INFORMAL LEARNING IN THE CHORAL CLASSROOM

by

Aimee Dorothy Pearsall

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Aimee Dorothy Pearsall

Approved:

Suzanne L. Burton, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved:

Russell E. Murray, Ph.D.
Chair of the Department of Music

Approved:

George H. Watson, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Approved:

Ann L. Ardis, Ph.D.
Senior Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education
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ABSTRACT

Although North American schools have had vast success in creating outstanding examples of formal musical ensembles such as choirs, bands, and orchestras, many choral teachers do not incorporate composing or improvising into their ensemble rehearsals. The purpose of this study was to explore students’ experiences songwriting in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting. The research questions that guided this study were: (a) How do students approach and navigate the songwriting process in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting? (b) How does participation in an informal learning context affect students’ experiences in choir? (c) How does the incorporation of informal learning in the choral rehearsal affect and inform my teaching practice?

Using an ethnographic case study design, I studied the students in a fourth through eighth grade choir (n=13) as they wrote original songs and performed them in a Coffee House. Data sources included my journal, the students’ journals, documents, field notes, still photos, semi-structured interviews, and video evidence, allowing for triangulation. As a reflective practitioner, I analyzed data during the data collection period. I concluded that informal learning served as an effective way to allow students to explore musical creativity through songwriting. Students became agents of their own learning, constructing their own musical, social, and organizational understandings while transferring their formal knowledge into an informal context.

Understanding students’ perceptions and processes as they related to songwriting in the choral classroom has important implications for the field of choral
music education. Teachers should consider informal learning and/or songwriting as a means to incorporating music creativity into choral classes. Choral directors should consider placing value on process over product at times, especially with regard to creativity in the classroom.
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Although North American schools have had vast success in creating outstanding examples of formal musical ensembles such as choirs, bands, and orchestras, these same schools are unsuccessful at incorporating composition and improvisation into their curriculum (Hickey, 2012). Despite this lack of exposure to music composition in K-12 music classrooms, many schools claim to value the development of children’s creativity across all disciplines including the arts (Odena, 2002). The National Core Arts Standards contain four core processes, with creating listed as one of them. According to the music glossary of the National Core Arts Standards, the term “create” is defined as “[to] conceive and develop new artistic ideas, such as an improvisation, composition, or arrangement, into a work” (SEADAE, 2014, p. 5). Therefore, K-12 teachers are expected to incorporate composition and improvisation into all types of music classes, including ensemble rehearsals.

Statement of the Problem

Despite existing policy documents (SEADAE, 2014, p. 5) and selected choral textbooks (e.g., Holt & Jordan, 2008) that emphasize the importance of incorporating opportunities for student creativity into choir rehearsals for children, there is a lack of research on the topic. Though informal learning exists as a theory (Green, 2006), there have been few studies dedicated to incorporating an informal learning context into a choral setting. Instruction in choral classrooms remains instructor-driven, focused on
performance rather than on fostering understandings, knowledge, and skills that students can transfer beyond the walls of the choral room (Freer, 2011; Walker, 2007), rarely giving students the autonomy to create their own products in an informal, authentic context.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore students’ experiences composing in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting.

**Research Questions**

The research questions that guided this ethnographic case study were as follows: (a) How do students approach and navigate the songwriting process in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting? (b) How does participation in an informal learning context affect students’ experiences in choir? (c) How does the incorporation of informal learning in the choral rehearsal affect and inform my teaching practice?

**Significance of the Study**

Many students in North American schools only receive their music education within the context of a school choral musical ensemble. Though musical creativity is emphasized in both the National Standards (SEADAE, 2014) and in some choral textbooks (Holt & Jordan, 2008), many choral teachers do not incorporate composing or improvising into their ensemble rehearsals (Arasi, 2008; Langley, 2014). There is also a lack of research on this topic. Though informal learning exists as an important theory, no studies dedicated to the incorporation of songwriting within an informal learning context into a choral setting have been found. This study, while challenging a
curricular paradigm, explored how students’ experiences in choir are affected by the incorporation of an informal learning environment with an emphasis on songwriting. This study delved into previously uncharted territory in the choral research literature as students were given the agency to compose their own songs in an informal, authentic context.
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Improvisation and Composition

The purpose of this study was to explore students’ experiences composing in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting. The literature review highlights current trends in music education related to musical creativity and formal and informal learning.

Standards in arts education outline the skills and concepts that students should learn (SEADAE, 2014). The 2014 National Core Arts Standards contain the following elements: “philosophical foundations and lifelong goals, artistic processes and creative practices, anchor and performance standards that students should attain, and model cornerstone assessments by which they can be measured” (SEADAE, 2014, p. 2). The artistic processes of creating, performing/producing/presenting, responding, and connecting serve as the overarching framework of the standards from which anchor standards for all of the arts disciplines and discipline-specific performance standards emerge. The standards exist on a voluntary basis at the National level, though many states have adopted them as their own mandatory set of core arts standards. The National Core Arts Standards serve as a lens through which to examine current practices in music education throughout the United States, and in many cases, as a call to action to improve instruction.

Music educators have cited performing as central to music education since the beginning of the twentieth century, yet researchers have found that an emphasis on
excellence in public performance has caused music teachers, and especially ensemble directors, to favor precision and uniformity in student musicians while losing sight of other attributes of music education, such as thinking and acting creatively (Arasi, 2008; Humphreys, May, & Nelson, 1992; Langley, 2014). Creat[ing], defined as “[to] conceive and develop new artistic ideas, such as an improvisation, composition, or arrangement, into a work” has been described as “essential for teaching and learning the arts” (SEADAE, 2014, p. 5, 19).

Though musical creativity may be emphasized more in policy than in practice (Snell, 2013), researchers have identified benefits of incorporating composition and improvisation, two elements of musical creativity, into the music curriculum. Stringham (2010) wrote that improvisation and composition are “meaningful elements of a comprehensive music education” (p. 107). Researchers have found that improvisation, defined as “the manifestation of musical thought…the meaningful expression of musical ideas, analogous to conversation in language” (Azzara, 2008, p. 203) contributes to students’ increased musical achievement, performance ability, and understanding of music (Azzara, 1993, 2015; Stringham, 2010).

Azzara (1993) studied the music achievement of two groups of elementary school instrumental students: one that received no improvisation instruction, and the other that had an emphasis on improvisation. At the conclusion of the study, the musical achievement of students who received instruction in improvisation was significantly higher than those students who did not receive instruction in improvisation.

Similarly, to improvisation, composition reveals “a great deal about students’ musical thinking and understandings” (Wiggins, 2003, p. 141). Kratus (1989) defined
composing as a process consisting of “exploring and developing musical ideas, ultimately resulting in closure on a unique musical product” (p. 6). Kaschub and Smith (2009, pp. 4-5) cited five reasons why every child should have the opportunity to compose:

- Composing challenges children to consider their understanding of the world in new ways.
- Composing allows children to exercise their generative potential in music.
- Composing develops a way of knowing that complements understandings gained through other direct experiences of music.
- Composing invites the child to draw together the full breadth of his or her musical knowledge.
- Composing is a process that allows the child to grow, discover, and create himself or herself through artistic and meaningful engagement with sounds.

Even with these cited benefits of incorporating composition and improvisation into the music curriculum, teachers hold varying perceptions of the importance of creativity in the music curriculum. Participants in a study concerning the implementation of the National Music Standards in instrumental music classrooms (Consortium of National Arts Education Associations, 1994) identified National Standards three (composition) and four (improvisation) as two of the three lowest perceived standards in an instrumental music curriculum (along with singing) (Snell, 2013). However, Gruenhagen and Whitcomb (2014) sent a survey to 103 Kindergarten through sixth grade elementary general music teachers regarding their perceptions of improvisation, and found that majority of teachers perceived it as necessary for
students to develop musical skills, a way for students to demonstrate musical understanding, and a creative process that produced independent thinkers and learners.

Time use studies reflect a general lack of composition and improvisation in music classes. Researchers such as Bell (2003) and Strand (2006) found that music teachers (general and ensemble) rarely incorporate improvisation and composition into their teaching, citing time constraints and performance schedules as obstacles. Strand (2006) determined that 54% of 339 general music, choral, band, and strings teachers utilized composition rarely, very rarely, or never, and only 5.9% of teachers utilized it often. Teachers who did not incorporate composition in the curriculum listed several reasons such as class size, not enough instruments, limited time, conflicting priorities, and a perceived lack of importance for the task. General music teachers reported using composition more often than ensemble directors.

Though there has been an increasing amount of research focusing on composition and improvisation in the music curriculum, Fitzpatrick (2014) pointed out the lack of literature related to creative thinking within the performance ensemble, and linked this gap in the literature with the lack of composition and improvisation within ensembles.

Studies of choral directors’ time-use (Brendell, 1996; Cox, 1989) indicated that choral rehearsals contained only warm-up exercises, literacy exercises, and rehearsal of repertoire, with no mention of improvisation or composition. I will refer to this format as the traditional choral model. Many choral textbooks advocate for the traditional choral model, describing best practices for the aforementioned activities (Brinson & Demorest, 2014; Garretson, 1961; Jordan, 2007; Lamb, 1988; Robinson & Winold, 1976). Yet, some texts devoted to choral methods and philosophy suggest
music educators incorporate improvisation and composition into the choral rehearsal (e.g., Holt & Jordan, 2008).

Langley (2014), identifying the lack of creativity in many choral programs, examined students’ and teachers’ perceptions of music creativity in secondary choral ensemble classes through a mixed methods design. The researcher first administered and distributed The Measures of Creativity Perceptions Assessment survey to 314 middle and high school chorus students and 11 teachers from six middle schools and five high schools across three different school districts in the southern United States. The researcher found that students perceived their chorus classes to include creative activities yet, they were unable to explain through which activity creativity occurred. Though most researchers have found that creativity is fostered during student-centered instruction (Pelfrey, 2011; Wiggins, 2002), Langley found that students perceived creative activities as taking place when singing printed or teacher-directed music: two activities that may not be deemed creative by outside observers. Students indicated that they were confused about exactly what constituted composition and improvisation in a chorus.

Next, Langley (2014) interviewed two teachers and two focus groups with four students each. High school students observed that creative activities like improvisation and composition were absent from their chorus classes. Teacher participants remarked that they did not feel confident leading lessons that included creative components such as improvisation and composition.

Langley (2014) found that choral teachers model their curriculum on the traditional choral curriculum paradigm (consisting of warm ups, sight singing, listening, and/or rehearsing repertoire—as described in Brinson & Demorest, 2014;
Garretson, 1961; Jordan, 2007; Lamb, 1988; Robinson & Winold, 1976). Further, Langley stated that choral teachers rarely build curriculum that achieves a balance among educational goals, tending to focus mostly on performance excellence (Freer, 2011; Stamer, 2002). Freer (2011) referred to this unbalanced choral curriculum as “the performance-pedagogy paradox” (p. 1). Arasi (2008) wrote, “The inclusion of creative experiences and opportunities to explore their musicianship are not standard in performance ensemble courses” (p. 37).

Despite the lack of inclusion of composition and improvisation in performing ensembles, many possibilities exist for incorporating these creative activities into ensembles. Among them is group composition, which has been explored by several researchers.

**Group Composition**

Kaschub (1997) examined guided composition in a high school choir setting with 85 members and two sixth grade general music classes. In both instances, a professional composer assisted the group in composing a class composition. In the high school setting, the composer helped the choir to create a choral composition for them to perform at their concert. Kaschub found that students learned to generate musical ideas and compositional techniques in to adapt those ideas to a larger context, but the revision process differed greatly from how it manifests itself in individual composition. Students challenged each other’s musical ideas, and new concepts emerged as students sought to defend their own ideas or attempted to compromise. Problems that occurred included a breakdown in communication and lack of understanding between composer and students, gaining consensus from all choir
members about which ideas to preserve/discard, hurt feelings, compromise, and preservation of musical ideas.

To investigate student perceptions related to their experiences composing in smaller groups, Faulkner (2003) conducted a longitudinal study of 33 pupils in sixth through ninth grade in Iceland. The researcher collected recordings of students involved in a variety of creative activities such as whole-class and individual improvisation and composition. Afterward, the students picked their three favorite compositions. Analysis revealed that students found group composing to be enjoyable, effective (especially as it related to individual composing, which they saw as less effective), and meaningful. The students were able to articulate their creative processes, which fit into constructivist, as opposed to reductionist theory. Faulkner found the students’ experiences to be similar to those informal experiences as described by Green (2002).

Hopkins (2015) studied collaborative composing in a high school orchestral setting. The students broke into groups of three to five students and formed eight string chamber music ensembles in a high school. The researcher discovered that the groups composed using a combination of verbal and musical forms of communication, but that balanced group collaboration had a strong relationship with high levels of individual contributions. However, the researcher also found that half of the eight groups had great difficulty staying on task, spending between one third and one half of their time off task.

Using theoretical sampling of previous studies, Wiggins (1999/2000) explored how shared understandings emerged when elementary students created original music in groups. Wiggins re-visited and re-analyzed six previous studies in which children
composed or improvised with their peers and/or with their teacher; the researcher sought to discover how shared understanding might empower musical thinking and individual learning within a group. Shared understandings were manifested in students’ musical conversations, verbal conversations about their works, and in their musical decisions. Group members judged the merit of their individual ideas against their own interpretation of the shared vision of the composition.

Through experiences composing in groups without direct teacher instruction, students created shared understandings (Wiggins, 1999/2000) and that they found meaningful and more effective than composing individually (Faulkner, 2003).

**Songwriting**

While songwriting could be considered as a type of composing, the terms ‘composing’ and ‘songwriting’ often carry a set of normative associations that differentiate the two terms (Tobias, 2013). For example, Zak (2001) argued that the term ‘composition,’ the term ‘musical work,’ and the studies that deal with compositional processes “have histories in which rock has no part” (p. 37). Riley (2012) defined songwriting as “a creative activity that helps persons express a range of ideas and feelings” (p. 2). Further, Kratus (2016) identified songwriting as “a form of composition that relates directly to adolescents’ personal experience of music” (p. 60).

Kratus (2016) identified the following four reasons to teach songwriting in schools:

- Songwriting connects directly with students’ own cultures and personal understandings, connecting the gap between students’ in-school and out-of-school musical experience.
• Songwriting serves the needs of a large population of students who demonstrate an interest in playing a fretted, keyboard, or electronic instrument.

• Songwriting can address social and psychological needs for students.

• Songwriting can provide students with a musical skill that they can utilize outside of the classroom throughout their lifetime.

Riley’s (2012) findings from an undergraduate first-year experience course dedicated to songwriting underscore Kratus’ statements; the researcher found that songwriting facilitated student development through enabling emotional stability, offered therapeutic benefits, and provided a vehicle for self-expression, self-discovery, and overcoming challenges.

Discussion

Choral teachers rarely incorporate composition in their classes (Bell, 2003; Brendell, 1996; Cox, 1989; Langley, 2014; Strand, 2006), perpetuating the long-standing traditional choral model of performance-based instruction. This traditional model of the choral rehearsal has not changed in its structure since its inception in the beginning of the twentieth century; the choral rehearsal traditionally does not incorporate creativity, one of the four artistic processes called for in the National Core Arts Standards (SEADAE, 2014). In spite of this traditional choral model, researchers have identified benefits (musical and non-musical) related to incorporating improvisation, composition, and songwriting into the music curriculum (Azzara, 1993, 2015; Kaschub and Smith, 2009; Riley, 2012; Stringham, 2010; Wiggins, 2003).

Researchers have suggested that creating original music through songwriting may allow students to bridge the gap between in-school music and their out-of-school music, allowing the music to reflect adolescents’ personal experience of music
This study was conceived as a way to challenge the traditional choral model by examining students’ experiences writing songs for their own choir. However, the dilemma remained: In what way, through formal or informal practices, would be the most logical to incorporate songwriting into the choral classroom. The final part of the literature review will focus on formal and informal learning in music education.

**Formal and Informal Learning in Music Education**

Formal learning and informal learning have come to the forefront of musical pedagogy discussions as researchers have discovered the disparity between students’ in-school and out-of-school musical experiences (DeVries, 2010; Kratus, 2007; McPherson & Hendricks, 2010; Rodriguez, 2009; Williams, 2007). In spite of the rising popularity of informal music learning, formal learning remains a prominent theory of instruction in music classrooms.

**Formal Learning in Music Education**

Formal learning refers to learning which is primarily teacher-directed, with instruction originating from qualified mentors (Mak, 2004). Learning is intentional, occurs within an organized and structured context, and is based on a curriculum (which includes objectives, duration, content, method, and assessment). The development of music knowledge and skills begins simply, gradually increasing in complexity, and is based on a hierarchic curriculum (Georgii-Hemming & Westvall, 2010; Mak, 2004). Heuser and Thompson (2010) acknowledged that formal settings that involve systematic and structured learning processes could help students develop valuable analytical and descriptive tools and skills that can empower learning. Those
observing a traditional choral classroom would observe formal learning, in which the instruction originates from the director. Many researchers have focused on the benefits and perceived benefits of the traditional choral ensemble.

Arasi (2006) conducted a case study of eight adults in which the purpose was to explore the perceptions of adults who had sung in the same traditional high school choral program. Themes that arose from the interviews, field notes, observations, journal entries, and archival records were as follows: taking pride in pursuing excellence, chorus as social experience, and chorus as personal growth.

Other researchers have indicated positive benefits related to student involvement in traditional, formal, choral music programs. Bartolome (2013) conducted an ethnographic study related to girls’ participation in the Seattle Girls’ Choir. The researcher observed and took field notes, and conducted semi-structured interviews with 42 of the girls, aged 7-18, their parents, and their directors. Data analysis yielded perceived musical, personal, social, and external benefits to participation. Perceived musical benefits included (a) acquisition of skills and (b) acquisition of music knowledge. Perceived personal benefits included: (a) choir as a worthwhile endeavor; (b) choir as a source of accomplishment and self-confidence; (c) choir as empowerment; (d) choir as discipline; (e) choir as a collective experience; (f) choir as commitment; (g) choir as school; and (h) choir as a special place. Social benefits as perceived by the girls, parents, and directors included: (a) choir as a constant; (b) choir as interpersonal development; (c) choir as a place to belong; and (d) choir as a diverse environment. Themes related to external and community benefits included (a) choir as community enrichment; (b) choir as ambassadorship; and (c) choir as advocacy.
Kennedy (2002) found that high school boys involved in a traditional, formal choral program, perceived musical, non-musical, social, and teacher benefits of choir, and Sweet (2010) shared similar findings in a case study investigation of middle school boys’ perceptions of singing and participation in choir. Sanal and Gorsev (2014) found that the traditional choral experience positively impacts psychological indicators of anxiety.

Though formal learning in the traditional choral classroom leads to both perceived musical and extra musical benefits for students (Arasi, 2008; Bartolome, 2013; Kennedy, 2002; Sanal & Gorsev, 2014; Sweet, 2010), Strauss (1984) described formal learning, which functions as the primary paradigm of Western schooling, as “deliberate, carried on ‘out of context,’” in a special setting outside of the routines of daily life” (p. 195). Heuser and Thompson (2010) warned that formal learning sometimes results in over-analysis and loss of enjoyment with the music making. Arasi (2008) identified that most choral rehearsals involve directors in dictatorial positions who do not include creative experiences for students to explore their own musicianship; the author called for a more comprehensive choral music education, expressing that the role of the teacher should become more educative as opposed to authoritative.

**Informal Learning in Music Education**

As compared to formal learning that occurs in the traditional choral classroom in which the teacher functions as the disseminator of knowledge, informal learning centers around the notion of teacher as facilitator, with individual, peer, and group learning at the center (Green, 2008). Green (1988, 1997, 2001) and Allsup (2003)
suggested that students often do not have the opportunity in formal music settings to create music that is culturally meaningful and self-reflective.

Informal music learning is gaining popularity as teachers seek ways to engage their students in culturally and socially relevant practices. Researchers have recognized a widening gap between students’ in-school and out-of-school musical experiences (DeVries, 2010; Kratus, 2007; McPherson & Hendricks, 2010; Rodriguez, 2009; Williams, 2007). Some scholars have described school music as inhospitable (Higgins, 2007a, 2007b, 2012) and not conducive to developing independent and self-directed learners (Lebler, 2007). Though students enjoy music, many do not enjoy school music (McPherson & Hendricks, 2010; Seifried, 2006; Shah, 2006). In an attempt to address this disparity, music educators are “seek[ing] ways of making classroom learning situations come as close as possible to the ways people learn outside classrooms, in society, in their families, in life” (Wiggins, 2007). Therefore, much research has focused on young people’s engagement with popular music outside of school, with many of these studies focusing on young people involved in garage bands (Davis, 2005; Jaffurs, 2004; Miell & Littleton, 2008) and others on youth hip-hop groups (Söderman and Folkestad, 2004).

