical expressions, it stands to reason that a population of

greater diversity would benefit even more from the freedom, and express an even wider spread of musical styles, although this remains a question for future investigation.

In addition to meeting the stylistic propensities of the participants, the open-endedness of the project allowed students of considerable variability in terms of musical skill to find an appropriate level of challenge. Even the most skilled amongst the children were stretched musically. James, who played violin with the youth symphony, reflected in an interview on the challenges along the way:

Matt: And so you play a lot outside of school on violin and you're playing with the symphony. What do you think you've learned from all that experience that helped you out with this project?

James: Well like everybody has to know their parts, and like in this we kept changing the parts and who had what instrument so we had to keep learning new parts.

Matt: You mean like when one part changes the rest change too...Do you think it's harder to create a song or to learn a song that somebody else created?

James: Create a song.

Matt: Have you done any creating songs outside of school?

James: No.

The requirements to adapt to a collective sound, bring conflicting ideas into correspondence, and invent new possibilities were a high ceiling of challenge for even the most advance players. The participants of the lowest skill level were also able to find appropriate challenges through the activity—these were some of the “squeaky wheels” described previously. Though these students’

experiences were complicated socially, they all found ways to engage musically. Ross and Erin showed tremendous growth in their work with the Killer Kowz and C'est La Vie, respectively, using visual strategies to sync with their band members. In a classroom containing a wide spread of abilities, it is difficult to plan curricula that meets the need of all parties involved. The freedom in this endeavor allowed just this to happen—taking the burden of individualizing, placing it on the shoulders of the learners (with support), and allowing for a more precisely targeted program to unfold for each student.

On the topic of musical ability, it is notable the critical role that rhythmic awareness played in the collaborative dynamics and semantic-level communication in these groups. The “squeaky wheel phenomenon,” as it played out across four different groups, was a glaring example of this. Certainly the limitations of these students were known before the start of the project, but the act of composing and performing in a small group brought them into unprecedented focus. It is reasonable to question whether the traditional approaches to music education—large group choirs and ensembles—really serve these types of learners well. They may simply become adept at not “standing out”; at going through the motions in mimicry of those around them without internalizing the sonic components of what is taking place. Stripping away this buffering effect of the large group structure certainly facilitated a new level of visibility and awareness for these children. This was a challenging place to be for them, but given that this project afforded the “space to figure things out” (in Paulina’s words), these learners were able confront these challenges to a greater degree than was previously impossible.

Structural considerations

There were structural challenges to the facilitation of this project. Chief among these were the limitations of the spaces being used. The proximity of the groups led to a constant competition for sonic space; as I scribbled in my notes, the groups were clearly “plagued by noise bleed.” While I made many efforts to contain this epidemic, the question of how to facilitate this type of work in a classroom setting is ongoing. Given the challenges I experienced, with relatively small class sizes of 17 and 18 students and several different space with which to work, it is hard to imagine a class of 30 or more students in a single classroom space being able to execute this scale of project. There are certain modifications that can occur: Adjacent spaces (hallways, classrooms, and lunch rooms) can be employed, although the need for teacher oversight and support means that these spaces can’t be too spread out. Work time can also be segmented, such that only a few groups are practicing at once, while the others work on complimentary activities. On the other hand, this issue does beg some bigger questions. What if structural conditions had allowed each group to meet in their own space, without noise bleed? How would the time frame, collaborative processes, and musical results have differed? These are questions for future research. Suffice it to say for now though, that if music educators see small group composition projects as valuable, and acknowledge that the chaos of a whole classroom composing at once is not ideal, then it may become necessary to explore alternate structures and scheduling possibilities for music instruction. Perhaps whole class instruction could alternate with small group composition-based “labs.” Such a scenario is hard to imagine with current restraints on budgets and personnel, but in time it could perhaps find traction, in the same way that private tuition on instruments has been made possible in some schools in the U.K. and beyond.

This project also has implications for group size with respect to collaborative composition. The groups of five that originally formed (Gravity and Enough Said) were a bit unwieldy, as expressed by James:

Matt: What was it like working in the group of five?

James: The people were focused like sometimes, but there's always some people that weren't focused.