Green (2002) proposed using the informal learning of popular music as the basis for developing and enacting a music education curriculum. She developed a pedagogical approach based on the idiosyncratic informal music learning processes of “English popular musicians involved in Anglo-American guitar-based rock” (Green, 2002, p. 9). When learning popular music informally outside of school, students are able to learn music that they select, and this process often involves copying recordings by ear in groups that are self-taught before they move on to composing their own
music; this often leads to students acquiring skills in haphazard ways (i.e., students are not necessarily scaffolded to learn easier skills before harder skills) (Green, 2006).

Green (2006, 2008) wrote that informal contexts often provide students with opportunities to choose musical selections with which they identify (as opposed to teacher-selected repertoire with which they may not identify). Because of the lack of emphasis on formal music notation, students are less reliant on an instructor for guidance (Green, 2006, 2008).

The Paul Hamlyn Foundation funds and manages the Musical Futures initiative, an informal music learning curriculum based on Green’s research (2008) that teachers have implemented throughout England. The definition of Musical Futures is as follows: “Musical Futures is an approach to teaching and learning. It is a new way of thinking about music making in schools that brings non-formal teaching and informal learning approaches to the more formal context of schools” (Hallam, Creech, & McQueen, 2011, p. 28).

To investigate the impact of Musical Futures in schools, Hallam, Creech, and McQueen (2011) conducted a longitudinal case study investigation in six schools in England who used Musical Futures in their music curriculum. Over the course of three years, researchers explored the strengths and perceived challenges of the program, as well as the impact on the whole school, student motivation, well-being, self-esteem, musical self-concept, behavior, extra-curricular music learning, and development of transferable skills. Hallam, Creech, and McQueen also looked at typical progression routes in music for Musical Futures students (how students progressed in music after experiencing Musical Futures) and the impact of contextual factors (geographic location, ethnicity, socio-economic group, ability group, gender, and prior musical
experience) on student responses to Musical Futures. Along with the researcher’s observations of music lessons, they distributed questionnaires to music staff, non-music staff, and students for each of the three years. The researchers conducted focus group interviews with students, Heads of Music, members of the senior management team, and members of the music teaching staff. They found that Musical Futures contributed to greater engagement with music, development of skills for learning, development of performance skills, supporting the school ethos, and a sense of pride related to students’ musical achievements. Teachers reported that the curriculum helped to develop student interest in many musical genres, produced high quality work, worked with classes of all sizes, and allowed teachers to more easily assess the work of individuals. Hallam, Creech, and McQueen (2011) reported five factors that contributed to the success of Musical Futures:

- Opportunities for autonomous learning.
- Practical music making and performance.
- Working in groups with peer learning.
- Engaging in creative tasks.
- Developing listening skills through working with music that the students chose themselves.

Though the Musical Futures curriculum, which is grounded in popular music, is based on informal learning, Allsup (2008) warned teachers not to associate informal learning with only popular music:

Conflating informal learning with a genre-specific art form, as Green does when she designed her Musical Futures curriculum around the practices of ‘Anglo-American guitar-based music makers’ may lead to the unintended consequence of narrowing of musical possibilities rather than expanding them (p. 3).
Allsup (2008) proposed that mutual learning communities should explore music of all styles and genres. Folkestad (2006) also cautioned music educators against thinking of informal musical practices too narrowly, suggesting that music educators and researchers broaden their definitions of informal and formal learning situations. Rather than thinking of informal learning as taking place outside of school, and formal learning taking place inside the walls of the classroom, Folkestad (2006) suggested placing informal and formal learning on a continuum distinguished by

. . . whether the intentionality of the individuals is directed towards music making, or towards learning about music, and of whether the learning situation is formalized in the sense that someone has taken on the role of being ‘the teacher,’ thereby defining the others as ‘students’ (p. 142).

With this in mind, informal music learning can occur almost anywhere. For example, Marsh (2008) explored children’s musical play and creativity outside of the classroom, specifically on playgrounds. Marsh discovered that students produced excellent compositions and improvisations in this informal environment, because, according to the definition of composition by Swanwick and Tillman (1986), they had “the freedom to choose the ordering of music, without notational or other forms of detailed performance instruction” (p. 311).

While teaching is formal, teachers can create environments that are conducive to students’ informal learning processes (Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2002, 2008). Groups such as the Instrumental Music Teacher Educators organization (IMTE) have called for research that addresses the need for school music to become more culturally relevant while also negotiating the tensions between innovative and traditional models of music education.
Allsup (2003) investigated “the notion of democracy as community-in-the-making” (p. 24) in an after-school activity consisting of nine students with intermediate-advanced level experience on an instrument. In an informal music fashion, the researcher, functioning as a facilitator, invited the students to compose music of any genre, using any instrument. Students shared in the design of the study and voted on procedures, established rules, and assisted in the data analysis. Allsup used three data-collection approaches: philosophical inquiry, collaborative inquiry, and participant observation. Students elected to split into two groups to compose. Two themes, mutual learning and democratic action, emerged from the study. Allsup concluded,

...when students are given space to explore freely, to work democratically, they will create (from one of their musical worlds) a context about which they are familiar, conversant, or curious...The materials that students choose to explore will represent a world that is theirs, a world they understand, a world that defines who they are (p. 35).

Like Allsup (2003), Bersh (2011) engaged students in informal music learning experiences. However, Bersh explored these experiences within the context of the instrumental musical ensemble, specifically “determin[ing] the extent to which participation in informal learning contexts impact[ed] student practice, musical achievement, the quality of students’ experiences in their school music ensemble, and students’ self-perceptions” (p. ix). The study occurred over four months and took place in two schools with 31 students in sixth, eighth, and ninth grade. The students formed collaborative groups within their instrumental ensembles and prepared for a music performance informally, without teacher intervention, by arranging songs of their own choosing by ear. The researcher found that through informal learning, the
students developed new strategies for music learning, identified benefits to collaborating with peers, felt more confident in their ability to learn independently, and became more thorough and productive in their practice and school ensembles.

Bersh recommended the following:

. . . teachers [should] situate learning contexts in ways that encourage student ownership over aspects of their learning, develop students’ communication skills, and enhance students’ awareness of the skills that they possess (pp. ix-x).

While Bersh (2011) studied students involved in instrumental ensembles and informal learning processes situated in an informal setting, Abrahams (2010) examined the efficacy of incorporating informal learning into the high school performing ensemble. The purposes of the study were to study the effectiveness of using informal learning as a means to address and nurture students’ musicianship and to observe any changes in perception related to the school ensemble programs (both on the part of the students and teachers). The conductors of four high school choirs and one high school band each chose one of their ensembles to assign to small groups, which totaled 80 participants. The students were charged with the task of copying an arrangement of a Christmas carol from a recording or creating their own arrangement. Students in each of the groups worked together in positive ways as they listened to the recordings and attempted to copy and arrange them, sharing responsibility for what was happening, accepted, and appreciated. Working to create an arrangement positively impacted group cooperation, peer-directed learning, autonomy, and leadership. Additionally, perceptions of students’ musical skill and ability shifted in a positive way, which changed the culture of the ensembles.
Summary

Whereas students find enjoyment composing music, choral teachers spend less time on creative activities such as composition and improvisation than on other activities in their music classrooms, reflecting that choral teachers tend to teach according to a traditional choral model (Freer, 2011; Langley, 2014; Stamer, 2002; Strand, 2006). However, trends in arts education policy include a focus on creativity in the choral classroom (SEADAE, 2014). Arasi (2008) discussed the possible implications of altering the traditional model of the choral rehearsal.

A choral music education that balances group performance quality with individual student achievement and growth in areas beyond singing (improvisation, composition, analysis, evaluation, cultural and historical connections, etc.) will possibly encourage more lifelong engagement in and valuing of musical endeavors (p. 37).

A need exists for a study that examines the implementation of composing in the choral classroom. Because informal learning in the music classroom yields high levels of musical engagement, high-quality work, and student autonomy (Abrahams, 2010; Hallam, Creech, & McQueen, 2011) and songwriting may allow students to bridge the gap between in and out-of-school music (Kratus, 2016; Tobias, 2015), I developed an interest in the assimilation of songwriting through informal learning into a choir. I did not identify any studies dedicated to students’ songwriting within an informal learning context in a choir setting. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore students’ experiences songwriting in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore students’ experience songwriting in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided the study were as follows: (a) How do students approach and navigate the songwriting process in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting? (b) How does participation in an informal learning context affect students’ experiences in choir? (c) How does the incorporation of informal learning in the choral rehearsal affect and inform my teaching practice?

Participants

The participants in the study were the choral students at the Newark Center for Creative Learning (NCCL). NCCL is a private school for students in grades kindergarten through eight. All students in grades four through eight were invited to join the choir. The participants served as a typical sample, which “[was] selected because it reflect[ed] the average person, situation, or instance of the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 1998, p. 62). The demographics of the participants were diverse in ethnicity, but the socioeconomic status of most students would be classified as middle to upper class.
In preparation to work with the teachers and students, I completed an online course by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) entitled, “The Protection of Human Subjects Curriculum” (see Appendix A). After consulting members of the school community about conducting educational research in their facility, I submitted for Institutional Review Board (IRB) Approval through the University of Delaware. The IRB requested that I revise my proposal to detail more about obtaining assent from the students. After making the revisions, my IRB document, as well as my consent and assent forms, were approved (see Appendices B, C, and D. At the first rehearsal, I described the study to the students, and gave them assent forms to sign/refuse to sign. I also sent a letter of consent home to the students’ parents/guardians (see Appendices C and D). All students (eleven females, two males) assented and all of the students’ parents consented for the children to participate in the study. Pseudonyms are used throughout this document in order to protect the identities of the participants involved.

Role of the Teacher-Researcher

Researchers often attempt to distance themselves from their work with the intention of presenting their work as scientific or credible (Hobson, 1996). Carr and Kemmis (1986) rejected this ideal of objectivity, and argued that the researcher’s self-interests shape the research. Practitioner inquiry rejects the notion of objectivity and encourages teachers to systematically and intentionally investigate their own practice and their students’ learning (Robbins, 2014). Central to practitioner inquiry is the assumption that “teachers’ intimate knowledge of teaching provides an important ‘insider’ perspective on teaching and learning” (Robbins, 2014, p. 187). Therefore, I served as the teacher-researcher and participant-observer for this study.
As the teacher-researcher and participant-observer, I served both as the choral teacher and the collector of data. I was the only music teacher at the school, where I taught choir for an hour before school on Friday mornings. I also taught four other music classes for Group One (Kindergarten through grade one), Group Two (grades two, three, and four), Group Three (grades five and six), and Group Four (grades seven and eight). These music classes took place on Friday mornings during the school day. Though the participants in the study also participated in the general music classes, these classes were not the focus of the research study.

**Rationale for Qualitative Design**

The purpose of this research was to holistically understand the experiences of the NCCL Choir participants as they composed songs for their choir in an informal learning context. Qualitative research includes the following characteristics: noninterventionist observation in natural settings, interpretation of issues related to the participants and the writer, contextual description of people and events, and validation of information through triangulation (Bresler & Stake, 2006). Creswell (2014) characterizes qualitative research as containing the following qualities: natural setting, researcher as the key instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive and deductive data analysis, emergent design, reflexivity, and holistic accounts. Because I sought to observe the students composing in a natural, informal, setting, gaining a holistic account of how the students compose without intervention, a qualitative design proved most suitable for the study. As the teacher-researcher, I interpreted issues as they arose using both inductive and deductive data analysis, validating the categories and themes that emerged through triangulation.
Ethnographic Case Study

The primary focus of ethnography is on human society and culture (Merriam, 2009). Patton (2015) described the central idea of ethnographic inquiry as follows: any people interacting over a period of time will develop a culture. When forming a culture, humans create “standards for deciding what is, standards for deciding what can be, standards for deciding how one feels about it, standards for deciding what to do about it, and standards for deciding how to go about doing it” (Goodenough, 1971, pp. 21-22). To understand the culture of a group, one must spend time with the group being studied (Merriam, 2009; Van Maanen, 1982). Because of the emphasis on spending time with the participants, the history of ethnography is most closely linked with participant observation in the field (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). Immersion in the site as a participant-observer exists as the primary method of data collection in an ethnography. Other methods of data collection can include interviews, journals, and analyses of documents, records, and artifacts (Merriam, 2009). Geertz (1973) wrote that “thick description” remains at the heart of an ethnography, and Wolcott (1999) added that ethnographers do more than describe; they convey the meanings that participants make of their lives with some interpretation on the part of the researcher.

Miles & Huberman (1994) and Merriam (2009) suggested that the most important aspect of the case study relates to its occurrence within a bounded context. The NCCL Choir represented a bounded system in which I incorporated informal music learning into the choral classroom. Because I was interested in studying the culture of a particular social group (the NCCL Choir), I chose to complete an ethnographic case study (Merriam, 2009). I served as a teacher-researcher throughout the study.
Though many researchers criticize case studies because one is unable to generalize the results, readers can learn a great deal from a particular case through its narrative description (Stake, 2005). Erickson (1986) stated that findings from a particular situation could be transferrable to other situations, because the reader can decide how applicable those findings could be in his/her context (Merriam, 2009).

I took precautions when considering issues of validity and bias. For validity purposes, I included many methods of data collection in order to triangulate the data. Additionally, I conducted a peer debrief with students and an external auditor. Though the study will inherently contain some level of bias because of the nature of a case study, in which most of the data is filtered through the lens of the teacher-researcher, Shields (2007) argued that qualitative studies remain important as a research method. As Shields (2007) described,

The strength of qualitative approaches is that they account for and include difference—ideologically, epistemologically, methodologically—and most importantly, humanly. They do not attempt to eliminate what cannot be discounted. They do not attempt to simplify what cannot be simplified. Because case study includes paradoxes and acknowledges that there are no simple answers, it can and should qualify as the gold standard (p. 13).

**Theoretical Lenses**

The theoretical lens in a qualitative study “shapes the types of questions asked, informs how data are collected and analyzed, and provides a call for action or change” (Creswell, 2014, p. 64). Theoretical lenses guide researchers as to which issues to examine and which people to study while also indicating how the researcher positions himself/herself in the study (Creswell, 2014). The theoretical lenses for this study
were informal music learning (Green, 2002; Green, 2006; Green, 2008) and social constructivism (Fosnot, 2005; Vygotsky, 1978).

**Informal Music Learning**

Many researchers have explored how students learn music outside of school and have noticed dichotomies related to in-school and out-of-school practice. Green (2006) listed five main characteristics that differentiate informal from formal music practices:

1. Informal learning begins with music selected by the students themselves.
2. Repertoire and skill-acquisition mainly involves copying recordings by ear.
3. Informal learning occurs in groups in which students are self-taught.
4. Musical skills and knowledge are often assimilated in “haphazard, idiosyncratic and holistic ways” according to musical preference (p. 10).
5. Informal music learning typically involves integrating multiple elements such as performing, improvising, and composing processes with an emphasis on creativity.

Green (2008) wrote that most young popular musicians acquire musical skills and knowledge through enculturation. These musicians tend to learn through interacting with peers as opposed to learning from a “master-musician” or adult with more skills (Green, 2008). Through observing others, copying recordings, and interacting with peers, young musicians acquire new skills, and learn to copy, improvise, and create new music (Green, 2008). Implicit in this process is the theory of social constructivism, in which students construct their own understandings as they
participate in, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences (Fosnot, 2005; Greene, 1995; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Lincoln & Guba; 2013; Wiggins, 2015).

**Social Constructivism**

Vygotsky (2004) theorized that learners’ understandings are directly linked to the quality of their previous experiences, emphasizing that the richer a learner’s experience with the world, the higher quality the person’s imagination. Constructivist thinkers believe that a learner’s understandings cannot be separated from the understandings of others (Vygotsky, 1978). Webster (2011) wrote that most descriptions of constructivist thinking contain the following tenants:

1. The learner forms knowledge through active interaction with the world.
2. The learner constructs meaning with this knowledge.
3. Learning is largely a social activity.

Though constructivism is mainly a theory of knowledge and learning, and is not necessarily a theory of teaching practice (Webster, 2011), Wiggins (2007), ventured to describe the constructivist music classroom:

In a constructivist music classroom, students would have opportunities to construct their own understanding of the dimensions, multidimensions, and metadimensions of music through interaction with ‘real-world’ music (as opposed to music contrived to teach a particular concept) by performing, creating, and listening. They would have opportunities to solve genuine musical problems ( . . . problems that ‘real’ musicians solve) with the support (scaffolding) of peers and teacher. They would have multiple opportunities to share ideas (musical ideas and ideas about music) with peers and teacher and a right to have their ideas respected and valued by all . . . . They would have opportunities to engage in authentic music in the context of authentic instructional design that honors and respects the ways they naturally learn (p. 39).
Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of a study consists of a “system of concepts, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs [the] research” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 39). The conceptual framework for this study combined the theories of informal music learning (Green, 2002, 2006, 2008), and social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978). I conceived this research with the understanding that students naturally learn through social interaction, and that learning in an informal environment can provide students with an opportunity to create products with agency in an authentic context.

Green (2008) referenced Bielaczyc and Collins (2000) when discussing the inherent nature of group work involved in informal learning; Green (2008) claimed that by working in a group to create musicks of their choosing, students are “involved in a collective effort of understanding…[which] supports the growth of individual knowledge” (Bielaczyc & Collins, 2000, p. 271).

In social constructivist literature, common understandings held by individuals working together within a shared experience are called *intersubjectivity* or *shared understanding* (Wiggins, 1999/2000). Beals (1998) suggested that what we understand is intrinsically linked with the knowledge and understandings of others. Gauvain (1998) agreed that cognitive development occurs in and emerges from social situations. Rogoff (1990) suggested some benefits of student collaboration:

As [children] collaborate and argue with others, they consider new alternatives and recast their ideas to communicate or to convince. In these activities, children advance their ideas in the process of participation…It is a matter of social engagement that leaves the individual changed. Communication and shared problem solving inherently bridge the gap between old and new knowledge and between
the differing understanding of partners…as individuals attempt to resolve contradictions or search for the common ground of shared understanding (p. 196).

Through participation in a social activity such as composing in a group, students create individual understandings through interactions with more skilled members of the group (Azmitia, 1988; Forman & Cazden, 1985; Howard & Martin, 1997; Miller, 1987; Wiggins 1999/2000). With social constructivism and informal music learning as the theoretical foundation, I created the conceptual framework for this study; students participated in both formal and informal experiences in the choral classroom, where they were to construct their own as well as shared understandings.

**Setting**

We began each of our rehearsals in the Spanish room, which doubled as the choral room. The brightly colored yellow room houses two large upright keyboards, six large red tables, and varying numbers of upright, stackable blue chairs, depending on the day. Brightly colored posters featuring a host of Spanish words adorn the yellow walls, on which a ladder and two white boards hang. Each day before the students arrived, I moved the tables to the sides of the room, and set up 13 chairs for the students in two rows. I moved one of the upright keyboards into the adjacent gymnasium, and positioned the other upright keyboard so that it was facing the chairs. This left a small walkway on the left side of the room between the two rows of chairs and some of the tables. I positioned the iPad recording device on a shelf in the back of the room, next to the entrance. To create the resource tables, I laid out the eight iPads, in four stacks, corresponding with the appropriate group number. The resource table also featured four iPad stands, colored pencils, blank paper, staff paper of varying sizes, and a variety of sheet music appropriate for children’s choirs. When the students
broke up into their small groups for the informal learning workshop time, they were allowed to compose in the place of their choosing throughout the school, though I suggested the choral room, the gymnasium, and group four’s science lab room. The gymnasium is attached to the choral room, and thus, allowed for easy transport of instruments including the one upright piano. The gymnasium also had a great deal of open space so that the students could spread out as they worked in small groups. Before choir, I plugged in the second upright piano in the corner of the gymnasium next to the choral room. I suggested group four’s science lab room as a workspace, because of the room’s proximity to both the choral room and the gymnasium, and because I did not think that it would not become filled with students when they arrived for the day, as the other classrooms would. This room provided more distractions than the gymnasium and the choral room, because it was attached to a classroom filled with students, but when the choir students felt as if they needed another space, it served as a functional setting. This small room contained lab tables and multiple chairs. Cabinets lined the walls, and a door connected the room to a typical classroom. As the teacher-researcher, I moved from room to room in order to observe the students as they worked.

**Procedure**

I taught the choir at NCCL on Friday mornings between October 2, 2015 and January 22, 2016. Beginning October 2, 2015, the choral students met from 8:00-8:50 am on most Friday mornings. I set up one iPad to collect video data for the traditional, formal rehearsal portion of the class.

Each day, I began the choral rehearsal with traditional choral warm-ups as suggested by the research literature (Brinson & Demorest, 2014; Jenkins, 2008;
Jordan, 2008). Afterward, I led the choir in a rehearsal to prepare three choral pieces for their winter concert. I taught two pieces with sheet music as an aide, and one piece by rote. Roughly halfway through the fifty minutes, the choir broke into their friendship groups and facilitated their own learning through informal means.

On the first day, October 2, 2015, I described the study to the students, passed out assent forms and consent forms, and answered any questions related to the study. All of the students assented to participate in the study, and their parents consented that their children could take part. Next, the students divided themselves into small friendship groups of three or four persons. I told the students that their task was to compose a song for their choir to sing, and that each group would take a mini iPad and a stand to record their group’s activities each day for the informal portion of the choral rehearsal. Riley (2012) wrote that collaboration is a valuable component in the songwriting process. Further, MacDonald, Miell, and Mitchell (2002) found that the quality of work on musical collaborations increased when students were able to work with a friend, as opposed to partner/group assignments. The students ended up in three groups of three, and one group of four persons. I told the students that they could compose anywhere in the school, but that I would recommend the gym, choir room, or group four’s science laboratory. At this point in the choir rehearsal, I suspended all teacher-directed learning, and I began my journey of learning along with the students. When students asked me for their assistance, I provided them with encouraging remarks, but allowed them to derive a solution to their own problems without my help.

I brought in objects and artifacts that supported the students’ learning, and they were allowed to use any materials that they wanted, and could document their learning or progress in any form that they found helpful and natural. This idea of putting
children in touch with their environment through the introduction of various materials is based on the Montessori method, a method conceptualized with a social constructivist framework (Montessori.edu). The students were able to utilize any materials that they found, including electronic devices and the Internet to aid them as they composed their choral pieces.

I originally intended to collect data for eight weeks, and for the students to share their compositions at the winter concert when they performed their other three songs. However, as the study progressed, the students made it clear that they did not feel prepared to share at that time. Because the qualitative nature of the study allowed for a flexible design (Creswell, 2014), I added four extra weeks to the study, collecting data for 12 weeks instead of 8. Because the concert occurred after week eight of data collection, the students used all of the time in weeks 9 through 12 to work on their own songs. In the ninth week, I decided to reassemble the class for an all-class sharing meeting, modeled from the description by Falk and Blumenreich (2005, p. 166). An all-class sharing meeting allows for students to present their work to classmates and share any observations, new knowledge/understandings, or questions related to their work. During this time, students can also present each other with any observations, comments, questions, or suggestions (Falk & Blumenreich, 2005). I decided to hold this meeting, because without sharing, many pupils have found composing to be pointless, since no one will ever hear it (Odam, 2000). During this meeting, the students facilitated discussions amongst themselves, presented their work to their classmates, and shared what they learned or observed. They used this time to offer each other feedback, observations, questions, or suggestions. The students began to teach the other groups their songs beginning in the tenth week. In weeks 10 and 11, I
allowed the students to work in their small groups until they felt ready to begin to teach the rest of the class (about halfway through the 50-minute class). The students practiced a great deal outside of the choral rehearsal between weeks 11 and 12, during their breaks and lunches. This occurred because of the prompting of their teachers to practice due to the upcoming coffee house. In week 12, students expressed that they wanted to practice only as a large group. Immediately following our choral rehearsal (8:00-8:50 am), the students performed all four group’s songs in the coffee house, which all students and teachers from the school attended, as well as family and friends of the performers.

**Data Collection Methods**

Because of the qualitative nature of the study, I collected data in multiple forms and triangulated the data for validity purposes. Data included video recordings, journals, field notes, photographs, additional artifacts, a questionnaire, and group semi-structured interviews.

**Video Recordings**

As a primary source of data collection, video recordings served as an integral method of understanding how students composed and interacted within their individual groups in an informal learning environment. I used one iPad to capture the rehearsal portion of each choir class on video. During the workshop time, I assigned each group a different iPad, labeled with their group’s number, and entrusted them with the responsibility to record their own group’s actions for the entire duration of the workshop time. These videos revealed the conversations and actions of multiple participants (Falk & Blumenreich, 2005).
**Journals**

I used journals as a primary source of data collection. As suggested by Elliot (2001), my journal entries contained personal accounts of observations, reactions, interpretations, reflections, hunches, and explanations. After each rehearsal, I watched each of the group’s videos and simultaneously typed my impressions in my journal document. These journal entries helped me to reconstruct and better understand the experiences of the participants.

Students’ journal responses also served as data in this study. Riley (2012) found that reflective journaling is important for students involved in songwriting, serving to enhance songwriting processes and products. I gave each student a hand-made choir journal that had a cover page with a clip art picture of students singing, as well as the words, “My Choir Journal” and a space for the students to write their own name (see Appendix E). The journal contained lined paper in the center, and a back page. Patton (2001) described that qualitative designs can remain emergent even after the data collection begins. Therefore, I did not create journal entry prompts before the study began, but rather allowed for the emergent themes during my ongoing data analysis to guide me in choosing particular questions to ask on certain days. I gave the students journal prompts on the following dates: 10/2/15, 10/16/15, 10/23/15, 11/13/15, 12/11/15, and 1/22/16. Prompts were as follows:

1. What is choir, and why do you want to do it?
2. How is choir going for you?
   Is there anything else you want me to know?
3. What have you done so far in your group and what do you have left to do?
4. How is composing going?
Describe your role in your group.

5. How did you feel about the choir portion of the concert?

How is composing going?

6. What was your favorite part of choir and your least favorite part of choir?

7. Did you like writing a song? Why or why not?

8. Was it easy or difficult to write a song? Why?

9. Would you like to keep writing songs in choir? Why or why not?

10. If you could change something about your song, what would you change?

11. What went well in the coffee house performance this morning?

12. What do you think you could have done better in the coffee house this morning?

13. What is choir?

Field Notes

Like Bersh (2011), Allsup (2003), Green (2008), and Wiggins (2000), I kept field notes in order to organize my thoughts in a cohesive manner, highlight interesting moments, and to describe the actions and reactions of the participants (Bersh, 2011). Merriam (2009) suggested that researchers organize field notes in a way that they can find desired information easily. Therefore, in my field notes, I included the date and organized the notes by groups. Like a journal, field notes contain an important reflective component, captured in observer commentary, such as the researcher’s feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, and speculations. I captured my observations and perceptions through field notes.
Photographs

I took photographs during the study. Elliot (2001) described that “photographs can capture . . . pupils working on classroom tasks, what is going on ‘behind the teacher’s back,’ the physical lay-out of the classroom, [and] the pattern of social organization in the classroom” (p. 79). I also drew still images from the video footage.

Documents

Each group received a folder in which the students kept any documents related to the choir class. Merriam (2009, pp. 139) defined a document as “the umbrella term to refer to a wide range of written, visual, digital, and physical material relevant to the study at hand.” Documents relevant to this study included written notes, musical notation, and pictorial representations of various musical concepts related to students’ compositions. After each rehearsal, I took pictures of each document, and placed those digital pictures in dated folders on my computer to document each group’s progress over time. I used these documents as data in the study. A representative sample of the each group’s documents can be found in Appendix F.

Questionnaires

I also handed out a questionnaire to collect information related to students’ prior musical experiences (see Appendix G). Similar to Bersh (2011), I used the questionnaire as a way to obtain data related to students’ prior musical experiences such as what instruments they played, how long they had participated in choir, and what other musical experiences they had in the past. A summary of the students’ responses can be found in Appendix H. (Note: Nolan, Bianca, and Brittany did not complete surveys).
Group Semi-Structured Interviews

Patton (2001) described that qualitative designs can remain emergent even after the data collection begins. Though I had not decided to conduct interviews at the onset of the study, I called for each group to meet with me separately for a semi-structured group interview on the last day of the study, after the coffee house (1/22/16). The interviews were used to obtain observations that I was unable to make directly and to capture the multiple perceptions of the participants (Bresler & Stake, 1992). I asked specific questions that emerged from my concurrent data collection and analysis (see Appendix I), and students participated and shared their thoughts related to informal learning and the compositional process. The semi-structured design gave me latitude to probe and follow the group’s sense of what was important (Bresler & Stake, 1992). I video-recorded each of the interviews, which provided me time to transcribe them for future analysis while attending to body language. The interview transcriptions can be found in Appendices J, K, L, and M.

Data Analysis

I began the data analysis while still focusing on the data collection, which is a typical approach in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). I analyzed video recordings, journals, documents, pictures, and focus group and all-class sharing meetings during and after data collection. I journaled while viewing the video data and catalogued the artifacts in digital files. These journal entries, containing my musings, insights, and hunches about the data, served as rudimentary data analysis (Merriam, 2009). During this rudimentary data analysis, categories emerged from all of the data, and I titled those as follows:

- Main events
• Approach
• Topics of conversation
• Involvement
• Help needed
• General feelings
• Problems

I created a digital spreadsheet for each group, and listed the dates of data collection across the horizontal axis and the categories down the vertical axis. An example can be found in Appendix N. After populating the spreadsheets, I allowed themes to emerge from the data within the spreadsheets. These themes constitute my findings.

Validity

In qualitative research, validity is based on the determination that the findings are accurate from one or multiple perspectives, including those of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account (Creswell & Miller, 2000). One concern about case study research relates to ethics, as an unethical case study writer could find “virtually anything he[/she] wished [to] be illustrated” and claim those as the findings (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 378). I took precautions against bias by triangulating the data, conducting a peer debrief, and an external auditor. Creswell and Miller (2000) noted that triangulation is considered a form of validity because “researchers . . . rely on multiple forms of evidence rather than a single incident or data point in the study” (p. 127). Additionally, I involved a peer debriefer, with whom I met with roughly each week of data collection and analysis, who reviewed my data and asked questions (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Finally, I used an external auditor who examined “both the
process and product of the inquiry, and determine[d] the trustworthiness of the findings” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 128). The auditor reviewed five videos, one from each group, as well as the final performance, cross-checking them with my journals and findings.

Limitations of the Study

I originally intended to collect data for eight weeks and for the students to share their compositions at the winter concert when they performed their other three songs. However, as the study progressed, the students made it clear that they did not feel prepared to share at that time, and I added four extra weeks to the study.

Because the students were responsible for their own video recordings, in a couple of instances, some parts of informal sessions remained unrecorded due to mistakes. Additionally, because the students worked in separate groups at once, there was no way for me to observe each of the groups simultaneously.

The study took place within the school, and at times, other students/parents/teachers talked to the participants when data was being collected. Additionally, because I only taught at the school once a week, any practicing related to choir that occurred outside of the choral rehearsal on Friday mornings remained unrecorded, and I could not use those practices as data for the study. Not all students were able to participate in each week of the study, due to factors outside of my control such as illness, transportation, and oversleeping. Three out of the thirteen students did not participate in the final coffee house performance; two did not attend school that day, and one felt too nervous to perform.
Delimitations of the Study

The population of the study was delimited to the students enrolled in choir at the Newark Center for Creative Learning, and I served as both the choral teacher and the writer of curriculum. The time frame was delimited to just over one semester, between October and January, for one hour on Friday mornings.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to explore students’ experiences songwriting in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting. Using informal music learning (Green, 2002, 2006, 2008) and social constructivism (Beals, 1998; Fosnot, 2005; Gauvain, 1998; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wiggins, 1999/2000) as the theoretical lenses for this study, I constructed the following conceptual framework: Students will participate in both formal and informal musical experiences in the choral classroom, where they may construct their own as well as shared understandings. Over the course of 12 weeks, I studied the experiences of fourth through eighth grade students (n=13) enrolled in a choir at the Newark Center for Creative Learning (NCCL) using an ethnographic case study design (Patton, 2105). As the teacher-researcher, I functioned as a participant-observer, immersed in the students’ experiences in the NCCL Choir.

NCCL Choir members (n=13) participated in 12 choir rehearsals held before school on Friday mornings. Students rehearsed formally for the first half of each rehearsal and wrote songs in small friendship groups of three to four students in the second half of each rehearsal. The students taught the choir their original songs and performed them in a coffee house performance at the conclusion of the study. I provided no direct instruction during the informal learning portion of the rehearsal.
Because of the qualitative nature of the study, I collected data in multiple forms and triangulated the data for validity. I analyzed the data concurrently with data collection, which is a typical approach in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009), and had both a peer debriefer and outside auditor check my data for validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000).
Chapter 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore students’ experiences songwriting in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting. Data were collected from primary and secondary sources: video recordings, my journal, documents, photographs, student journals, and group interviews. This chapter contains descriptions of each of the four participant groups, presented with rich, thick description as recommended by Merriam (2009) and Denzin (1989). Afterward, the data analysis and findings are discussed as they relate to each of the three research questions.

Teacher-Researcher Involvement

As the teacher-researcher, I functioned as the participant-observer, immersed in the students’ experiences in the NCCL Choir. While I provided formal instruction during the first half of each rehearsal (consistent with the traditional choral model, I provided no instruction during the informal portion of each choral rehearsal, and functioned as a facilitator during that time.

Presentation of Data

Ethnographic studies include rich, thick descriptions of the phenomena under study (Merriam, 2009). Denzin (1989) claimed the following:

[A thick description] does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail,
context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard (p. 83).

Therefore, a thick description demands interpretation that goes beyond meaning and motivations, and it is critical for plausibility and for making the meaning of the study compelling (Major & Savin-Baden, 2012). With this in mind, each group is described in a detailed overview consisting of a thick description before the presentation of data analysis and findings. Though I wrote the entirety of these descriptions through my lens of experience as the teacher-researcher, some of the description records what the students did, how they acted, and the sequence of events. Other parts of the description contain my interpretation of these events and actions; I separated these parts of the description from the rest of the text, which can be found in italics. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the identities of the participants.

Overview of Participant Groups

On the first day of data collection, I described the nature of the study to the students, informing them that their goal during the informal learning portion of the rehearsal was to write a song for the choir to sing. I told the students that I would act as a facilitator, not as a direct instructor, and would not deliver any formal instruction related to the topic of songwriting or composing. Amidst the nervous, yet excited buzz of the class, I answered many questions related to assent and consent, how the choir rehearsals would be structured, and how groups would be chosen. Afterward, the students divided themselves into friendship groups (Green, 2008; Macdonald, Miell, & Mitchell, 2002). Some students immediately clung to each other, excited to work with specific people, while others felt more hesitant, not knowing exactly with whom to
work. After some encouragement, all students eventually chose their groups, assembling in clumps of three or four students, spread throughout the choral room. They understood that these groups would remain consistent over the course of the study. While in their groups, I informed them that they would be responsible for capturing their interactions on video using iPads, and that they could use anything from home or from the resource table to aid them in their compositional process. I told the groups that if they needed any additional materials, they could feel free to make a suggestion on the list entitled, “What do you need?” which was located on the resource table. They were given access to folders with their group numbers so that they could keep anything related to their composition in one place. The groups were eager to get started, and immediately grabbed their iPads and other materials, at which point they started to video record their interactions.
Group 1: The Formals

Figure 1 Two members from The Formals (left to right): Brittany and Ashley.
Day 1: This energetic group consisted of four students named Ashley, Silvia, Molly, and Brittany, all in grades 5-8. Though the students only had about five minutes to work on their compositions on the first day, they made their enthusiasm evident. Silvia immediately ran to fetch the iPad while Brittany gathered materials such as pencils and staff paper in preparation to notate their composition. When all four students had gathered in the corner of the chorus room, crouched on the floor in front of the iPad and next to the standing keyboard, Brittany lead a discussion about the form of the song. She described the typical form of a song, “We were talking about how we wanna have kind of like a sweet chorus-ish song, not so much pop, but we haven’t decided what we wanna write about, but we were, kind of said that for the sweet songs, they usually have the little beginning…intro, and then like, a chorus kind of verse thing, and then they have usually a faster, special part, and then like, the chorus verse thing.”
All of the students listened intently, but Silvia evidently had a different idea in mind; she suggested that they take a pre-existing chorus song and change the lyrics and some of the notes. Shaking her head back and forth, Brittany strongly opposed that idea and wanted them to write something completely original, because she did not want to “steal a song.” Ashley, disagreeing with her older sister, Silvia, agreed with Brittany. Before the group could decide on a plan of action, Ashley, a budding pianist, bounded up and moved to the keyboard, beginning to improvise. The other students quickly gathered around Ashley who continued to improvise, as Brittany attempted to create a group discussion about the content of the song. The students quickly moved back to their initial positions, and Silvia, a guitarist, found the guitar app on the iPad, and began to play.

*The approach of the students differed; whereas Brittany sought to lead a discussion, Silvia and Ashley were more inclined to improvise on instruments with which they had familiarity. Molly seemed to have less of a role, though everyone seemed included and comfortable to speak her mind in the group.*

Day 2: The second day of composition began much the same way as the first day. The four students had claimed the chorus room as their own, and positioned both themselves and the iPad in the identical position as the previous week. Once positioned on the floor of the brightly colored room, Brittany led the conversation, asking questions to help the group make decisions. Silvia redirected the discussion, stating a list of musical elements related to their composition that they needed to figure out, such as the key signature and time signature. The students agreed that 4/4 time was easiest. When Silvia squealed with great enthusiasm and suggested that they
compose a waltz, Brittany said that they “better not.” They quickly decided on a travel theme, and Silvia yelled, “traveling to Hawaii!!” while strumming her ukulele. Similar to the first week, the students spent a moment discussing how everyone should fit into the video’s frame; as they readjusted the iPad camera, Brittany said, “I don’t wanna be slightly in this thing [the video frame],” and Silvia whined with a knowing smile, “But what about me?!” They decided on a key of G or D, based on what instruments they play. Silvia improvised the chords on her ukulele, and the group thought it would be a good intro.

At this point, Silvia drove the songwriting process. I noticed that Molly, the only student in The Formals who did not take private music lessons, was not as involved in the creation process.

After deciding to notate the ukulele part, Ashley suggested that they could write a piano part. All four students gathered around the upright keyboard and Ashley improvised a harmony part that would go well based on the written chords. She figured out this part independently of the ukulele part. Though Molly had been somewhat uninvolved in the creation process, she immediately became occupied in the playing the piano, asking Ashley to teach her what to play. Silvia focused on notating the music, whereas the others directed their energies into improvising and practicing. Ashley told Silvia which notes to scribe, and Silvia wrote them onto the staff. Brittany plucked the notes on her violin as Ashley played them on the piano and said the letter names out loud. Silvia got very frustrated with Ashley when Ashley didn’t know the notes in bass clef. The students in this group kept each other on task, even noting that
they “only have eight more weeks.” When they finished notating the music, they decided that they wanted to “make sure [the ukulele and piano parts] go together.” The parts immediately came together, as they all moved their bodies to the beat while playing. Molly, grinning ear to ear, asked, “did it work?”

*Molly, unconfident with her lack of formal music knowledge, noticeably looked to the others for their musical expertise. I thought that it was neat that Molly became more involved at this point; I had been starting to worry about her lack of involvement.*

Silvia began to revise their introduction, stating that she was going to take out two chords in the ukulele part. Brittany stated that they needed to come up with a melody, but my one-minute warning (a warning that I gave to each group to encourage them to wrap up their composing at a good stopping point) discouraged them from continuing to compose. Very proud and excited, the group asked to play their introduction for me. When I agreed, they began to play, with Silvia on ukulele, Molly and Ashley on piano, and Brittany happily snapping along.

*Though the group insisted on notating their song, their approach remained informal and inclusive, with a good deal of improvising. The students helped each other to know what to play. They got a great deal of joy out of making music together as a group, and spent much of the time musicking. I felt so amazed at what the students had accomplished in one day!*
Day 3: The students quickly decided to review their introduction, and they continued to refine and revise it as they added extra bass notes in the piano part. Throughout this process, Silvia notated the additions on the staff paper that they had previously used. This took quite a bit of time to review and revise, and throughout the entirety of this process, Brittany drummed along to the beat on the top of the keyboard. Afterward, she asked, “Should I start working on the melody, so I can do something other than drum on the piano?” Silvia replied, “Yeah, go grab your guitar,” but meant to say violin. Ashley worked on notating the chords that they composed as a harmony part in the bass clef. As Ashley did this, Silvia and Molly played the introduction on the piano and ukulele. Brittany tried to figure out what to play on her violin; Silvia suggested that she play just the top note for each chord, and told her to play “E D C C.” She played it, but Ashley suggested that she play different notes in the chords.

Silvia then started to play the ukulele, attempting to play at the same time as the piano and the violin. Because the girls did not start playing at the same time, the chords didn’t line up. They decided that the violin didn’t sound good with the ukulele, and that Brittany would play the melody when the ukulele wasn’t playing. They played through the introduction again without the violin, and decided, “that sounded good.” They moved on to try to write the melody for the remainder of the song. Silvia told them to get started while she finished writing down what they had so far. Molly, Ashley, and Brittany improvised and talked about ideas for the melody for the rest of the song, and after a while Ashley said, “Okay what kind of song do you want? Sad or happy?” Brittany supposed, “I don’t know. Mellow?” Silvia replied, “It has a ukulele in it. It has to be happy.” They concurred that they liked a certain melody that Ashley improvised on the piano, but Ashley said she wouldn’t be able to recreate it exactly.
They identified that they had a problem; because Ashley was playing the piano, she couldn’t write while she was playing. However, Ashley was best at writing formal musical notation. Therefore, the girls asked me to write down the notes. I asked if Ashley would be able to remember the song without notation and she said “no.” I asked if there was another way they could remember it, and they said, “Oh! Film it!” Ashley improvised while Silvia filmed, though the musical content was very different from what she had improvised the last time. As all of the girls crowded around the iPad to watch the video, Ashley complimented herself, “I’m good at making up music on the spot!”