Matt: You're saying that when you were with the big group initially it was hard to focus. Is it easier with a smaller group?

James: Yes 'cause there are less people to get to focus.

Pauline, the principal, offered a summary in our interview: “We find someone that we think we can work with usually, and then maybe add on the third person, and then it is a little less stable—the more people you add the more unstable the group is.” This was observed to be true for the groups of 5, but interestingly for the groups of 4 or less there didn't seem to be a big difference in terms group functioning (with the variables of gender and musical ability emerging as of greater importance). The one group of two (Double Trouble), though they functioned well as a collective, had trouble delivering the sound that they wanted, because there weren't enough of them to play the guitar, drums, and sing at the same time. So, from the perspective of this project, the optimum group size for collective identity formation and collaboration (on both the pragmatic and semantic level) sits in the range of three or four.

Beyond Alder Park Elementary School

Overall, the complex journey outlined in this dissertation points to a potpourri of potentials that emerge when collaboration and composition are brought together and stretched to their logical limits. The project that transpired was very much situated in the context and school climate of Alder Park Elementary, and as such is not presumed (based on the data collected and analyzed here) to be transferable to other school contexts. However it is a logical next step to consider how a similar project might unfold in a dramatically different school environment and with a distinct population of participants. How would students in a more traditional context experience composing in a band differently? With fewer verbal collaboration skills ingrained in the school program, would the students perhaps transfer more easily to the idea of semantic or musical communication? Given the greater contrast with their “typical” school experience, would their collaborative lessons emerge as more profound or dramatic? Additionally, how would a greater span of cultural diversity among the population of a neighborhood, school, or class interact with the process of collective identity formation?

It is also reasonable to ponder the effects of abridging or condensing such a project to fit the needs of alternate school program. How would further time constraints affect the natural evolution of student groups? To what extent does the experience of collectivity rely on the freedom of choice in the matters of group formation and instrument selection? What if “breaking up” or “starting over” were not permitted? Would this have a diminishing effect on the eventual collective experience?

If the project were replicated, it would be useful to have groups working concurrently on a music composition project and another (mathematical, scientific, or social studies) project in the classroom. This would allow for a more direct comparison of processes and outcomes that

are uniquely musical and how these play out for a particular group of individuals. It would also be interesting to consider what would happen if structural conditions allowed groups to meet in their own space, without “noise bleed?” How would the time frame, collaborative processes, and musical results differ? These are all questions that merit future attention and future study.

Parting Thoughts

“Music carries some capacity to separate and bring together, and in doing so, its power charges us as civic educators, not simply music educators.” (Allsup, 2010, p. 136)

Exploring the democratic and collaborative potentials of a music project opens the door to new possibilities, but also suggests new responsibilities for the field of music education. Beyond the day-to-day skill building, rehearsal, repertoire building, and assessment, there is the human side of music teaching. There are the basic questions of “who are our students?” and “who do we want them to become?” There are also the bigger questions of “what kind of society do we want to live in?” and “what is the role of music participation in shaping society?” Beyond commonly held assumptions about music participation and its positive influence on cooperation and harmony in society, there has been insufficient attention given to explicitly connecting musical study to the overarching goals of schooling. Much advocacy work has focused on separating musical objectives from the rest of education, and giving these objectives the strength to stand alone and sustain programs amidst shrinking budgets. Perhaps Mark (2014) is correct however, that “the present moment offers music education further opportunities to significantly impact the educational path of the nation.” (p. 21) Perhaps we stand at a crossroads of

opportunity for redefining, clarifying, and translating the work we do to the rest of the education community. Rather than fearing cross-curricular connections as a hijacking of musical integrity, music educators have an opportunity to recognize the potentials for music advocacy on broad educational terms. In many ways, the discourse has changed, and there is no longer need to give exclusive attention to resisting the “music makes you smarter” rhetoric and the oversimplified justifications for including music in the curriculum based on test scores. There are countless renewed voices across the spectrum of educational domains that are calling for approaches that are more collaborative and creative, and music educators could very well add a great deal to this momentum, in ways that are unique, musically compelling, and rich with possibilities for musical thinking, collective engagement, and student-driven performance. This investigation of collaborative composition among fourth and fifth graders at one school suggests this is indeed possible.