*The Formals did not make nearly as much progress on day three as they had the last two days. They contributed to their intro by adding more of a bass line, but this was done mostly by Ashley. Silvia spent the remainder of the time notating what they had composed so far, and Ashley improvised on the piano. Brittany and Molly were less involved and not much was accomplished during this session.*

Day 4: The group searched the photo library on the iPad for the video of Ashley’s improvised melody from the previous week. Molly asked what the song should be about, and Ashley said that they should figure out a tune first and then brainstorm topics. Silvia then asked if they should do a pop song or a choral song. Ashley said it should be like “Danny Boy,” and Brittany replied, “so boring.” Molly said that she wanted it to be more “upbeat” like “Everlasting Melody” [a song by Rollo Dilworth that they were singing in the formal part of choir]. Brittany agreed. Molly wrote the word “Ideas.” on the board while Silvia sang “Everlasting Melody.” Silvia suggested
that they come up with an idea for a topic and then write a poem and figure out a tune. The girls decided that if they wrote a poem that featured two people talking, then that could translate to altos and sopranos singing back and forth in their song. Ashley stated that they did not have to use the melody that she had recorded, and Brittany quickly agreed that they should not use it. After a bit of off-topic discussion, Brittany, suggesting that the group was not accomplishing much, said, “Can we not fool around and actually get to work?” She led them in thinking of ideas for topics, but the girls kept getting distracted talking about other things. As they brainstormed, Brittany played the piano, not necessarily trying to make a melody, but mainly to doodle. Silvia walked away after a little while, and remained pretty uninvolved for the rest of the time. During this time, the girls sang the melodies of various songs together while continuing to write topics on the board. Molly decided that they would vote on what to write about. They began to vote but got sidetracked and never finished. Molly and Ashley decided to practice the introduction, and at the end of the session, Molly stated, “So basically we didn’t really get anything done.”

The group members seemed a bit dejected at the end of this session, and their journal entries reflected this feeling.

Silvia wrote in her journal, “All that we have written in our group is the intro, and today we got nothing done.” Ashley was more specific, “We have wrote [sic] the intro for treble & bass clef but we still have to write the melody and ending. We need to figure out what our topic will be.” Brittany provided a similar description as Ashley, and stated, “I think we are a bit behind on schedule.” Molly concurred, “We have a
tone [sic] of stuff left to do. We have not found a thing to write about. We have the tune a little but not the words."

_All progress seemed to cease in week four. The group had decided to pick a topic, but they never did, and decided not to use the melody that they had previously agreed upon. The group members became irritated with each other, and ended their session frustrated. I felt disappointed watching this session, because if they actively musicked together instead of talking about music, I thought they would have been more successful._

Day 5: The Formals immediately got down to work, with Brittany taking charge. Brittany suggested that everyone play the intro so the group could improvise musical ideas for the verses with the introductory material in mind. She told Ashley to improvise something that might fit with the intro. Brittany “changed the channel” when she didn’t like what Ashley was improvising. After Ashley improvised for a while, Brittany said, “that’s better,” and Silvia said, “I like it.” Ashley kept playing for a long time, and the others told her to start over. Ashley said, “I can’t do it again, the same way.” Silvia retorted, “Well try.” Ashley said, “It’s impossible.”

_ Ashley’s inability to re-play the same melody indicated that she was not audiating while playing._

Nonetheless, Ashley began to play again, and Silvia recorded what Ashley played so they could remember. This time, it was completely different. When she finished,
Molly yelled, “Awesome!” Brittany said, “Good, so now we gotta transcribe it.” Ashley replied, “Yeah, that might be the hard part.” Brittany said that they could just focus on Ashley’s right hand while watching the video, because that’s the melody part: “See it’s always almost one note for the melody for this hand. We should be able to transcribe that. What do you guys think?” They decided to slide the adjuster at the top of the video so that they could transcribe. Brittany said, “I can write the notes pretty well. What clef are we in?” Silvia said, “Treble clef, not bass clef.” Ashley replied, “First note is E.” They talked about which E to write. Brittany was used to writing an octave higher because she plays violin. During this time, Silvia and Molly became more and more off-task, since they did not have any specific jobs. Silvia experimented with how low she could sing while Molly, entertained, observed Silvia’s off-task behavior. Later in the session, Ashley mentioned to me, “Trying to transcribe from a video is really not working. I wish we had one of those pianos that…you play and it transcribes it for you.” Silvia asked if there was an app for that, but I replied that was probably not going to be possible for them to use for this project. By the end, Brittany assured Ashley, “We got this, Meely. Slowly, but surely. We’re doin’ it.” She identified that only she and Ashley had been participating in the transcription process.

Despite two group members having nothing to do, Ashley and Brittany continued to transcribe, and there was little musicking involved. In this instance, the group’s insistence on using formal notation seemed to slow them down, especially when compared to their former success with improvising for the introduction.
DAY 6: Brittany immediately tried to get her group down to business: “How about this guys? How about we listen to our video and see if we all still like it, and then we’ll work on transcribing it. Sound good?” Meanwhile, Molly had asked Ashley to teach her the melody to “When I Close My Eyes,” and Ashley obliged. Silvia opened the video recording of Ashley’s improvisation and they all listened. Ashley seemed like she didn’t feel like continuing to transcribe, but Brittany thought that it was important. The next couple of minutes were disjunct, with group members doing different things including off-topic conversation and playing different songs on the piano that were unrelated to their composition. Brittany finally exclaimed, “Guys can you quit playing a different song? We’re trying to make our own!” Ashley and Brittany continued to transcribe and revise the melody. For example, when Ashley came across a chord she didn’t like, she said, “It says E and D at the same time but that doesn’t sound good.” Brittany replied, “I say get rid of the D…Does F and G sound good together?” Ashley said, “D. Keep going . . . It says E again!” Ashley asked if I could play her song, and Brittany laughed, “No, you’re playing it, cause you’re the pianist.” Ashley had trouble playing what they had transcribed, even though she had played it originally. Silvia, jobless, took it upon herself to keep other groups on track, and Molly continued to practice a different song on the piano. Brittany served as the group’s cheerleader, encouraging Ashley, “C’mon, you’re like a note archeologist. You’re digging a note from ancient relics of Silvia’s bad photography.” As time went on, Silvia and Molly got more and more off track, talking about other topics, like colors, and chasing each other. Silvia mentioned, “We’re not getting very far at all.” Brittany, laughing, said, “You’re just chasing Molly and talking about . . . ” Silvia interrupted, “[Be]cause you haven’t given me anything to do!!!” Brittany replied
calmly, “Practice.” Silvia retorted, “I have nothing to practice!” Brittany said, “We made up something [the introduction] so far. Find the sheet music and practice.” Silvia said, “I don’t need to practice it! It’s FOUR CHORDS.” Ashley replied, “You’re going to have to figure out the chords for this [the new melody].” Silvia said, “No. I don’t need to.” Brittany said, “Okay, you can help us then…Would you like to help Molly, or would you like to stay where you’re safely sane?” Molly replied, “Safely” and continued to play “When I Close My Eyes.” Ashley played what they transcribed, but it was rather slow and choppy, with pauses as she attempted to read the notation.

_The notation process significantly slowed this group’s progress. Even though they wrote down the notes to the intro, they did so after they created a product that they liked. Because Ashley could not audiate her melody, she was not able to re-play it in musical fashion. This made me feel frustrated as a teacher, considering some of the students’ lack of involvement; I wanted to help them improve their efficiency so that they could more quickly develop a product of which they felt proud._

DAYS 7-8: The transcription process continued much like it had on day six. However, Brittany suggested to Molly and Silvia, “Why don’t you two start talking about words? You two start brainstorming some topics and then maybe even write a . . . poem or something that we could use as words and then we’ll all look at it together, okay? . . . Alright guys, so you start working on words because I know you’re both very creative and ready to argue, and uh, we’ll check in in a bit.” Silvia and Molly spent much of days seven and eight attempting to come up with lyrics, but getting severely off-task. Brittany and Ashley multi-tasked, working hard on transcribing but
sometimes speaking their minds when Silvia and Molly talked about the poetry. As they transcribed, Brittany said, “Maybe it’ll sound good.”

*Brittany and Ashley had no idea what the piece sounded like, even though they were notating it as a product that they expected to use for their song.*

While brainstorming, Molly reached out for help, saying, “Aimee, we’re having trouble coming up with words.” I asked about their song topic, and they discussed their ideas with me. Ashley and Brittany attempted to keep Molly and Silvia on track, suggesting that they write a song about eagles. Molly joked about this, singing, “Eagles fly in the air, and they like to eat their hair.” They all laughed. Silvia suggested an alternative approach to creating a melody, different from the process that her group had agreed upon: transcribing Ashley’s improvisation. She stated, “We have to like, choose a topic, sing it, we can listen to it, and if we like it, we can write that down.” However, her group rejected her idea. At the end of week seven, Brittany noted that she felt sad that her group was not accomplishing much, and all of the group members reflected those sentiments in week eight.

*The group’s choice of process to create melodic material (transcription, using formal musical notation) seemed to slow them down. After Silvia and Molly discussed their preferences for composing based on vocal improvisation, Ashley and Brittany insisting on continuing their process of transcribing from the video. I felt as if the social dynamics hindered them from accomplishing more and acknowledging the validity of Silvia’s approach.*

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DAY 9: Ashley began the session by playing the transcription on the piano while reading Brittany’s notation. Brittany said that they needed to add some “timing” because if all the notes are the same length then it “doesn’t give it much depth.” Ashley started to remember the rhythm, playing it differently, singing along on a neutral syllable. Brittany asked if Ashley needed to write anything down to help her remember the rhythm. She added that she knows that this is Ashley’s least favorite thing to do, but that once they hear the melody, they can decide on words. Silvia, not paying attention to Brittany and Ashley, sang about the morning and night and improvised vocally. Ashley told Silvia that she is singing a different melody than the one that they have written down, so it will not work. Silvia disagreed with Ashley’s logic as it related to the process, exclaiming in a frustrated manner, “We don’t have to put it down people! You guys have nothing! At least I have something!”

_Silvia had a different idea about the compositional process than Brittany and Ashley, which created a riff in the group. Similar to the previous week, Silvia expressed her preference for composing melodic material through vocal improvisation with text, while Brittany and Ashley dismissed her suggestion and continued to transcribe from the video recording of Ashley’s piano improvisation._

The group had an unstructured couple of minutes, as they continued to talk about the topic of their song, as they watched a favorite YouTube video and sang along, and as Ashley continued to practice the transcription. Ashley stopped, saying, “It sounds bad.” Brittany replied, “That’s why we’re looking over it to change it. Timing also
really helps.” Ashley agreed, “Yeah.” Ashley kept practicing, actively trying to come up with more rhythms, and said, “I don’t like that note.” Brittany asked which note she wanted to use instead. Ashley played a couple of notes and said, “D.” After Ashley and Brittany practiced and revised the new melody, Brittany said, “I was thinking. Can we try playing the intro part [the vamp] while Ashley plays this [the new melody]?” Ashley asked, “Together?” Molly became involved in the process again, playing the piano part for the introduction, but Silvia did not have her ukulele. After trying the introduction with Ashley’s new melody, Brittany exclaimed, “That was awesome, guys!” They discussed adding some repeats and editing some sections, and Ashley asked, “Can we get Aimee to play it because she’s better at sight reading than me?”

Even though Ashley conceived the melody, she still considered reading her own composition as sight reading. To me, this meant that she was not audiating the melody.

Brittany said, “I don’t think she’s gonna help us.” Ashley asked, “Why not?” Brittany replied, “Because we’ve asked before.” Brittany and Ashley walked into the gymnasium, in an effort to discover the other group’s topics so that they could get ideas for their lyrics, and Silvia said to Molly, “Just because they’re little cranky-poos and don’t like to have fun, doesn’t mean we can’t have fun.” They spent the next few minutes off-task. Upon her return, Brittany walked to the board, and wrote the word “Ideas” on the board. Under that, she wrote “morning.” They saw me and one of the girls said, “We’re failing.” In a cacophony of exclamations, the rest of the group agreed, and Brittany added that it was hard to work with siblings. The room erupted
into sound. I didn’t give them much advice and Ashley said with a smile, “You’re the worst teacher. You’re not helpful.” I said, “I’m not teaching you right now. You’re teaching yourselves.” At that remark, the group was despondent, though they talked about a couple of ideas. Molly corrected, “And Ashley. She is not the worst teacher.” Ashley replied, “I was kidding.” Brittany said with a smile, “She’s the worst teacher when she’s not teaching.” They added ideas to the board for topics, and Brittany organized a vote; they decided on wishes as a topic. Ashley worked to teach Molly a more complicated bass line part for the introduction, first singing it out loud while playing, then taking Molly’s hand to help her with the rhythm. Brittany complimented Molly on her efforts. When Molly succeeded, she squealed, face alight with joy, bouncing up and down, yelling, “I did it! Yay!” The group practiced the entirety of the song a couple of times, and afterward, Brittany suggested that they think of four wishes, one for each of the four sections of the song.

Though Molly became more involved again, Silvia remained uninvolved, perhaps because her ideas about composition had been ignored. Though this session started out as unproductive, the group managed to figure out that Ashley would play the melody over Molly’s bass line. They also determined the form of the song as they divided the song into sections and made revisions to their previously-existing material. Though they did not write any words, they finally began to revise the song based on their aural perceptions of the composition as a whole.

Day 10: On the day of the sharing session, Brittany and Ashley worked diligently on creating a bridge for their song. Silvia spent most of the session doing her homework.
Ashley improvised a bridge on the piano, and Brittany notated her improvisation on staff paper. Brittany told Molly and Silvia that she was not sure if they had a specific thing for them to work on, but that they could think about the words since they already decided on a topic. Ashley played the new bridge and Brittany suggested that they extend it. Ashley and Brittany worked together to decide which part of the bridge to repeat.

This seemed much more musical than before, because Ashley played the bridge twice, meaning that she really remembered and could audiate what she wanted Brittany to notate.

Silvia asked if they could include Molly in “some way that’s actually productive.” Molly said she was just standing around, and Ashley accused her of being annoying. Silvia retorted that it was supposed to be an entire group project, not just the two of them working. Brittany apologized, “Sorry, we’re not quite ready to include you, Molly.” Soon after, Ashley and Brittany decided to have Molly play the introductory vamp while Ashley played the melody for the bridge on the piano. Brittany acted as the group’s cheerleader, mentioning that once they wrote the words, they would be done. Silvia criticized that Ashley’s new melody for the bridge sounded all slapped together, like she just played random notes that they just made up. Ashley retorted, “Because we just made them up, Silvia!” Silvia said that she was just trying to give her input. She suggested that Ashley add in “some eighth notes” and change up the tempo to make the bridge sound “more musical.” Ashley created different rhythms, playing without Molly, and Silvia said that it sounded better. Ashley made up a bass
line to go along with the bridge, and taught it to Molly, saying and singing the letters out loud. Molly learned her new part quickly.

As compared to the other days, this group was very productive, and seemed to feel motivated by the impending deadline of the sharing session; only 16 minutes into the session, and they had composed a bridge in two parts that did not exist previously.

The group practiced what they had so far, stopping between sections to remember who needed to play what. At this point, Brittany said that they should make up words. Silvia had been doing homework. Molly and Ashley started to talk about dinner, and Brittany exclaimed, “Are you guys going to listen?! We’re trying to write music here!” They got quiet and then started to laugh. Brittany said, “I know we all hate this, but we’ve gotta do something, okay. It’d be embarrassing to just play music.” Molly said, “I don’t hate this but I don’t really . . .” Brittany took the lead, and said that they have four different verses, and that she had come up with different ways that people could make wishes: candles, stars, and dandelion fluffs. When Brittany said that they need one more idea, Silvia mentioned a wishing well. Brittany asked what they wanted the morals to be. The group became annoyed with each other at this point, with some of them messing around, and Silvia bringing up how her and Molly felt discluded again. After a bit of bantering, Molly asked everyone to stop fighting, and after a minute or two, they all ended up laughing. Brittany stated the positive: even though they all feel like killing each other, and they have no words, they finished the song. At that point, I gathered all of the groups into the Spanish room to share their songs with the other groups.
This was interesting because with the pressure, this group worked a great deal faster than they had been working. Because Ashley audiated instead of just looking at a video, her and Brittany notated the part much faster. Through trial and error, they figured out a harmony part with Molly, and because of this, the bridge/intro sounded much more musical than the verses.

When it was The Formals’ turn to share in the sharing session, Brittany got up and started talking, saying, “Alright, so, we have a song . . . composed. We have a bunch of different . . . we haven’t come up uh, finalized it of with words yet, so we’re just going to hear the, um, instrumenters . . . the musicians to play . . . okay? And they’re a bit out of practice, so they should be fine . . . but there’s a few parts . . .” Molly interrupted, “Won’t we might have a ukulele?” Brittany confirmed, “. . . and we might have a ukulele playing as well for part of it.” Brittany stood next to the piano as Molly and Ashley began to play, and Silvia sat, watching in the audience. A couple of times, when changing from section to section, Ashley had to remind Molly about how her part went by playing it for her. Molly said, “oh yeah” as she recalled what she should play. They struggled to put this together, and Brittany apologized to the choir, “Sorry, we added a lot of the second hand today.” After they finished playing, I asked for the other students to give comments about things that they liked about the song. Ashley criticized her own group’s composition, “There’s nothing anybody likes about that song.” Eloise mentioned, “It was nice.” The students all laughed. Danielle commented that she liked that two different people were playing two different parts on the piano at the same time. Ryan enjoyed “the length and the key changes.” Brittany
said, “We kinda had some repeating stuff . . . we just played the three different parts that will be interchanged.” Even with her negative attitude, Ashley smiled at some of these comments.

*Having a set deadline seemed to motivate the students, though Silvia remained uninvolved, and very frustrated as a result.*

DAY 11: All four students gathered around the piano to play what they had so far. Brittany mentioned to Ashley, “I still think you can take it down an octave.” In response, Molly and Ashley both played that section down an octave, and they agreed that it sounded better. Brittany and Silvia shrieked and laughed hysterically about how high it would have been. Ashley said that she wanted to hear me play it, and Brittany said, “Why? You guys play it fine.” Silvia finally brought her ukulele to school, and the students worked together very well, using democratic processes like voting to make decisions. For example, Brittany, talking about the second half of the melody, proposed, “All in favor of keeping this part in.” They decided to cut part of it out, but to keep in the whole bridge, just not add words. After discussing the words, the group got off topic, and joked about writing a song about pillow fights. Molly, kidding around, sang a melody with words related to pillow fights, and Silvia sang a complimentary line afterwards. Brittany told them to focus.

*Though the group was “off task,” Molly and Silvia demonstrated that they possessed the capabilities of assisting in the composition process by creating really interesting melodies with words. However, because of the process their group used, creating*
words proved very difficult, and the group viewed Silvia and Molly’s singing as “off-task” instead of helpful.

The group had a difficult time figuring out words for the existing melody, perhaps because Ashley played very long sections on the piano that the students could not remember. Finally, the group decided that they wanted to pick a new topic. After everyone contributed ideas, Ashley suggested, “rain.” Silvia mentioned the weather, and Ashley and Molly agreed, “yeah, weather.” After a bit of discussion, Brittany said that they were going to start the polls, and that they each get three votes. All four of them voted on the weather, but then diverted to a discussion related to instrumentation during each part of the song. As they attempted to come up with lyrics, Molly said, “Guys, let’s get to work here. This is like, the last day. Guys this is the last day. Let’s work, let’s work.” They thought of rain, sun, wind, snow, and fog. At this point, the other groups convened for a sharing session and began to teach each other their songs, but The Formals had told me that they did not feel prepared for this. Thus, when they heard the others rehearsing The Parodies’ song [a parody on the tune “Ode to Joy”], Silvia criticized that The Parodies stole that tune, and Ashley rolled her eyes and stated that it was a “parody.” Molly asked why they couldn’t just have done that, and Brittany remained her positive self and said, “Because we’re being original and beautiful music artists. Our song sounds really good. It’s just the words we don’t have, and they still had to make up words anyway, so toughen up, okay?” They continued to try to come up with words. Silvia vocally improvised a song about the rain. Brittany tried to stop her, saying “But that’s not our music.” Silvia said, “Yeah, I’m just singin’ words. You can just put it to somethin’ else.” She looked to Ashley and said, “Okay,
could you play and I sing stuff?” Silvia tried to sing along, but then became embarrassed, saying, “I don’t know what I’m singing, never mind” while smiling. Ashley finally considered Silvia’s idea, saying, “Well it could be . . .” before singing Silvia’s words, but fitting them in with the notated tune. Molly felt much more negative on this day and stated, “We are never gonna finish this.” Brittany said, “If we want to we can.” Molly replied, “I want to . . . kind of.” Silvia mentioned, “I just wish we didn’t have to write words, and we could just perform what we had written.” Molly said, “Exactly!!! I don’t wanna like, write words.” Ashley replied, “Well we’re going to so too bad!” Silvia said, “This is choir.” Brittany added, “We were supposed to make a choral piece.” Molly alleged, “Fine I want to but . . .” Ashley replied, “It doesn’t matter what you want. It’s what we have to do.” When I came in a minute later, I asked, “How’s it going group one?” Ashley replied, “Terribly!”