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Appendix 1: Parent Consent Form

Group Songwriting in the Music Classroom

Researcher:

Matt Swanson, Graduate Student, School of Music, 206.777.5472, mattswan@uw.edu

Patricia Campbell, Ph.D., Professor, UW School of Music, 206.543.4768, pcamp@uw.edu

**Please note that I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information sent by e-mail.*

Researcher's statement

I am asking you to allow your child to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether you want your child to be involved in this study or not. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what I would ask your child to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a parent/guardian, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called 'informed consent.' You will get a copy of this form for your records. Your school's principal and classroom teacher have approved this letter, and have agreed to cooperate with the study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to explore the potential of group songwriting as a format for developing collaborative skills. I will be observing students as they work together to create original music.

STUDY PROCEDURES

As part of the study, I will be observing your child's normal music classes. Participation in the study includes the following activities. At the end of this form, you can decide if you would like your child to participate in any or all of the activities.

- (1) I would like to videotape your child's classroom participation during music lessons. I will be videotaping in the classroom even if you and your child choose not to participate in the study. If you do not want to participate, I will blur your child's image from the videotape, and I will not keep a record of his/her participation.
- (2) I would like to interview all children in the class about their interest level of the activities of music class. In order to maximize their comfort level, students will be interviewed in pairs. The interviews will take place during recess or lunch, or at other times during the day that the classroom teacher has indicated will not be disruptive or impact their learning. The interviews will be videotaped, then I will transcribe the tapes and assign a fake name in place of your child's name.
- (3) I would like to ask all students in the class to fill out a survey about their approach to teamwork, a questionnaire about their musical background, and another questionnaire about their group's songwriting processes. Each of these activities

will take approximately 15 minutes. Students will also keep a songwriting journal throughout the project which can travel between home and school. Writing in this journal will be entirely voluntary.

Participation in this study will not require any time outside of school. Your child's participation is voluntary. Participation will not affect his or her classroom grade or any other evaluation.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. I will protect your child's privacy by assigning a fake name in all writing related to this research.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Though your child may not benefit directly from this study, I hope that the findings will encourage music teachers to design lessons that build cooperation, creativity, and teamwork.

ALTERNATIVES TO TAKING PART IN THE STUDY

If you or your child chooses not to take part in the study, they will still be a part of the regular music class. Video recordings will be made, and their faces will be blurred to protect their anonymity. They will not be interviewed outside of class. They will refrain from filling out the questionnaire and survey.

OTHER INFORMATION

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may remove your child from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which your child is otherwise entitled.. Your decision whether or not to consent that your child participates in this study will not affect your child's standing in the classroom.

Information about your child is confidential. I will code all study information using fake names. You and your child can view the videotapes of specific class periods or of his or her interviews with me and erase anything that you or they do not want used for research.

With your permission, I will use samples from tapes for presentations at educational audiences, such as at professional conferences and in teacher education courses. Note that if you give me permission to use recordings in these educational settings, I do not have control over how others will then use the information I would like your permission to keep the tapes forever in order to use them for these purposes. I will not use your child's name in any presentation. I will not use the tapes publicly until you have had an opportunity to review and edit the tapes and provide your written consent. I will provide an opportunity for you to view and edit the tapes at the end of data collection, in December, 2013. I will then only use tapes publicly if you give your written consent on an additional form.

The link between the study information and your child's name will not be destroyed until December 2017, unless you allow me to maintain your videotapes forever. I will keep the link between your child's name and the study code forever in case you decide that you do not want me to use the tapes at some point in the future. If you give me permission to keep video recordings indefinitely, I will keep them linked to the student work indefinitely.

At the end of this form, you can indicate whether or not you give your permission for your child to be video taped for this study.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at any time, using the contact information at the top of this letter. If you have questions about your rights as a parent/guardian or your child's rights as a research subject, call the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at 206.543.0098.