The group had not been having as much fun since the times that they all had made music together for the introduction; they seemed dejected about the process, and especially irritated by the lyrics.

Day 12: On this day, the students decided to practice their songs together as an entire choir. They clearly had practiced a great deal between weeks 11 and 12. There was a bit of talking as Ashley and her group tried to get organized in the gymnasium. Some people sat on stage, and it took a bit of shuffling for everyone to find their lyric sheets. Ashley said, “5, 6, 7, 8” to count off the choir. They had to stop a couple of times to remind the choir about certain parts, but they were able to finish the song. They decided to sing through it again. After the beginning section, Joslyn (a choir member
from a different group) said, “‘the clouds descend to the ground’ is kinda hard. I don’t know how to sing that part.” Ashley simplified the melody and re-taught the group. They also decided to alter some wording, because they used the same word twice in two lines. They continued to edit the song as they progressed, noting what the group had trouble with. After the choir practiced the other group’s songs, The Formals asked if the choir could practice their song again. The gymnasium was filled with chaos as choir members talked and ran around, thinking that they had finished their rehearsal. I mentioned that if they practiced again, they might consider trying to stand how they would in the performance. Silvia remained laying on the ground, but most of the other students stood up, with Joslyn reminding them to put their toes on a certain line on the makeshift stage. Ashley counted “5, 6, 7, 8.” She conducted during the interludes, so they knew when to come in. After the practice, the students moved quickly into the choir room, and they appeared visibly nervous. Just a few minutes later, it was The Formals’ turn to perform. Molly started to play the introduction, and Ashley conducted the choir, showing them when to come in.

Joslyn’s voice was the most present in this song. This song was so much more advanced than the others, though it was evident that the group didn’t know the tune quite as well as the other songs. The melody was not quite as melodic as in the others.

Afterward, there was a lot of cheering and I gestured for the students to bow. Many of them were smiling, obviously proud of how they performed.
Group 2: The Informals

Figure 3  The Informals (left to right): Danielle, Layla, and Sabrina.
Day 1: This bubbly group of girls consisted of three students named Danielle, Sabrina, and Layla, who were in grades four through five. After breaking into their new-formed friendship group on the first day of the study, the girls, all budding pianists, immediately began to giggle, waving hello to the camera, exclaiming, “Hi,” while sitting in three blue chairs in the center of the yellow chorus room. Layla, holding the iPad, opened GarageBand, and all of the girls excitedly listened and played some of the instruments. Smiling, Danielle suggested that if they wrote down the notes, she could play them on the piano. Sabrina, holding a piece of staff paper and a pencil, poised to write, said that they should think of a title first. The girls decided that they
wanted to write a pop song, but Danielle said that she did not want it to be too “girly.” Danielle, noticing Layla still playing the instruments on GarageBand, instructed her to stop messing around on the iPad; Sabrina and Danielle seemed more interested in discussing their song than exploring the iPad.

*With only three minutes to work, this group demonstrated their enthusiasm through iPad exploration and discussion.*

Day 2: Sabrina and Danielle immediately moved into the gymnasium, curling themselves up against one of the white walls that sported hand-painted leaves, their group lacking Layla because of her absence. The energetic girls immediately opened GarageBand on the iPad, first playing the piano and then exploring other instruments. Completely engrossed in musical exploration, the girls occasionally looked up at each other in delight, singing different melodic motives on neutral syllables that reflected the music pouring out from the iPad. Sometimes their singing remained quiet and rehearsed, the girls carefully imitating the sounds from the iPad in their head voices. Other times, their singing seemed to erupt from them in a raw way, and involved movements like fist pumping and dancing. Danielle handed Sabrina her “music folder,” and instructed her to “read this one.” I later discovered that this folder contained lyrics that Danielle wrote for songs at home; she suggested to Sabrina that they might be able to take some lines from those songs. Sabrina began to read, but also distracted herself by creating body percussion, moving to the music from the iPad, bobbing her head, swaying, clapping, and snapping. After Sabrina finally read Danielle’s lyrics, she asked, “Okay, now how does the melody go with this?” Danielle said, “That’s what I was looking for;” in an annoyed tone before smiling. Sabrina
closed the folder and they both turned their attention back to the iPad. Danielle, looking longingly at the other groups playing on the pianos, said, “We can’t use the piano, which is such a bummer.”

*Danielle did not speak up about wanting to use a piano even though I continually insisted that the groups should ask if they would like more materials.*

The girls continued to explore different sounds on the iPad, and Danielle asked, “So what should the melody be like?” Sabrina continued to play different sounds on the iPad. After a while, Danielle, frustrated, stated, “Maybe we can try to make a song right now, so we don’t waste our time trying to find music.”

*While Sabrina felt content to explore various sounds on the iPad, Danielle, wanting to create a melody, viewed this as a waste of time.*

The girls came up with the idea to open YouTube, but then were unable to because of the lack of Internet connection. After 15:00 minutes of mostly iPad exploration, Danielle suggested again, “Sabrina, let’s write a song.” Unfortunately, at this time, choir was over.

Week 3: Layla’s absence in week two was followed by Sabrina and Danielle’s absences in week three. Layla positioned the iPad on the resource table in the chorus room, choosing to stand for the entirety of the data collection. Not knowing what had transpired the previous week, Layla seemed to lack any sort of direction, and spent her time exploring GarageBand on the iPad. When playing the various instruments, she did not play in a very “musical” fashion, but mostly tapped various instruments very fast.
Despite my assessment of this exploration as “unmusical,” it could be possible that Layla found a pattern to her playing, and that my predispositions related to Western Art Music could have negatively impacted my understanding of what Layla audiated during this time.

Silvia (from The Formals) approached Layla, and asked, “What are you doing?” Layla replied, “I don’t know. I’m trying to figure out something.” After a while, Layla, looking devious, stopped her recording device, and typed on the notes app that she could not believe that her other group members were missing.

_Layla plainly felt as if the task of composing was not as much fun without her friends. This group’s inconsistent attendance impacted the social dynamics and progress related to their composition. I felt disappointed at this time due to this group’s lack of progress._

Week 4: Because of another function occurring at the school, the gymnasium was unavailable, so Layla, Sabrina, and Danielle positioned themselves with their iPad on the swinging bench outside in the front of the school. Amidst much giggling, the girls managed to solidify a beat for their song, using the drums on GarageBand. The girls remained very positive about their song. Danielle wrote in her journal, “We have got the rhythm [sic] of the song done and almost all the words but we still need the tune.” Sabrina agreed, “We have one song in ruff [sic] draft and than I have a song to think about so we are working on our beat rite [sic] now and soon we are going to start to sing!!” Layla wrote, “We made a beat for our song and we are done with the beat, but we have more to do.”
The girls were excited to compose together, and all members were equally included. However, productivity suffered in this group due to their close friendship; the girls spent a great deal of time giggling, and the only thing that they had accomplished thus far included creating a beat on the iPad.

Week 5: The group’s struggle with attendance continued with Danielle’s absence in week five. Sabrina and Layla positioned themselves on the floor of the gymnasium, with Sabrina sprawled out with staff paper and a pencil, lying against the hanging blue mats, and Layla sitting cross-legged with the iPad. When I noticed Sabrina writing lyrics, I asked her what she was writing, and she grinned, “This is a song I made up for Danielle. It’s weird. It’s about how I hit her on the head with a water bottle.” Sabrina said that she had a different song she wanted to write down, one that her mom said that she liked. I asked how she figured out these songs at home, and she said she just sort of sings them. She added, “I want to write a song about growing up.” While Sabrina sang her water bottle song, Layla moved in flow to the beats on the iPad, clapping, moving her fists back and forth, and swaying. Sabrina’s song had an upbeat, pop song feel.

Though Sabrina spent her time improvising, it seemed as if she was not actively working toward the goal of creating a song for the choir.

Layla said to Sabrina while playing her recorded beat on the iPad, “This is the song I just made up.” Sabrina replied, “Well it’s the beat to the song you just made up.” Layla said, “Ready, listen? It’s the beat to my song.” Sabrina asked, “What song? . . . We can listen to the songs on YouTube. Let’s go to YouTube.”
Again, it’s not clear here that the girls are working toward an end product, but are focused more on having fun.

Sabrina saw “Wildest Dreams” on YouTube, and started singing the song a capella, while instructing Layla, “Just do Taylor Swift.” Layla had trouble opening YouTube, and Sabrina got frustrated after a while, eventually returning to writing lyrics for her song for Danielle. Toward the end of the session, the volume level in the gymnasium had increased, and although I was unable to hear the girls’ exact discussion, I could tell that the girls felt annoyed with each other; Sabrina turned off the iPad recorder, saying “stupid thing.”

For this group, the iPad served as a distraction, impacting their productivity. Additionally, the girls seemed to feel as if they did not want all of their interactions recorded, perhaps because they did not want me to watch social interactions that I would view as negative.

Week 6: All three girls positioned themselves in the gymnasium in the same spot as the previous week. Danielle stated that they needed to make up a tune, but Layla continued to create drumbeats on GarageBand, while Sabrina talked about various topics and made faces at the camera. Layla, noticing Danielle and Sabrina laughing while recording themselves on the iPad, scolded, “Stop fooling around like girls.” Sabrina retorted, “We are girls.” Layla mocked, “Like baby girls.” The three girls continued to play around, turning the iPad recording device around, laughing and gasping through hysterics, “We’re gonna be upside down!” Finally, the girls turned their attention to GarageBand’s piano, playing a pop song. Danielle, feeling inspired by their piano playing, moved to the upright keyboard in the corner of the gymnasium
and began playing the same pop song. The other girls quickly followed, and Sabrina said in a silly voice, “Let’s actually figure out ze song. Of ze band. Of the awesomeness.” Layla played a tad of the pop song that Danielle had played before, and Danielle played broken minor chords in the right hand with full chords in the left hand, saying, “It should start like that.” Layla confirmed, “Yeah.” As Sabrina sat on the ground next to the piano, Danielle continued to improvise in minor tonality, but then got distracted and played “Heart and Soul.” The Formals yelled through the door, criticizing them for being off task, and in response, Danielle went back to improvising a melody in minor tonality, replaying the same motive over and over again.

_This group’s productivity seemed to lag behind The Formals and The Serious Songwriters, as they continuously became sidetracked by their own silly behavior. However, this group sang the most while composing, actively musicking more than the other groups. As far as I knew, they had not yet talked about their approach to composing, mostly playing with musical material and not worrying much about a musical product or whole._

The group felt positive about their accomplishments, and Danielle wrote in her journal, “Our composing is going really well! We are working together on everything! We are trying to find out a tune. I think we are going to work over the weekend!” Sabrina shared Danielle’s sentiments, writing, “Our composing is going okay. It still needs a lot of work but we are doing ok!! We kind of do the same things [we all have the same role] but we are good!! 😊 I <3 music” Layla wrote, “It is hard when other people are inoying [sic] you”
In spite of minor annoyances between group members, the students enjoyed composing together, recognizing that they did not delegate responsibilities between group members, but rather preferred to work together.

Week 7: The group sat next to the piano with the iPad, making funny sounds amidst much giggling. Danielle prompted the group to focus as she stated, “Guys, we need to figure out the tune…I want the piano.” She walked to the piano, and improvised within the constraints of a five-finger minor penta-scale. After Sabrina and Layla played around on the iPad, Sabrina finally turned her attention to Danielle at the piano, and inquired, “What song is that?” Danielle replied, “I just made it up…for the first part of the song it should be like” [played minor arpeggios]. Sabrina jumped up to the piano, effortlessly joining in, mimicking Danielle’s arpeggios. While Sabrina continued to play that motive, Danielle improvised a melody also in minor tonality overtop. She stated, “And then we need the chorus. It should be like…” [plays].

These girls had not accomplished much until this moment, when they seamlessly used their formal knowledge as an aid in this informal setting to improvise and make music together. As deemed by my own Western standards, the melody was well constructed, singable, ended on the resting tone, and was a balanced phrase.

Danielle reviewed the melody by singing. As Sabrina began to learn Danielle’s melody on the piano, Danielle interrupted her and said, “Wait wait, Adele song,” while she played a progression. After this digression, Danielle went back to playing their recent composition. They gleefully talked about how the song sounded evil.
The two girls seemed to get great joy out of making different sounds and improvising. Layla remained a bit uninvolved during this process, both observing and playing instruments on GarageBand.

Danielle attempted to have Sabrina play a harmony part, but Sabrina wanted to play the melody. After practicing the melody, Sabrina exclaimed, “Ooh I got it. Danielle listen, Danielle listen!” As other, non-choir students walked into the gymnasium for their weekly 9:00 am All-School Meeting (a meeting in which students discuss new business, old business, and announcements), a boy walked over, observing their piano playing. The girls informed him while smiling, “We’re making up our own song!” The non-choir student told them that it sounded like Batman, and the three girls giggled. They kept practicing this progression over and over with Sabrina singing along on a neutral syllable. Danielle seemed relieved, saying, “At least we got that part done.” Layla, wanting to get involved, asked, “Can you teach me how to do it?” Danielle played the tune slowly, and Layla quickly succeeded. Sabrina ran away, and then returned with a piece of paper and said, “. . . so we can write down the notes.” Danielle told her the note names one by one to write down. Layla continued to practice. After noticing that Sabrina mixed up the sharps and flats, Danielle asked, “Can I write the notes please?” As Danielle finished writing, Sabrina and Layla continued to practice. As I walked by, Sabrina exclaimed, looking at me, “Do you like it?!” and went on to mention in a jovial tone that it kind of sounds like “The Nightmare before Christmas.”

Despite my disappointment in the girls’ lack of progress for the past six sessions, The Informals’ productivity peaked for the first time on this day, and in only 17 minutes,
the girls were able to catch up with their peers, creating a melody for their song that was singable and memorable. They wanted to preserve their work through notation, and they rushed to notate the song before the end of the session. All three girls were very engaged when playing together, and genuinely enjoyed composing and teaching each other. Danielle emerged as a group leader in this session, assisting the group members in focusing to create a product.

Week 8: The Informals immediately recalled their composition from the previous week as all three girls crammed next to each other on the small keyboard bench and played through the song. Danielle exclaimed, “Okay so guys, we need to work on the words! ‘It is a dark and spooky night!’ How ‘bout that?” Sabrina had a different priority as she helped Layla to review how to play the right hand melody and left hand chords. When a member from The Formals walked in with The Informals’ iPad, all girls exclaimed, “We don’t need that!” They were completely immersed in their piano playing. The group vacillated between playing their song and playing known popular compositions such as “The Entertainer.” Danielle suggested that they arrange the song so that they would begin with the chords and then add the melody, but that idea did not come to fruition because Joslyn (a member from The Serious Songwriters) came over and started a conversation about her natural vibrato. Danielle and Sabrina both played different versions of the ending of the song, but they did not settle on an ending because they lost focus. After continued practice, Danielle attempted to refocus the group while opening the notes function on the iPad, stating, “Okay, guys. We need to figure out the words. Does this thing have a typing thing?” Layla asked Sabrina for help, and Sabrina continued to re-teach Layla with patience, demonstrating the melody by playing it on the piano and singing on a neutral syllable. Danielle, after giving up
trying to get her whole group to focus on the lyrics, tried to think of them herself. Sabrina started to play “The Entertainer” again. Layla looked at her, and said, “Stop playing that, really. I’m trying to practice . . . Sabrina, stop.” Danielle finally turned off the keyboard, and said, “No playing now, no playing. We have to figure out the words.” Sabrina pleaded, “nooo!” and looked at Danielle and said, “Stinky butt.” They all burst into laughter, and had a difficult time refocusing over the next several minutes, as Sabrina looked into the camera, wiggled around, and made faces. The girls did not accomplish anything at the end of the session, even though Danielle repeatedly attempted to refocus the group.

_Though the girls practiced their melody, they did not accomplish anything new in this session, mostly because of Sabrina’s difficulty with focusing on the task at hand. Layla remained very engaged, though she depended on the other group members to assist her in learning the song and did not create any new material on her own._

Week 9: Because Danielle was late to choir, Layla and Sabrina spent much of the beginning of the session reviewing the song on their own. When they got to the end of the song, Layla exclaimed, “You never taught me that!” Sabrina encouraged her as she helped to teach her, saying “You almost got it; you’re really close!” They played the ending part again, and Sabrina smiled when Layla messed up, but not in a mean way. When Layla finally got the ending correct, she squealed and threw her hands in the air. Sabrina easily fit into a tutor or teacher role, informing Layla that she needed to practice again, but slower. Sabrina played the parts of the chorus slowly, stopping between each phrase, and labeling them as A B A C to help Layla learn the melody.
Sabrina effectively transferred her formal knowledge about form into this informal setting in order to effectively break down the learning task for Layla. Not only did it shock me that Sabrina identified the varying form of the musical phrase, but it amazed me that Danielle constructed such a well-balanced phrase in the first place.

Layla messed up, and said, “oo that sounded cool.” Sabrina laughed, mimicking Layla’s altered motive. They both played the new music idea, and Sabrina said, “Take a video of my hands.” Sabrina played the composition, but then moved into playing “The Entertainer.” Layla, trying to refocus Sabrina, asked, “What are the first good lyrics?” In spite of Layla’s best efforts, Sabrina remained unfocused, changing the setting on the piano to organ, then harpsichord. Ryan, from The Parodies said, “Stop playing around . . . no one likes the sound of a harpsichord unless it’s a real one.” The girls changed the setting back to the regular piano, and continued to play the song over and over, occasionally creating a variation of the theme. Layla imagined a story to accompany their music, telling Sabrina that when she plays it in a lower octave first and Sabrina plays it in a higher octave second, it represents spooky versus evil. After several minutes, the girls attempted to push each other off the piano bench, each trying to function as the star of the video. The girls continually giggled, and Layla gasped, “no scratching” through her laughter. Sabrina said, “We have to stop goofing off,” but they keep tickling, pushing, and sitting on top of each other.

About 28 minutes into the session, the girls had not accomplished anything other than to review what they had previously composed. This session confirmed that Danielle functioned as the leader of the group, and that social dynamics served as a primary distraction impeding upon the productivity of this group.
Finally, the girls returned to playing their song, with Sabrina playing the melody and singing along on jibberish syllables. Layla used GarageBand to play beat boxing noises, and after a bit of time, the girls relocated, plopping onto the floor of the gymnasium. Sabrina fetched a drum, and played beats that were seemingly unrelated to the song. Layla told Sabrina to stop, but just a few minutes later, Sabrina informed Layla, who was playing on GarageBand, “This is NOT what we’re working on!” When Danielle finally entered the gymnasium, she looked at her group members and accused, “You’re supposed to do the words.” She seemed unimpressed with Sabrina and Layla’s progress and scoffed, “What should we do with words?” When Sabrina replied, “I don’t know” while continuing to play the drum, Danielle said, “Sabrina. Seriously.” Danielle and Layla ended up at the piano, while Sabrina left the drum to help another teacher clean the gymnasium. Danielle looked at Sabrina with a look of disgust and said, “I don’t know what she’s doing. She’s not even helpful.” Layla said, “ooh. I’ll help write.” The girls began to create lyrics, by singing “ooh” along with the beginning of the song. Layla typed their lyrics on the iPad, and then proposed the next line by singing, and said, “What about that?” Danielle agreed, but edited one word. By this time, Sabrina re-joined the group, and helped to edit the lyrics based on the number of syllables. The girls ended the session by playing while singing the lyrics along.

Danielle’s presence increased the productivity of the group, and the girls were most productive within the last three minutes of the session. Layla began to gain a musical role, creating new material for the song.
Week 10: Only Danielle and Layla were present on this day, and the two girls immediately picked up where they had left off in week nine, playing the melody and singing the lyrics. Danielle composed a new section, which functioned as a bridge, and Layla typed the lyrics. Danielle began to teach Layla the melody for the verses (that she had figured out the last time) by singing the words over and over, and having Layla hear if what she was playing on the piano was same/different. While both girls practiced, Layla found a new motive she liked, Danielle copied it, and Layla asked how they could fit that motive into the song. Danielle replied that they could fit it in with the next verse. Danielle wrote new words through a combination of audiating and singing out loud while Layla continued to get great joy from practicing the chorus, proud of herself when she correctly remembered how to play the various sections.

After writing the new words, Danielle taught Layla the vocal/piano part for the verses by singing the note names and playing slowly. Danielle said to Layla, “I think we do better without Sabrina, no offense to Sabrina.” The girls continued to write lyrics for more verses, coming up with the words before audiating a tune. The girls titled their song “Dark” on the notes function of the iPad. Layla, reinforcing Danielle’s sentiments, stated, “If Sabrina was here, we wouldn’t have done any of this.”

_The girls identified that the social dynamics of their group impacted their productivity, and really enjoyed feeling accomplished._

After I warned the girls that the sharing session would begin shortly, they continued to frantically work on writing more words, making a great deal of progress. After coming up with lyrics for another verse, Danielle said, “This is pretty good, actually.” They practiced singing and playing the piano starting at the beginning. The girls stopped for
each verse so that Danielle could remind Layla of the piano part. Though they laughed a lot trying to figure out the verses, they remained incredibly productive, and both continued to support each other. Layla occasionally exclaimed, “I love that!” when Danielle came up with a new section. At the five-minute warning, Danielle took a new approach to teaching Layla, pushing her fingers down in rhythm. They continued to work together before the sharing session to solidify the song. When I mentioned that the girls should enter the choral room for the sharing session, Layla groaned, “Nooo” and turned off the camera.

Danielle’s “pedagogical” techniques changed as the sharing session approached, but she effectively helped Layla to learn a great deal of the song. The girls focused on notating only the words, which was what they needed to remember the song. This de-emphasis on musical notation sped up the process, allowing them to focus on finishing their product.

In the sharing session, Danielle introduced their song to the chorus at the front of the choral room, “So we have some . . . we have a lyrics to our song, and we have some music, but, it’s not completely finished yet, and we might add a drum to it.” Layla asked, “Drum, what?” Danielle laughed saying, “Yeah.”

Though the girls spent so many weeks composing a drum part, they had not discussed how it would fit in now that they had composed a melody; their focus had shifted completely to the melody/harmony/lyrics of the song as opposed to the beat.

The girls started by playing and singing the chorus twice, after which they progressed to the verses. Layla quickly realized that she was unable to keep up with Danielle, and
finished out the rest of the song by just singing. At the end of one of the verses with the words, “You were my best friend, but not till the end,” Brittany commented, “That’s depressing.” Someone else said, “I like it!” Everyone (including Layla and Danielle) giggled for a bit, but then the girls continued on, playing the chorus twice. They did not display as much confidence while singing or playing the newly-composed ending verses as compared to the choruses. Everyone clapped at the end, and Layla and Danielle smiled, looking sheepishly proud. Eloise (a member of The Serious Songwriters) exclaimed, “I like the sound of that!” Brittany restated her previous sentiments in a joking manner, “That’s depressing.” Nearly everyone smiled in response, and Danielle grinned and shrugged, “Yeah, I know.” I asked for any quick comments. Ashley said, “It didn’t sound terrible, and it actually sounded very nice,” making a jab at her own group with this comment. Silvia commented about the lyrics, liking the part about the chains. Nolan laughed, saying that the piano drowned out their voices; I asked if that was something he liked. Joslyn commented that he is such a pessimist, and the students subsequently rolled a giant dice (a suggestion made by the students to decide on the order for the sharing session).

_The girls felt very proud of their product, but needed more practice._

Week 11: Though all three girls were present on this day, Sabrina did not arrive until later in the session. Layla and Danielle decided to title the song “Alone.” Danielle mentioned that they needed to figure out the tune for “this whole part.” They began to sing and play, and Layla commented, “We should repeat that.” Danielle agreed, and they notated that on the iPad. Danielle continued to teach Layla the verses on the piano, breaking them down into small sections while editing and adding a couple more
lyrics to the note on the iPad. Danielle, encouraging them to play their song starting at the beginning said, “Okay. So let’s try it. Let’s try it.” When Sabrina entered, Layla smiled and bragged, “We made up the whole lyrics.” Danielle added, “Without you. And we made up the whole tune without you.” Sabrina did not seem to mind, and the two girls played what they had composed for Sabrina. When Danielle and Layla couldn’t remember a part of one of the verses, Layla figured it out, and then said with a proud expression, smiling, “Phew! I figured out something that Danielle didn’t know!” They decided that Layla would play some lines and Danielle would play others. To indicate this, Danielle typed treble or bass next to certain lines on the iPad to indicate who would play. Sabrina and Layla began to fool around, poking each other, and Danielle said forcefully, “LITERALLY. It’s not FUNNY.” This made Sabrina visibly upset, and she walked away and sat on the edge of the stage in the gymnasium. Around this time, I asked if the girls would be ready to teach the group soon, and Layla told me that “Sabrina’s kind of the hold up.” Layla asked her to come back, saying, “It’s not helping us if you’re not doing anything. Sabrina, you played the high part? Can you practice?” Sabrina replied, “I know what I’m doing.” Layla asked, “Really? You know this?” while playing the verses. Sabrina said, “I’m not playing piano.” Layla responded, “So you quit?” Sabrina replied, “No.” Layla asked her if she is just going to play the chorus and Sabrina said no. Layla asked her if she is just singing, and Sabrina snapped in an annoyed tone of voice, “No. I don’t know what I’m doing.” Layla bargained, “Well you can choose what you’re doing.” After convincing Sabrina to return to the piano, Danielle got up from the bench to make room, and Layla began to teach Sabrina the verses. Soon, the girls were back to their old selves, continuing to review their song while laughing. As I approached The Informals, Layla
asked me if they are really going to do this in All-School Meeting. They all started to
giggle and act nervous, but secretly they looked really excited. Layla stated, “I will not
sing.” I clarified that the other groups will know their song and so they would not have
to sing alone. They accepted this, said, “Okay” and smiled. They continued to
practice, and Danielle clarified that if a line of lyrics specifies treble, Sabrina and her
will play together. Danielle said “Let’s try this part (pointing to the verses), because
this is all we’re gonna teach the peeps.” When I told the groups to stop, Danielle said,
“Okay. Guys. If you don’t know your part, I can play it.” Sabrina said, “I hopefully
know it.” The girls did not get to teach their song to the group because of time.

_Sabrina was happy to accept the composition without question, even though she did
not have much input as it related to the song._

Week 12: On the day of the performance, The Informals spent the first couple of
minutes of rehearsal at the back of the stage, attempting to precariously balance a
keyboard on top of two chairs. The Informals informed me that they would be
practicing their song first. After a bit of shuffling, all of the choir students found the
word sheets that the girls had printed for each of them. Meanwhile, chaos ensued as
choir students ran in and out of the gymnasium, attempting to clean up water spilled
by a student in The Serious Songwriters. Finally, they all crowded in a clump around
the piano, some sitting on the stage, some standing, with Layla and Danielle crouched
by the piano that was propped up on two chairs facing away from the audience. After a
great deal of lost time, I finally said, “Okay. You’re starting in 5, 4,” Danielle
interrupted, “I don’t think everyone has copies.” I responded, “3 . . . You can share
them . . . Share . . . 2 . . . 1 . . . ½ . . . ¼ . . . Joslyn [she was lacking attentiveness] . . .
1/8 . . . 1/16 . . . 1/32 . . . 1/64.” After ¼, Layla jumped down to the larger keyboard positioned in front of the stage, asking if she should start the song, and Joslyn and Silvia walked away to throw out paper towels. By 1/64, Ashley and Molly started chanting loudly, “5, 6, 7, 8. Go!” Danielle started playing, but because no one was singing with her, she stopped and looked at the choir in dismay. Joslyn served as a major distraction, standing in front of the stage taking off her outer layer of pants. Ashley realized that Danielle wanted them all to start with her so she said, “Oh!” and started singing from the beginning of the song, fast and kind of in a joking manner.

At this point, I struggled with my role. I wanted the students to lead the rehearsal, but I also knew that each group wanted to rehearse their song before the performance, and that we had already wasted seven and a half minutes!

I said, “Hey guys, guys, guys. We don’t wanna get to the end and not be able to practice some people’s songs. You gotta get started.” Danielle was singing and playing by the time I was done talking. Layla said, “Wait are you actually doing it?!” Danielle, smiling and nodding emphatically, “Yes!” Layla yelled, “People! Aren’t you gonna sing?!” Ashley replied, “Sorry!” Discussion erupted, and again, Ashley exclaimed in a low, almost character-like voice, “5, 6, 7, 8.” They all started singing together this time. Danielle played for the verses by herself on the piano, because Layla had not managed to learn how to play them within the context of the whole song. Layla played the piano for the chorus. The choir sounded a bit unsure on the verses, because the pitches in each differed only slightly. The group stopped singing in the middle of the song after Ashley asked to review a certain section. Layla edited this section of the song, telling the group to repeat the word, “alone” eight times instead of
16. After the group sang a descending third eight times, Danielle gave the group feedback, criticizing, “It has a tune.” Ashley replied in a sassy tone, “Well I don’t know what the tune is!” Danielle demonstrated the tune while playing and singing, but it sounded complicated, syncopated, and unpredictable. The group’s attempt was not much better the second time. Ashley tried to clarify: “So it’s [sings it incorrectly but close].” Joslyn asked if Danielle can just sing louder. Ashley agreed, and said that Layla and Danielle should both sing louder. Ashley had both girls sing from the “alone” section to the end. After listening and then practicing again, the group sounded more cohesive. This was the last time that the choir practiced “Alone” before the performance.

During the performance, I introduced The Informals, and Joslyn gestured to the rest of the group, indicating that they should move forward and have their toes in line with each other. The girls from The Informals told the audience that their song was entitled, “Alone.” Joslyn descended to the large, upright keyboard with Layla, and Danielle and Sabrina kneeled behind the keyboard propped up on two chairs on the stage. Sabrina and Danielle discovered that their piano wasn’t working. I walked on stage, and helped plug in the piano. Danielle held up three fingers and counted down. She did not give a starting pitch. The group did not know the tune to the verses as well as the choruses, because the verses differed slightly in pitches and rhythm each time, lacking predictability. However, they got through the song without stopping, and were very proud at the end of their performance.

_These girls felt very proud of their accomplishments afterward, noting in their interview how much they enjoyed feeling validated by the audience clapping for the song that they had composed._
Group 3: The Serious Songwriters

Figure 5  The Serious Songwriters (left to right): Eloise, Joslyn, and Nolan.

Week 1: The Serious Songwriters consisted of three students, Eloise, Nolan, and Joslyn, who were in grades five through eight. Both Eloise and Joslyn had formal musical experiences outside of school—playing the guitar and piano, and were seasoned choir members, having participated in the NCCL Choir and other choirs outside of school. Nolan had less formal musical experience, with this being his first year in choir. After forming their group, the students immediately migrated to the rear
of the choir room, where they placed the iPad on one of the red tables, beginning to explore the various instruments on GarageBand. The three students, smiling, explored different sounds by playing them and then mimicking them vocally. They also spent time sifting through the choral repertoire available from the resource table, and Eloise sang some of the pieces that she recognized, excited about many of them.

Week 2: The group began their session at the rear of the room with the iPad sitting on the same table as the previous week. They decided that they should use the iPad guitar in their composition. Joslyn and Nolan wanted to explore the instruments on the iPad, and Eloise continually insisted that the group should focus, providing suggestions for their composition. For example, after talking about different genres of music, Eloise stated that if they are doing a folk song, they should not use minor chords. As both girls turned their attention to sifting through the sheet music, Nolan played the drums in GarageBand.

*Perhaps because of the age difference, with Eloise being almost three years older than the other two students, Eloise emerged in a leadership role, telling the other two members to focus while they attempted to explore the various sounds on the iPad.*

Though Eloise attempted to refocus the group, she did not appear annoyed, and the students seemed to work well together, laughing a great deal as they experimented with different sounds on the iPad. They decided not to use a bass, because it’s “more for other stuff.” Eloise also noted that the piano “doesn’t even sound like a grand piano!” She got frustrated and said “I need to be on an instrument right now.” After a while, Joslyn referenced The Formals, who were playing their vamp on the piano, and said, “They’ve got the right idea. We’ve gotta stop messing around.” Eloise
simultaneously grabbed a piece of staff paper and said, “. . . in the key of what? . . . You know how to write music right?” Joslyn replied, “Yes, of course I know how to write music. I wouldn’t be in this choir if I didn’t know how to write music.” Eloise retorted, “I was in choir before I knew how to write music!” Joslyn, in a flippant tone, said, “Whatever!” At this point, Joslyn also took on a leadership role, stating, “Nolan, let’s stop fooling around, please, and actually find something to work with.” Eloise asked about the key of their song, but before they could decide on one, they had a discussion about the genre of their song, deciding to write a “pop folk” song, over a “funky folk” song. Eloise played a chord progression on the iPad piano. Nolan said that Eloise’s chord progression would be a good introduction, and they agreed that her playing sounded like a “pop progression.” The group got sidetracked in their musicking by trying to determine where middle C was in their progression on the iPad; they decided to migrate to the upright keyboard in the gymnasium to try to play the same harmonic sequence. Eloise spent quite a while attempting to match the exact octave of the chords on the iPad to those she was playing on the piano; Nolan got frustrated with this and exclaimed, “Just play your own song!” Eloise wrote down the chord names on a piece of paper by using letters. She ended the time by playing the chord progression on the piano, but in a different octave from the iPad.

Despite the group’s excitement, Nolan was content to explore the sounds on the iPad, while Eloise and Joslyn emerged as leaders, trying to create their pop folk song. Nolan felt frustrated when Eloise got stuck in formal discussions because he was more interested in making rather than discussing music.
Week 3: This group set up in their usual spot in the back of the chorus room, and Joslyn immediately began re-playing the pop-like chord progression that they had composed the previous week on the iPad piano. Eloise commented that the chord progression “sounds more like a pop song.” Joslyn replied, “Well, we don’t have to define what kind of song it is until after we make it.” Eloise said, “Okay.” As The Formals’ piano playing increased in volume, the students in The Serious Songwriters decided to grab some staff paper from the resource table and move into the science lab next door. Once situated, Joslyn said, “We need music and lyrics . . . so that’s our intro.” Eloise said, “Oo could it be in another language?” Joslyn excitedly replied, “Yeah!” They discussed the other languages that they speak, like Chinese, Spanish, and Arabic, before Eloise exclaimed that they could use Google translate. Eloise, thinking twice, said, “You know what, let’s just do it in English . . . should it be about peace, friendship, love, I don’t know?” Joslyn added, “What should the theme be?” Eloise replied, “Peace . . . could be a love song . . . all the songs today are love songs.” Joslyn inquired, “Yeah, why does everyone write love songs? How about we write a love song for the world? Like love for the world?” Eloise, squealing with delight, exclaimed, “Yeah!!! Love for the World! I like that idea!” Joslyn replied excitedly, “That could be the name of the song!” Nolan, oblivious to the squealing around him, was happy to continue exploring GarageBand. Joslyn helped Nolan focus, saying, “Let’s think of drums right now.” Nolan replied, “I’m good at drums.” Joslyn set the tempo for him by chanting “1, 2, 3, 4.” Eloise came over and suggested that they use different kinds of drums; she clearly had an aural image in mind for how she wanted it to sound, dismissing the various drums that Nolan was playing. Joslyn remained quite complimentary of Nolan, stating, “Nolan’s the drum master.” Nolan sought advice
from his peers asking, “Does this one sound better or does this one sound better?” Nolan stayed engaged for a long time, smiling to himself, and not playing the drums in any particular rhythm, but as fast as he could. Joslyn turned her attention to Eloise and said, “Let’s think of lyrics right now and then think of which instruments would fit best with the lyrics.” Joslyn mentioned that she had an idea for lyrics, and stated, “I’m just writing it in English. Let’s just write it in English and then we can translate.” Eloise attempted to sing the words along with the vamp that they had recorded, and Joslyn instructed Nolan to try to keep the drums “in tempo.” Eloise said, “Most pop songs have four chords. A lot of them have minor chords in them at some point.” She asked, “Do you know ‘Stronger?’ It does have our chords in it!” Eloise grabbed the iPad from Nolan and asked, “Can I see something?” Joslyn, delegating responsibilities, suggested, “You guys make up the tune right now and I’ll make up the lyrics.” Eloise started playing the chords that she knew from the pop song “Stronger,” and sang the song while she accompanied herself on the iPad. After a few minutes, Eloise read some of Joslyn’s lyrics aloud, and the girls worked together on the editing process. They tried to sing the words, testing out different melodies. Nolan, despite his prior lack of involvement, said, “Okay we have to get something done today.” Ironically, afterward, he continued to bang on the iPad keyboard and drums. When other, non-choir students walked into the room and started to talk to them, Joslyn and Eloise told them, “This is serious! This is choir stuff! Get out.” Eloise, trying to get Nolan to play in rhythm, suggested, “Try to play the rhythm with this,” as she started the metronome on the iPad. His playing became steadier. Afterward, Eloise ran into the hallway and fetched a real drum for Nolan to play along with the intro. At first, he played along with the macrobeat of the introduction, and Eloise suggested,
“Add a little bit more creativity to it,” meaning that he should alter the rhythm. The group began to pack up after this, and at this point, they had the chords for the introduction, as well as lyrics for a verse and chorus.

Though Nolan’s contributions lagged behind Eloise and Joslyn’s, his group members helped to scaffold his learning so he could compose something meaningful that would fit with the group’s composition. The Serious Songwriters had a clear, unified vision, and their level of productivity soared in this session. This group impressed me when they continually tried to involve Nolan.

Week 4: After beginning their session in the choral room, The Serious Songwriters migrated again to the science lab. After talking about the title, Eloise and Joslyn discussed what “folky” sounded like. Joslyn said that “Kumbaya” was “folky” to her, and they explored YouTube for various songs that could be interpreted as “folky.” Eloise improvised a beat on the drum along to their recorded introduction on GarageBand, and Nolan banged arrhythmically on another drum. Joslyn criticized, “That’s just our intro . . . We can’t just keep focusing on that. We need to actually get something together.” Eloise replied, “Okay, we’ll figure out the melody then.” Joslyn instructed, “Then stop playing on the, on the iPad.” After complaining about the lack of an available piano, Eloise improvised a melody on the iPad piano along with the previously-recorded, looping chord progression. After Joslyn tried to improvise on the iPad piano, Eloise yelled, “What happened to group cooperation?! Upset, she stated that she wanted to figure out the melody since Joslyn wrote the lyrics. Joslyn gave the iPad back to Eloise, and Nolan continued to bang on the physical drum. Eloise struggled to figure out a melody, improvising by playing notes that were in each chord
and humming along. Eloise exclaimed again, frustrated, “I need a real piano!” She grabbed a pencil and paper while informing Joslyn, “So I think we should start on a G . . . because the first chord is a C chord, C major. Listen.” Joslyn walked away, and then Eloise described that when it changes to a minor chord, they should change to the note D or A for the melody. Joslyn kept suggesting that Eloise should be figuring out the melody for the next part of the song instead of for the introduction. Nolan agreed, “We need to add another song.” Joslyn replied, “Another song? You mean another part?” Nolan concurred, “Yeah, another part.” Joslyn, misunderstanding, said, “There’s going to be two parts, a high part and a low part so the entire choir can sing it. So, the choir’s divided into two, so the low part, the high part, and then, you know.” Eloise wrote the notes in a chord, and labeled them as the high part and low part. Joslyn looked skeptical as Eloise talked technically about the various notes in the chords, and Joslyn finally exclaimed, “C’mon just work it out!” Nolan stated, while playing the drum quite quickly, “I have a good intro.” Joslyn clarified, “For the drum.” Nolan replied, “Yes.” They started the recording of the intro again, and Joslyn coached Nolan, helping him to play a steady beat on the drum. Eloise wandered off to experiment with a melody on one of the upright keyboards, and returned, singing her composition to Joslyn.

_The students did not accomplish as much this session as compared to their previous sessions, and Eloise’s formal knowledge bordered on getting in the way of her coming up with something musical, as she diligently attempted to think theoretically about the harmony and melody. Joslyn did not seem to have the patience for Eloise’s formal knowledge, and Nolan seemed uninterested in Eloise and Joslyn’s processes, wanting to contribute only by playing the drum._
Week 5: Eloise was absent from choir this day, but Joslyn and Nolan positioned themselves on the ground in the far corner of the gymnasium in front of the hanging blue mats. Joslyn picked up their paper with the lyrics, and started singing them under her breath, coming up with a melody. Nolan, continuing in his role as drummer, played on the iPad drum set, occasionally seeking Joslyn’s approval. Joslyn said after a few minutes, “So, our tempo is . . .” while patting a steady beat; she suggested that Nolan fit his beat with that tempo. Joslyn continued to vocally improvise, trying to figure out a melody. After Nolan added a drum part, she said, “That’s good but that’s just the intro.” She helped Nolan add a new section on GarageBand, saying, “So section B? This is section B.” Nolan began to work on section B, playing with the smart guitar.

Without Eloise, Nolan seemed to have a more active role in the group; he remained entirely on-task, trying to compose something on the iPad drum set that would be helpful for the group. The two students maintained a very positive atmosphere throughout, laughing a great deal together. I felt happy to see Nolan taking on a larger role.

After a while, Joslyn took the iPad and improvised, playing chords on GarageBand while audiating the melody. Joslyn suggested to Nolan, “I’m going to sing and you’re going to figure out [the chords]. Tell me when.” Nolan said, “Go.” Nolan changed chords very quickly, and it did not seem as if he understood that he had to actively listen to Joslyn’s singing to know when to change chords. Joslyn instructed Nolan, “Don’t record. Listen.” She sang a very well conceived version of the melody, but Nolan played a different melody simultaneously on the guitar. As he played a motive
on the guitar, he asked, “What about that?” Joslyn, again insinuating that Nolan’s improvisation did not fit with her conception, said, “Listen” before singing her conception of the melody. Nolan returned to playing chords on the iPad guitar, trying to accompany Joslyn as she sang. Joslyn asked, “Aimee, do we have to write out the instrumentals or just the lyrics?” I replied, “Yeah, you don’t have to write out anything at all. You just have to have something to teach the choir.” Joslyn said, “So we don’t need music?” After I replied, “no,” Joslyn said, “Phew!” Nolan continued to seek Joslyn’s approval, asking “What about that?” as he played the iPad guitar. He added with an excited tone, “That sounded like your music!”