Matt Swanson

Printed name of researcher

Signature of researcher

Date

Parent's/Legal Guardian's Statement

This research study has been explained to me. I voluntarily consent to allow my child to participate. I have had a chance to ask questions. I give the researcher permission to observe and interview my child regarding his or her group processes in music class, as outlined above. Below, I will indicate whether I will allow these interactions to be video and audio recorded. If I have questions later about this research, I can ask the researcher listed above. If I choose to contact the researcher by e-mail, I understand that confidentiality of any information cannot be assured.

If I have any questions about my rights as a parent/guardian or my child's rights as a participant in this research, I may call the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at 206.543.0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Please INITIAL next to EITHER YES or NO for each of the items below:

I give my permission for the researcher to video and audio record my child's regular music classes.

Yes _____ No _____

I give my permission for the researcher to interview my child about group work in music class.

Yes _____ No _____

I give my permission for the researcher to video record the interview with my child about group work in music class.

Yes _____ No _____

I give my permission my child to provide written answers to questions about group processes.

Yes _____ No _____

Future use of data from this study:

If data from this study is used for further studies:

I give my permission for the researcher to contact me about future related studies.

Yes _____ No _____

Name of Student

Printed Name of Parent or Legal Guardian

Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian

Date

Appendix 2: Teacher Consent Form

Group Songwriting in the Music Classroom

Researcher:

Matt Swanson, Graduate Student, School of Music, 206.777.5472, mattswan@uw.edu

Patricia Campbell, Ph.D., Professor, UW School of Music, 206.543.4768, pcamp@uw.edu

**Please note that I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of information sent by e-mail.*

Researcher's statement

I am asking you to be in a research study. The purpose of this consent form is to give you the information you will need to help you decide whether you will be in this study. Please read the form carefully. You may ask questions about the purpose of the research, what you would be asked to do, the possible risks and benefits, your rights as a participant, and anything else about the research or this form that is not clear. When all of your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called 'informed consent.' You will get a copy of this form for your records. Your school's principal has approved this letter, and has agreed to cooperate with this study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to explore the potential of group songwriting as a format for developing collaborative skills. I will be observing students as they work together to create original music.

STUDY PROCEDURES

- (1) If you choose to be involved in this study, I would like to video record your class.
- (2) I would like to interview students, in groups of two, about their group work process. I will arrange with the students to conduct most of these interviews during recess or lunch, but there may be some times when I will attempt to arrange times with you to interview students during normal class time. I will work with you to find suitable times that will minimally impact their learning in your class.
- (3) I would like to interview you two times. The interviews would concern your perceptions of students working together in the elementary music class overall, and would last approximately 20 -30 minutes. The interviews will be video recorded, and then transcribed.

RISKS, STRESS, OR DISCOMFORT

Some people feel that providing information for research is an invasion of privacy. I will protect the privacy of you and your students by assigning a fake name in all writing related to this research.

BENEFITS OF THE STUDY

Though you may not benefit directly from this study, I hope that the findings will encourage music teachers to design lessons that build cooperation, creativity, and teamwork.

OTHER INFORMATION

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.. Participation or withdrawal will not affect your standing in your school. Information about you is confidential. I will code all of the study information using pseudonyms for you, your students, and your school. You are welcome to review the video recordings or the transcripts at any time and make changes or delete any of your comments.

With your permission, I will use samples from tapes for presentations at educational audiences, such as at professional conferences and in teacher education courses. Note that if you give me permission to use recordings in these educational settings, I do not have control over how others will then use the information. I would like your permission to keep the tapes forever in order to use them for these purposes. I will not use your name in any presentation. I will not use the tapes publicly until you have had an opportunity to review and edit the tapes and provide your written consent. I will provide an opportunity for you to view and edit the tapes at the end of data collection, in December, 2013. I will then only use tapes publicly if you give your written consent on an additional form.

The link between the study information and your name will not be destroyed until December 2017, unless you allow me to maintain your videotapes forever. I will keep the link between your name and the study code forever in case you decide that you do not want me to use the tapes at some point in the future. If results of the study are published or presented, I will not use your name.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at any time, using the contact information at the top of this letter. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, call the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at 206.543.0098.

Matt Swanson

Printed name of researcher
Date

Signature of researcher

Participant's Statement

This research study has been explained to me. I volunteer to take part in this research. I have had a chance to ask questions. I give the researcher permission to observe my classes

and interview me, as outlined above. Below, I will indicate whether I will allow these interactions to be video recorded, and whether I volunteer to be interviewed. If I have questions later about this research, I can ask the researcher listed above. If I choose to contact the researcher by e-mail, I understand that confidentiality of any information cannot be assured.

If I have any questions about my rights as a participant in this research, I may call the University of Washington Human Subjects Division at 206.543.0098. I will receive a copy of this consent form.

Please INITIAL next to EITHER YES or NO for each of the items below:

I give my permission for the researcher to video and audio record my classes.

Yes _____ No _____

I give my permission for the researcher to observe my class instruction.

Yes _____ No _____

I volunteer to be a part of the interview portion of this study.

Yes _____ No _____

I give my permission for the researcher to video record my interviews.

Yes _____ No _____

Future use of data from this study:

If data from this study is used for further studies:

I give my permission for the researcher to contact me about future related studies.

Yes _____ No _____

Printed Name of Subject

Signature of Subject

Date

Appendix 3: Student Assent Form

Group Songwriting in the Music Classroom

Researchers:

Matt Swanson, Graduate Student, School of Music, 206.777.5472,
mattswan@uw.edu

Patricia Campbell, Ph.D., Professor, UW School of Music, 206.543.4768,
pcamp@uw.edu

What is my study about?

I am interested in finding out what you learn by creating music in a group.

What will I do?

- (1) You will have normal music classes. What is different is that you will sometimes be recorded. When your group is working together you may be asked to record your conversation with a handheld voice recorder. Sometimes your group may also be video recorded.
- (2) I will interview you about music class. I will ask you questions about how your group is working together. You will be interviewed along with another student in your class. I would like to video record the interviews. You can watch the videos, and you can ask me to change or erase anything that you said.
- (3) In class, you will sometimes write on a piece of paper about your musical experiences and how your group is working together. You will also have a 'songwriting journal' where you can keep track of your ideas.

I would like to show some of the videos of you and your classmates to other people who are learning to teach. I will give you a chance to see and hear the videos. I will not show the videos to other people unless you tell me that it is okay with you. I will not use your real name.

Your part:

You can choose if you want to be part of this study. You don't have to be in this study if you don't want to. No one will be mad at you. You can ask questions any time while I am in your classroom. You can change your mind about being in this study at any time. If you choose not to participate in the study, you will still take part in all music activities with the rest of your

classmates, but your face will be blurred in the recordings so no one can tell who your are.

Matt Swanson

Printed Name of Researcher Signature of Researcher Date

Student’s Statement:

Matt Swanson told me about this study. I want to be in it. I can ask questions about the study now or later. I know that I will be filmed on video and that is okay with me. I know that if I have more questions, I can ask Matt Swanson.

I give you permission to video record me during music class.

Yes _____ No _____

I give you permission to talk to me about group songwriting. I understand that you will make a video of what we talk about. You can ask me to write about making music with a group.

Yes _____ No _____

Appendix 4: Sample interview questions

How well has your group been working together?

How did your group come up with a plan at the beginning of the project?

What has been your role in the group? What do you bring that is unique?

Has everyone been contributing to the process?

Are some people contributing more than others? In what way?

How does your group make decisions?

Can you think of a disagreement that your group has had?

How did your group resolve the disagreement?

What do you think of your song so far?

What still needs to be done to finish your song?

Do you think you will finish on time?

What's one thing you wish you could change about your group?

What's one thing you wish you could change about your song?

Can you think of ways to make those changes happen?

Have you worked in groups in other classes in the school? What are some examples?

How does this group project compare with other groups you've worked with?

Appendix 5: Rolling Stone Interview Questions

My name is _____ and I'm interviewing
_____ from the band _____

1. You recently headlined at the Songwriter's Ball in Seattle—how did the performance go?
2. Can you describe the evolution of your band? How did you get to where you are now?
3. What was the inspiration for your hit song _____?
4. How does the band go about writing a song? What does the process look like?
5. Are there different roles that people take on in your band?
6. Have you had any disagreements in your band? What were they and how did you work through them?
7. What's one thing you wish you could change about your song?
8. What's the next stop on your world tour?