Though Joslyn continued as a group leader, this week marked a distinct change in Nolan’s behavior and contributions. Joslyn and Nolan were unable to determine chords for the melody, but Joslyn was able to consistently audiate and sing a melody for the lyrics of their song. Joslyn lacked the desire to notate their song, which allowed her to create a clear conception of the melody, making purely aural, not visual decisions.

Week 6: The group, positioned in the same spots as the previous week, began by looking at Eloise’s “Essential Songwriter’s Rhyming Dictionary” that she had brought to school. As Eloise played the chords on the iPad piano, Joslyn sang the words to the song. Joslyn watched Eloise attempting to read her own notation, and said, “We don’t need to write music, we just need to write the song, okay?” Eloise replied, “Yeah, but I wanted to write music.” Joslyn argued, “Yeah, but music isn’t as important as lyrics right now. How about I do lyrics, you do music? Yeah, everybody happy that way, right?” Eloise sang a bit of the melody, but Joslyn disagreed, “No it was different,”
singing what she had made up the previous week. Eloise listened and criticized, “Except we need a certain key to be in . . .” Nolan remained involved from the previous week, and made suggestions about the chord progressions. The group had trouble figuring out the chord progression that they had previously used. Eloise suggested that they just come up with new chords. After 10 minutes of off-topic discussion, Eloise said, “Okay, it’s time for us to take charge. What chords?” Referring to Joslyn’s lyrics, she asked, “How ‘bout soda cans?” She looked up a word that would rhyme with can in the rhyming dictionary. Nolan continued to play the iPad piano, and Eloise and Joslyn edited the lyrics. After taking the iPad from Nolan, Eloise sang while testing out various chords to serve as accompaniment. Joslyn joined her in this endeavor, pausing on certain notes while singing, but the two determined that they needed to change the available chords on the iPad, since they did not fit with Joslyn’s melody. Joslyn continued to sing through the song as Eloise tried several times to find the second chord. She instructed Joslyn to stop singing because she was having trouble hearing.

Distinct roles emerged throughout their composition process, and the students recognized this. Joslyn wrote in her journal, “Composing is going well. We have 2 lines in the 3rd verse (out of 6). I am making the lyrics, and Eloise & Nolan were writing the music.” Eloise concurred with her role, writing in her journal, “I am a . . . editor and chord person melody person.” Though Nolan remained involved and engaged in the composition process, he certainly did not emerge as an integral member of the group.
Week 7: Joslyn, reinforcing the group’s roles, looked at Eloise and said, “You work out the music, and I’ll work out the lyrics.” Eloise tried to figure out a new chord progression for their song, stating, “It’s going to have an F and then a D major . . . I wonder what G minor sounds like.” Joslyn continued to sing the lyrics that she already wrote, while Nolan walked around the gymnasium. Eloise told him, “You know, you’re not really helping.”

*I could not help but wonder*:* If Nolan had an assigned role in the group, would he make more of an effort to stay involved?*

Eloise played many different progressions while singing the melody. Nolan suggested certain chords for her to try. Joslyn continued to write more lyrics. Eloise said, “I don’t want it to have a minor chord, but I want it to have a minor chord. Does that make sense?” The group discussed this for a bit, but Joslyn brought up a concern, saying, “Eloise, we have very different ideas for the tune. What’s your idea?” Eloise sang, but got distracted by seeing a different student in the gym, and played the progression for him/her. Joslyn ruminated if she should end with a dramatic ending, and with Eloise’s input, they both decided that the ending would not be dramatic. Eloise continued to try to figure out the chord progression. Joslyn bragged to the non-choir students, “We’re composing music. Every person in choir is composing music.” Eloise and Joslyn decided together that the alto and soprano parts could simply be an octave apart. Nolan had completely “checked out,” talking to other students in the gymnasium—away from his group. By the end of the session, Eloise had written down a chord progression.
The group did not solve their various conceptions of the melody, which had evolved as a result of them delegating responsibilities and failing to adequately communicate. This surprised me, that they could not focus for long enough to fix a sizeable problem.

Week 8: After situating themselves on the floor of the gymnasium, Joslyn stated, “Now we have to work together to figure out the bottom part and the top part.” As Eloise and Joslyn reviewed the song, Nolan said, “I don’t like that song. Can we make an entirely new song?” The two girls did not address Nolan, and Eloise looked longingly at The Informals and asked, “Guys, can we use your piano? We just have a keyboard piano [meaning iPad] in here! It doesn’t sound the same!” At this point, I told them again that there were other pianos available for them to use. Eloise got excited squealing, “I’m going to get a real piano!” As I fetched them a mini keyboard, Joslyn said, “So bottom part, and top part.” Eloise said, “Yeah, I have everything figured out. I just need to write it down.” After I delivered the keyboard, Eloise practiced shorter sections of the melody on the keyboard while Joslyn continued to sing straight through the song. Eloise shushed her, “Sh, sh, sh. I’m figuring it out!” Joslyn replied, exasperated, “Okay! I’ll work on lyrics, and where’s the dumb pencil?” As Eloise played, Nolan tested out the tiny keyboard as well, and Eloise said, “Heyyyy, no.” Nolan laughed, and Eloise said, “You can work on drums,” while handing him the iPad. Eloise, bursting with excitement, showed Joslyn what she figured out, singing the lyrics while playing the melody on the mini keyboard. Afterward, she exclaimed, “I got it! I got it! I got it!” Joslyn exclaimed, “Perfect! Write that down! Write that down now!” Eloise worked diligently to dictate the melody, saying “It’s flattened E.” She dictated the first two phrases. As I watched,
Eloise defended herself, stating, “I know I’m not writing it with eighth notes and quarter notes and stuff but we don’t have that much time to write it down.”

*Did Eloise conceive that I would not value her song as much if she did not follow all of the rules of formal notation? She felt badly that she was not notating everything formally, and felt worried that I would judge her for that.*

Joslyn said, “Okay. There! I’ve got all of the lyrics, but so far we’ve only got one harmonic. On the word parish.” I asked, “One harmonic? What do you mean?” Joslyn replied, “Uhhh . . . I think it’s called a harmonic. When one group uhh . . . uses a different chord . . .” I asked, “Oh, harmony?” Joslyn said, “Yeah, I think. I’m not sure what it’s called . . . One group uses a different tune for like [she sang two melodies on the word ‘parish.’]. That’s what we’re doing.” I replied, “Yeah, that’s cool” and Joslyn informed me, “I’m in charge of the harmony. Now she’s working on the music, which I think is called the melody.” The group said that they were on a roll right before the end of the session.

*Eloise’s approach to the piano completely changed when she received the keyboard; she shifted her focus from figuring out chords to accompany their sung melody, to figuring out how to play the melody on the piano. I could not help but think that this would impact their final product, thinking that it would have been better if they had come up with an accompaniment. Nolan’s involvement diminished as the weeks progressed.*

Week 9: At the beginning of the session, I informed the class that the sharing session would occur the following week, and Eloise responded to Joslyn, “Well at least we
have the melody!” The group migrated into their corner of the gymnasium. Eloise immediately retrieved the mini piano and started to play a pop song. Nolan took his usual station on the iPad drum set. In the next few minutes, Eloise referenced the sheet with the music and lyrics, figuring out the notes on the piano, continually practicing the right hand melody, until she exclaimed, “ta da!” After a couple of minutes of off-topic conversation, Eloise re-played the melody while she and Joslyn sang along. However, they soon reached a section in which Joslyn audiated something different than Eloise. Joslyn, encouraging Eloise to figure out Joslyn’s version on the piano, continually sang that small section over and over. Eloise mentioned that they could add harmony, and played thirds on the piano, thinking that those could function as the two parts. Nolan, as usual, functioned in his own drum world; staring at the drum pad on the iPad, he mentioned that it looked like a chessboard. Eloise’s mom entered the gymnasium, and began to brush Eloise’s hair while she pleaded, “But I’m in choir.” This served as a major distraction for Eloise’s group, and Joslyn pressed a button on the piano and a pre-recorded beat began to play. Joslyn said, “Maybe we can have that as an under beat.” Eloise seemed to like that idea, but Eloise’s mom questioned Joslyn about her terminology, asking if she meant to say “bass line.” Afterward, Joslyn worked with Nolan to develop a slower beat, more suitable for their composition, and titled it “bass line” on the iPad. Finally, Eloise returned to notating and playing the composition with traditional notation on staff paper. When not helping Nolan, Joslyn wrote the lyrics underneath the staff lines, like one would see in traditional choral scores. The three students vacillated between on and off-topic discussions, including talking about appearing in other students’ videos, which caused them to laugh together. Eloise experimented with the various sounds on the piano, and played the
song several times with different settings. She also sang the melody while playing a

drum set beat on the piano (each key functioned as a different drum sound).

*Eloise’s melody differed from Joslyn’s melody in small ways, but neither of them
adequately addressed this discrepancy since they worked separately for most of the
time.*

Nolan and Joslyn bounded into the choir room to look for percussion instruments,
while Eloise continued to play the piano, phasing in and out of practicing the
composition and playing pop songs. Joslyn and Nolan finally returned with armfuls of
assorted percussion instruments. With the addition of rhythm instruments, Nolan took
the role of leader, informing Joslyn which rhythm she should play with the maracas.
Nolan organized all three of them to play together, but after starting his beat on the
iPad he mentioned, “We shouldn’t play to this beat. We should play to a more mellow
beat. This beat isn’t like, destruction.” Nolan stopped his beat and all three students
continued to experiment with percussion sounds separately. Nolan and Joslyn worked
hard together to find the correct drum sounds. Meanwhile, Eloise continued to
transcribe some of the harmonies for the song as she improvised on the mini keyboard.
She wrote the harmonies as two separate melody/harmony lines. Joslyn finally said,
“Nolan, I got it” as she played an egg shaker. Nolan, pointing to the drum pad on the
iPad, said, “We need to make a graph like this [the drum pad on the iPad is set up as a
grid so that when one moves a drum sound to a certain square it makes a certain
sound].” He began to draw a graph similar to that on the iPad (see Appendix E).

*Nolan took the cue from the iPad of how to notate/organize sounds in an
“unconventional” way.*
Eloise, after finishing notating both the melody and harmony parts for the verses, handed Joslyn the lyric sheet so that she could continue to re-write them on staff paper. Eloise found pre-made beats on the keyboard, bobbing her head back and forth as the sound emanated from the mini orange device. In response, Joslyn aggressively shook an egg shaker in her face telling her, “Waste of time.” Eloise retorted that she already wrote down the melody, and asked, “What am I supposed to do?!” Joslyn replied, “The entire thing.” Joslyn asked if Eloise already notated the chorus. Eloise claimed that it is same as the verse, and Joslyn shook her head no.

*The students did not work to resolve the disagreement about the melody, and so they continued the session with different conceptions.*

After switching locations to the lab room (because students needed to clean the gymnasium), the group practiced together; Eloise played the piano, Nolan played the drum, and Joslyn shook the egg shaker. Eloise played her conception of the chorus, telling them that she wanted their approval. Joslyn immediately dismissed Eloise’s chorus, stating, “No,” and subsequently sang what she has been audiating as the chorus. Eloise glared at her and said, “Sometimes you’re not singing notes.” She added that the song is not minor, but major.

*Again, the girls did not come to an agreement about their various musical ideas, as they moved on to working separately after this conversation. I could not help but feel as if the girls would have more success if they decided on the same conception sooner in the process, rather than later.*
Week 10: After The Serious Songwriters assembled in the far corner of the gymnasium, Eloise played a song from the “Lion King” on the mini keyboard. Joslyn told her, “Not helpful, please.” Eloise replied, “Well, what do you want me to do?” Joslyn suggested, “Practice the music.” As Joslyn and Nolan worked on the beat on the iPad, Eloise experimented with various sounds on the piano, finally exclaiming, “I love that beat with what I just played. That was awesome . . . I could totally do dubstep for a living.” Joslyn, very frustrated told her, “Eloise! . . . Practice and figure out the rest of the song.” Eloise asked if she could be the leader, and Joslyn replied “no.” Eloise suggested that Joslyn could be the leader, but Joslyn continued to brush her off, saying, “I don’t wanna be the leader.” Joslyn nonverbally encouraged Eloise to get to work by placing the sheet music in front of her. Joslyn continued to write the lyrics on the staff paper, and after Eloise played the melody and harmony in thirds, Joslyn confirmed, “Yeah, that’s the bottom part.” Eloise spent the next few minutes off-task, experimenting with drum and strings sounds on the iPad, but then returned to the regular piano sound, trying to play a chord structure, instead of the melody, for their song. Eloise looked at Joslyn and asked her why she was re-writing the words underneath the staves. Joslyn got annoyed, and told her that they will give copies of the paper to the singers, so it has their different parts with the words under it. Eloise retorted that they could just teach the singers without the papers and if Joslyn was going to write all the words they would have to write all the notes. Eloise continued to experiment with various sounds on the piano, as Nolan continued to play with the drums on the iPad. Finally, Eloise played the beginning of the chorus in thirds, while singing, “If things stay the.” Afterward, she separated out the bottom part and the top
part, playing and singing each time. Joslyn clarified that she would sing the top part, and Eloise would sing the bottom part.

*The girls did not give Nolan a part to sing, because of his preference to play the drums. Though the girls decided who would sing each part, they did not practice.*

As Eloise played the chords for “Pachelbel’s Canon,” Joslyn began to plead with her: “Please Eloise. PLEASEEE.” Eloise replied, “Do what?” Joslyn said, “Please just . . . figure out the words to the rest of the song [the chorus] on the piano. PLEASE.” Eloise asked, “How does the chorus go?” Joslyn seemed confused, “Huh?” Eloise inquired again, “How does the chorus go?” Joslyn looked extremely distressed, and replied, “How am I supposed to know? You’re the one that’s figuring out the music.” Eloise said, “You made all the words.” Joslyn stopped whining, and said, “Yeah, okay. So it’s [sang from the beginning of the chorus].” Eloise tried to play along but Joslyn sang too fast, plowing along, without trying to work with Eloise to figure it out together. Eloise played something different for the ends of the lines, and the two of them disagreed, each singing their versions back and forth. While Eloise wanted to polish small sections, Joslyn wanted to make it through the whole song. Occasionally, Joslyn sang back the part that Eloise played, but Joslyn did not truly focus on learning the new part. Joslyn asked Eloise if she figured out the chorus yet. When Eloise said no, Joslyn started to confidently sing the chorus.

*Just a minute ago, Joslyn said that she did not know what the chorus was! However, Joslyn had a conception of the melody for the chorus weeks ago.*
Eloise tried to figure out the first few notes of the chorus on the piano so she could notate them, but Joslyn sang the entire chorus again and then started to talk to Nolan, losing interest in Eloise’s slow pace of transcription. Therefore, Eloise started composing the chorus by herself by humming and playing along. When I came around and told them that they should start their final practice as a group, because the sharing session would begin soon, Joslyn informed the group, “Okay, ready. We’re gonna start singing.” Nolan had expressed on multiple occasions that he did not really enjoy singing; Joslyn told Nolan that he did not have to sing. Eloise stated that she had not finished the chorus, and Joslyn relaxed and started talking to Nolan. All of a sudden, Joslyn became panicked and looked at Eloise with wide eyes saying, “Ready?! Ready?!” Eloise said, “No,” still writing on the staff paper. Joslyn began to practice singing without Eloise, starting from the beginning of the song. She demonstrated both parts for Eloise, in octaves, and then said, “Okay? Here we go.” Joslyn’s eyes bulged, and she squeaked Eloise’s name right into her ear, “ELOISEEEE!!! Come on. We’re singing. Not piano right now.” Eloise told Joslyn her first note, and allowed Joslyn to get started before playing her own note a third lower on the piano. Eloise joined in with Joslyn’s singing, and the two of them sang a capella in perfect thirds.

_They sang in harmony without much practice; their level of musicianship impressed me._

When Joslyn sang a different chorus melody from Eloise, Eloise exclaimed, “You said I could be in charge of the chorus.” Joslyn said, “Wait, what?” Eloise played a totally different melody, singing along, and Joslyn looked skeptical saying, “Umm . . . I never said you could be in charge of the chorus. I already have it planned out.” Eloise,
throwing her hands to the side, “What?? I don’t have it written in note formation, and
you’re not exactly singing that part in the key . . . I thought it sounded cooler!” Joslyn
replied, “Eloise we can’t change it now.” Eloise, shrugging, said, “I already wrote it
down.” Joslyn crinkled her face, looking as if she had an internal moment of angst,
and stated, “Okay. Tell me how to sing it.” Eloise replied, “We don’t have to sing this
. . . we could sing it your way.” Joslyn seemed happy about this, and Eloise tried to
play Joslyn’s version of the chorus. At this moment, I instructed everyone to walk into
the Spanish room to share. Eloise yelled, “DO WE HAVE TO?” and kids from other
groups yelled back, “YES.” Joslyn said, “Eloise, let’s just not use the piano for that
part, because we’re all confused.” Eloise began to protest, shaking the paper with the
notes saying, “But I’ve got it,” Joslyn apologized, “I’m sorry, Eloise . . . ”

Though the girls had discovered this discrepancy in their musical conceptions for the
past few weeks, they did not feel the pressure of working through it until the time
crunch of the sharing session descended upon them. Their working separately on the
melody and lyrics had hindered their product; every time they reconvened to share
what they had been working on, they discovered differing conceptions that they had to
work out. It disappointed me that Eloise’s hard work would be discarded.

In the sharing session with the choir, The Serious Songwriters volunteered to go first,
and Eloise wanted to use the little piano. I helped her to get it set up on top of the big
piano. Joslyn introduced the song to the group,

Okay, so we are pretty much done, except that the chorus, we haven’t
really figured out, because we both, Eloise and I had different ideas of
the tune for the chorus, so we’re just not gonna have piano for that part.
Joslyn said that they have a bass line (meaning the drumbeat) but mentioned that it is “A little bit not fitting.” After a great deal of shuffling, Eloise started playing on the larger piano, and Joslyn started singing alone, but then stopped to inform her peers, “It’s got a bottom part too, but I’m only singing the . . . [top part].” She told Eloise, “Okay. Let’s restart” and looked at her peers, saying, “It’s got a bottom part too, but we kind of, I’m the only one singing, she was supposed to sing the bottom part, but we’re not. Okay.” Joslyn told Nolan not to re-start the drums. They had a difficult time getting started; Joslyn kept trying to sing, and Eloise tried to play, but they could not combine the parts together. Finally, Joslyn put up the little stand on the piano and moved the small keyboard off of the big piano, and said, looking at Eloise, “Okay. Here. Here’s the music. Here is your music. Oh my gosh. I am so sorry. This is taking forever . . . Here is your music, and here is my . . . wait where’s my lyrics?” The choir, getting a bit antsy, shouted that they were on the back of Eloise’s notation. Joslyn replied, “I know, but I have another sheet . . . for exactly this purpose! Okay. 3, 2, 1.” They finally started, and sang in harmony. At the end of the lines, Eloise looked at Joslyn with a “what are you doing” type of look, and Joslyn looked at her with a look that meant “keep playing.” They got to the chorus, and Joslyn told her to stop playing. Joslyn kept singing, and then looked at Eloise, annoyed, saying, “Sing with me. Please.” Eloise didn’t really know Joslyn’s proposed tune for the chorus so she sang along the best that she could. When they reached the verses, Joslyn exclaimed, “You’re supposed to be playing piano for this part!” By the time Eloise got situated, it was the chorus again, and Joslyn said, “Not this part.” Nolan sat off to the side for the entirety of the performance. For the rest of the song, the two girls failed to sing/play together, and they continually needed to stop. They finally stopped right in the middle
of the verse, and Joslyn said, “Okay. That part we didn’t really figure out.” I asked for quick compliments. Brittany said that she liked that they had “a story and verses and things.” Molly said that she “liked the sound of [their] voices together cause [Eloise has] kind of like a little bit of a low voice and [Joslyn has] a little bit of a higher voice, so when [they] put it together and have the piano . . . playing, it’s really good.” Danielle said, “I like that you had a lower part and a higher part.” Nolan walked into the audience from the side of the room and raised his hand, and said, “I. do. Not. Like. It.” Joslyn laughed, saying thank you to Nolan.

*Did Nolan not like the song because of his lack of participation and/or the process of composition, or did he sincerely not like the song? This group had a great deal of potential to create a unified, successful song with great harmonies, but their lack of communication truly hindered them.*

Week 11: For the most part, the three students worked separately on this day. Joslyn worked to type the words on the iPad, Nolan worked on a puzzle, and Eloise, donning headphones, played the piano alone. Eloise alternated between on-task piano playing and off-task piano playing.

*Though Eloise and Joslyn were fully aware about their different conceptions of the melody, the group barely spent any time talking about their song.*

In the middle of the students’ time composing in week 11, when I asked the group if they would be ready to teach soon, Joslyn replied that she just needed to print out the lyrics. Joslyn finally addressed the group, asking, “How should we end it?” She suggested singing the chorus twice. The group did not come to a consensus
regarding how to end the song, and Joslyn ran off to print the lyrics for each chorus member. Eloise continued to practice and notate her part.

When it was The Serious Songwriters’ time to share, I stated, “We have 5 to 10 minutes.” Joslyn handed out the lyrics sheets and her group clamored onto the makeshift stage, set up on wooden stilts in the back of the gymnasium. Joslyn, taking charge, immediately said to Eloise, “I’m gonna count you off. 3, 2, 1, you ready?” Multiple students asked, “What’s the tune?” Joslyn replied “I’m just about to sing it to show you . . . 3, 2, 1, go.” Joslyn started to sing, and when Eloise needed a couple seconds to figure out a note, Joslyn paid no attention, continuing to sing at her own tempo. Finally, Joslyn suggested, “Maybe we should just have it without the piano for now,” as she continued to sing. Everyone followed along with his or her lyric sheets, as Joslyn unintentionally modulated over the course of the song. Eloise started to play with her again, and said, “Joslyn,” implying that she was not singing the correct pitches. Joslyn kept going, and eventually ended up singing an octave higher than Eloise’s playing. By the last chorus or so, other students joined in singing with Joslyn. Afterward, Layla said, “I love it!” and people clapped. I said, “So make sure they know it.” Eloise raised her hand, looking at Joslyn accusingly, and said, “Joslyn, are we going to make the song minor or major?” Eloise said that she thinks it should be major. Joslyn replied, “Uh . . . we have very different views of the song.” Joslyn asked the group if they could stand up on the stage with her and try singing. The girls from The Informals immediately stood up, singing lines from the song, bouncing around, spreading their arms, and acting like divas. After discussing if Eloise should play along or not, Joslyn counted off: “3, 2, 1.” They started singing with Eloise playing along. The students seemed to have learned the chorus reasonably accurately already.
Joslyn and Eloise did not teach the harmony. Eloise seemed frustrated, and when Joslyn modulated during Eloise’s pauses, she put her head in her hands. I had to cut them off in the middle of the song, because it was time for All-School Meeting.

*I wondered if the students had completely forgotten about the drum parts and the harmony parts, or if they decided that it would be too hard to teach those in a short period of time.*

Week 12: The week of the performance, all of the groups gathered in the gymnasium around the stage to practice the four groups’ songs. When I announced that it was time to practice “Love for the World,” Ashley and Danielle started to sing it in a silly way, dancing and singing extremely loudly. Eloise started playing “On Top of Old Smokey” on the piano, and I mentioned that they needed to get started. Nolan was too nervous to perform, and other teachers were comforting him in a different section of the school. Ashley helped to conduct the group to start them. All of the students were laid sprawled out all over the stage. Everyone seemed to know the song pretty well, and they ended up singing Joslyn’s version of the song without any harmonies. Eloise played the melody along on the piano. Afterward, I asked Joslyn and Eloise if there was anything that they want to fix in their song. They say that there was not, appearing confident.

In the performance, I introduced The Serious Songwriters, and said that they wanted to say a little bit about their song. Eloise pointed at Joslyn, and she said, “She did the lyrics. I did the melody.” I asked about the content of the song, and they replied that their song was titled “Love for the World.” Eloise descended from the stage down to the upright keyboard, and Joslyn used her fingers to count down to one
before Eloise started to play and the others started to sing. All of the students sang in unison while staring at their lyric sheets. They sang together, almost in tune, and after, Joslyn and Layla hid their faces behind their papers, and smiled and whispered to each other.

Though this group’s process was fruitful and promising at times, with the students composing a melody, harmony, piano accompaniment, and a drum part, their product ended up being simple, with only the piano playing in unison with the sung melody line. Group dynamics, the struggle for leadership between Joslyn and Eloise, and the lack of time to teach led to the simplification of the song.
Group 4: The Parodies

Figure 6  The Parodies (left to right): Maddie, Bianca, and Ryan.

Week 1: The Parodies consisted of three students in grades five and six. Though each of the students had some formal knowledge from taking piano, clarinet, or voice lessons, none of them had taken lessons for over a year. On the first day of the study, Ryan, Maddie, and Bianca wedged themselves on the floor behind the rows of chairs in the chorus room, in front of the red tables and under the whiteboard. The students discussed that they wanted to compose a song in English. Ryan mentioned that he
wanted to take a “tune from one song” and “words from another” and “figure out if we can put them together.” Bianca asked, “Is that making our own song?” and Ryan replied in a know-it-all tone, “This is very hard to do. Trust me.” The group asked if I thought that would be an okay approach, and I approved it, because they would be creating a song for the choir to sing. They approached the resource table in an attempt to choose two songs that would be suitable. Bianca wanted her group to choose songs that related to winter, while Maddie seemed concerned about the length of some of the songs, shaking her head while saying, “These are really long! . . . I don’t think we should use this one.” They narrowed down the selection of songs by the end of the session according to these two criteria.

*Ryan seemed to want to scaffold the group’s knowledge by trying to use pre-existing material to make the task a bit easier.*

Week 2: Ryan sat on the floor on the right side of the gymnasium and tried to open Safari. Maddie asked, “What is that [the iPad] even for?” Ryan replied, “I have no idea.” Maddie mentioned that she really wanted to use parts of “February Twilight” or “Happy Winter” (two of the songs from the resource table) and Ryan said, “No, we have to make one up, remember?” Maddie, confused, said, “This was your idea.” Ryan asked, “What?” Maddie said, “To mesh [sic] up two songs.” Ryan, with a knowing smile, said, “It’s not as easy as you think.” They bantered in a friendly way, and Maddie accused Ryan of changing his mind. After discovering that the iPad was not connected to wifi, Bianca said that she read the poetry to one of the two pieces and that it sounded pretty, but that she did not know how to read music. Ryan, insistent on using his formal knowledge, wanted his group to figure out the key signature and time
signature. Looking at the two pieces, Ryan asked, “Which one should we take the tune from?” Bianca and Maddie said that they wanted the song to be pretty, and after playing on GarageBand, Maddie exclaimed, “I’m playing music! I think we should use this . . . So do you even wanna mix up songs or do you just wanna make up our own?” Ryan looked at her and said, “You know you’re composing right now?” Maddie smirked at him and he said, “You’re composing a very not good song.” Maddie replied, “We’re not making a song. We’re playing!” Bianca clarified, “We’re thinking of ideas.” Bianca again mentioned how she wanted the song to be pretty, and Maddie said, “That’s why I think it should be a violin, because violins are nice and calm.” Bianca said that she knows how to play the viola, but no one asked her if she could bring it in or play it. Instead, they launched into a discussion about other people who they know who play string instruments. Maddie, looking at February Twilight, said, “I don’t know how to read notes so I don’t know what tune this is.” When I approached them to give a two-minute warning, Maddie whined, “We don’t know anything! . . . We don’t know what to do because we don’t know how to read music.” Ryan exclaimed, “I do!” Maddie clarified, “Okay . . . he does.” I asked, “You think you need to read music to be able to compose a song?” Bianca said, “It would help . . . no. But it would help.”

The group needed time to explore their musical options in order to get their bearings. They did not have a clear plan about how to progress forward, though a great deal of their discussion centered on their song.

Week 3: Bianca and Ryan were present this week, though Maddie was absent. Bianca and Ryan moved into the same spot in the gymnasium as the prior week, and Ryan
stated, “I hate iPads,” before using Google on the iPad to search for winter songs. Bianca wanted to use the two winter songs that she had found on the resource table that she knew from her other choir. Bianca Googled, “Beautiful winter song.” They found a three-part song, and determined that they might not be able to use it because their choir did not have enough people.

*These students navigated their own exploration of musical possibilities. The group spent most of their time talking about music and had not yet made any music together. This made me feel disappointed as a music teacher, because I wanted my students to actively musick together.*

Throughout the session, Bianca struggled to help Ryan to focus on coming up with a clear plan, instead of just searching on Google; she asked, “Remember last time we had these two songs?” Ryan said, “Yeah, I don’t know if they can go together at all.” He asked her to check if the two time signatures match. She said that they do, and he replied that they might be able to still use that idea. However, he continued to scroll through Christmas Carols on Google, and sang the tunes to some of them. When he found “Silent Night” with both lyrics and a piano part, he said, “People could sing the piano part!” Bianca brought up an image on the iPad of the song “Winterlight,” which she had sung in another choir before. Ryan took screenshots of both songs, and then asked, “What’s the tune of your song?” Bianca did not answer. Then he said, “Do you know the rhythm to this song?” He clarified that she did not need to be able to read the music to remember the rhythm, but Bianca was unable to remember, and continued to state that she could not read the music. Ryan tried to figure out the rhythm to the song, “Winterlight,” saying, “1 and 2 and . . . what? That literally makes no sense at all.” It
seemed that he was audiating, as he moved his hand to somewhat of a beat. After an unsuccessful attempt to read the rhythm, he said, “Oh, God. I can’t do this.” Bianca held up the sheet music to the winter songs, asking, “We’re not going to use these songs?” Ryan replied, “I doubt it, no.”

By attempting to use their formal knowledge to read pre-written music, they made the task more difficult than if they had simply audiated and worked on a new song. They had a plan, but did not know how to move forward. Ryan emerged as a leader, with the other two students looking to him to determine what was attainable, because he claimed to know how to read music, a skill that the group valued for this project.

Week 4: Because of another teacher working in the gymnasium, this group positioned themselves on a swinging bench outside of the front of the school. Ryan began searching on Safari for “Winter light [sic].” Maddie stated, “I don’t know how to read music. How are we supposed to do this?” Bianca agreed with her, and Ryan said, “I can teach you.” Ryan searched “Ode to Joy,” without consulting his group, and sang a fragment in German. Bianca asked, “If you can sing it in German, do you think you could sing it in English?” Ryan replied, “If I had the words in English.” Bianca said, “They have words in English.” Ryan disagreed, “No, I think they just have the violin playing if it’s in English.” Bianca suggested that she could, “. . . play it on [her] viola.” Maddie said, “I wish I could play strings, but I can’t. I play clarinet.” Amidst much off-topic conversation, Ryan managed to find the English lyrics to “Ode to Joy,” singing the tune in English and then on a neutral syllable. Ryan and Maddie felt worried that the word “drunk” was present in the English lyrics. Bianca stated that it probably meant something different and that it was likely okay. Bianca said, “We can
pick a different song. We have time. Do we have any idea what we want our song to be about though? Is it about winter?” As Ryan sang “Ode to Joy” in multiple languages, Bianca continued to try to refocus the group, asking about their plan for the song.

*Ryan, holding the iPad, functioned as a self-selected leader, putting himself in charge of approving the ideas for the group. He seemed to control the productivity of the group, despite Bianca’s attempts to refocus them.*

As Ryan continued to scroll through Google images of various versions of “Ode to Joy,” Bianca stated, “Well we might do this if we don’t get it finished by the winter concert, then it could be for, like, the spring concert.” Maddie said, “I don’t know. We haven’t even started our song. I think everyone started their songs.” Ryan suggested, “What I think what we should do is really, like, if we can’t figure out something, is that we should make up another tune for Ode to Joy. How ‘bout that? Sound good to you guys?” Maddie asked, “Make up a tune? Sure! But I don’t know German!!” Ryan replied, “I know we don’t . . . It’s actually quite easy to . . . personally, I don’t actually know what anything means.” Bianca said, “Like, I’m in another choir and sometimes we sing songs [in other languages].”

*Based on Ryan’s suggestion, the group’s plan shifted by the end of the session to create a new tune for the German words that accompanied “Ode to Joy.” They decided to give up their other idea because they could not read the music that accompanied the winter songs that they had chosen.*
Ryan expressed in his journal that his group had not accomplished much; “My group has done basically nothing and we don’t know what to do. We have a back up, though. Please write back.” Bianca scribed in her journal, “We actually have a lot left to do. We looked at a lot of different songs. We’re trying to decide what to do.” Maddie wrote, “We’ve gotten some things done like getting the music that we’re doing ready [“Ode to Joy”]. But we still have a lot to do left.”

*All group members agreed that they have a great deal left to accomplish. At this point, I felt disappointed in this group’s lack of progress, and wanted to step in with suggestions about how they could improve their efficiency.*

Week 5: As Bianca spent time searching the resource table for sheet music related to winter, Ryan spent the time taking pictures and videos of him and Maddie in their usual spot in the gymnasium. While Bianca flipped through the new songs, Ryan and Maddie reviewed the pictures that they took, laughing a great deal. Bianca, struggling to refocus the group, mentioned, “So I sang this song before. It was in two parts.” Ryan and Maddie, totally oblivious to Bianca’s comment, chased each other around the gymnasium, fighting for possession of the iPad. Bianca said she already knew the melody of the song, and started to hum. After Maddie and Ryan continued to ignore her, Bianca stated, “Alright well, I found this song. I sang it.” Finally, Ryan listened to Bianca, and Maddie said, “We only have four more days to do this.” Ryan played with the recording device, saying “moo” over and over again. Maddie, looking at GarageBand, asked, “Wait, how do you get to the cello?” before Ryan began to chase her. After a long while of off-task behavior, Maddie and Ryan aimed to figure out how to record the strings on the iPad. When I walked toward them, Maddie and Bianca told
me again that they did not know how to read music. After I encouraged them, they asked me, “So how do you record?” Bianca added, “Most songs rhyme, right? Most of the songs I listen to rhyme . . . so how do you record? What button do you push?” Ryan stated, “I don’t get it.”

_Maddie and Ryan continually ignored Bianca’s repeated attempts to discuss their composition. The group never mentioned their decision from the previous week to set the German lyrics to a different tune; the group lacked direction, communication, and maturity._

Week 6: The iPad served as a distraction to Maddie and Ryan, as Bianca tried to get them to decide on a topic for their song. Ryan mentioned that he needed a piano, but then said in reference to the sheet music related to winter in front of him, “I could try to sing this song to this tune or this song to this tune. They’re both two-part songs, and they’re both in 4/4.” Maddie mentioned that she was going to look up songs by the Pentatonix on YouTube, and Bianca said, “I don’t think we need to search other songs on YouTube. We’re supposed to be writing our songs, not listening to music.” Maddie replied, “I know, but I don’t know a song. That’s why I’m on YouTube.” After a bit of bantering, Maddie asked again how they were supposed to compose without knowing a song. Bianca’s response was different than previously, and she was confident in herself when she stated, “We either like, use a tune from a song and then make new words . . .” Maddie said, “I don’t know how to read music.” Bianca replied, “I don’t know how to read music either, but I have lots of experience singing.”
Bianca finally recognized the value of her prior musical experiences, even with her deficiency at music reading. This made me feel excited, and that maybe Bianca would take more of a leadership role in her group.

Ryan played a version of “Ode to Joy” from YouTube while singing along on a neutral syllable. Maddie looked at Bianca, asking, “Okay, so do you think we should mash up like, one paragraph and then mix it up with another paragraph and just keep on going with the song?” Bianca replied, “No, we shouldn’t make the song just about winter . . .” The girls felt concerned about making the song about winter if they might perform it closer to the springtime. Maddie sighed, “We haven’t made any progress.” Ryan stated in an annoyed tone, “No we haven’t. That’s because we don’t know at all what to do.” Bianca suggested, “We could make a song about the seasons.” Maddie reached out for help, “Aimee! We’re stuck. We don’t know what to do.” They talked about their winter theme dilemma and I said they would be performing it in January. Bianca finally convinced Ryan to agree that the song’s content would be about the seasons. Bianca said, “Okay, there. We have something . . . So we’re gonna write a song about the seasons.” Maddie replied, “But we need to make up a tune.” Bianca said, “Yeah, I know.” As Ryan continued to listen to “Ode to Joy,” he suggested, “This tune!” Maddie said, “oo, my sister knows how to play that [on the cello]!” Ryan confirmed, “I know how to play it on the piano also. And on ukulele.” Maddie asked, “Okay, so which one do you want to do, cause my sister’s doing cello. I think piano would be good.” After some off-topic conversation, Bianca tried to refocus the group when she asked, “Okay, so, a song about seasons, right?” Maddie confirmed, “Yeah. Okay, wait. Do you know how to make up a tune?” Bianca replied, “No. I don’t know how to write music. I can write lyrics. I don’t know how to read music. And if you know how
to read, you can read the lyrics.” Ryan said, “I can write out the tune to that song on a piece of paper. Then you two can figure out the lyrics.” Maddie asked, “We’re having two tunes, right?” Ryan confirmed, “Correct.” Ryan mentioned that “Ode to Joy” is really short, so they would be able to learn it quickly. Ryan asked, “So, do we have it planned out?” Maddie and Bianca said, “Yes,” and Ryan stated, “Okay good. I will come in next time with the music. I’ll bring in the music for two parts and accompaniment.” Maddie said, “Hopefully my sister has a day off on a Friday.”

Bianca wrote notes about what they planned to do, and the group was excited to have a plan.

The group’s plan changed again from the last time, and they had barely musicked together throughout all six weeks. The group seemed to have realistic conceptions about their roles in the group: Ryan wrote that his role was to bring in the music for “Ode to Joy,” while Bianca mentioned that hers was to try to keep everyone focused. I found it interesting that Bianca identified her role as primarily social, not musical.

Week 7: Maddie, forgetting the plan from the previous week, asked, “Okay, so do you think that we should just skip all those other songs so we can make our own song? Do you think so?” Ryan replied, “Yes” and Bianca stated, “Yeah, remember, we’re doing the tune of ‘Ode to Joy.’” Maddie replied, “Oh, yeah.” Bianca reminded them that the song would be about the four seasons, and Ryan said that the words needed to fit to the tune, meaning that there should be “one syllable per note.” They decided that their song would be in two parts but only in some sections of the song. Ryan sang the song on a neutral syllable, but they did not actively work to write any lyrics. At the end, Maddie organized a vote about how many times they should repeat the song; the group
decided on three times, and Maddie wrote “Copy 3 times” on a piece of paper that said, “A song about the seasons. Tune-ode to joy.”

*It helped that this group had written their plan so that they could immediately get back on track at the beginning of the session. The group continued in the same vein as the previous week, but instead of coming up with lyrics, they did not make much progress, mostly due to social dynamics.*

Week 8: Ryan, after finding the music for “Ode to Joy” online, stated, “Okay, we don’t actually need this. Does everybody have it memorized?” Maddie sang “Hallelujah” from Shrek, mentioning that it used to be her favorite childhood song. As Maddie took off her shoes, Ryan replied that “Hallelujah” was boring, and they continued their off-topic behaviors, until Maddie stated, “This is our very last practice.” Bianca said, “The lyrics. They usually go like underneath [the staves].” Maddie asked, “Okay, can we just copy that?” Ryan inquired, “What?” Maddie, pointing to the iPad, said, “The . . .” Ryan asked, “This?” while pointing to the “Ode to Joy” sheet music. Maddie commented, “Yeah.” Ryan asked, “Copy it to where?” Maddie, pointed at the staff paper and said, “Onto there. ‘Cause then we can write the notes on it. Like our lyrics.” Ryan said, “Save image. Where do you save the image to?” Bianca mentioned, “You have to make up the lyrics.” Maddie asked, “The notes?” and Bianca said, “No, not the notes. The lyrics.” Maddie said, “I know. But we have to write all of the notes down. Then we can . . .” Ryan, interrupting, stated, “Okay, guys.” Bianca said, “Yeah, because the lyrics have to fit.” Ryan said, “I saved this image [of the sheet music].” Maddie instructed him, “You need to give Bianca the notes. She’s writing them down.” Bianca said, “I’m not writing down the notes, I’m
coming up with the lyrics.” Ryan said, “Yeah, guys. We need to come up with the lyrics.” Bianca asked, “What are we gonna call our song?” Ryan said, “We don’t need a name!” Maddie replied, “Yes we do.” Both Bianca and Maddie agreed that they should have a name, but Maddie stated that the name “depends on what kind of lyrics we do.” Bianca replied, “Yes it does.” Maddie added, “ ‘Cause, whichever one that we say the most is gonna be the title.” Bianca suggested, “Let’s just call it ‘Seasons’ for now.” Ryan said to me, “We can’t come up with words.” Bianca said, “We need to write down the notes.” Ryan replied, “We don’t need to write down the notes . . .” Maddie added, “We’re struggling.” I asked, looking at Ryan, “You just said, you don’t need to write down the notes. Is that what you just said?” Ryan replied, “Yeah. We do not need to write down the notes.” Maddie disagreed, “No, we do. I thought.” Ryan asked, “Why?” Maddie said, “To make it easier, so we can read it.” Ryan argued, “Writing down the notes is only gonna help me, and I have the song memorized.” Maddie said, “Exactly!” but Ryan said, “So, we don’t need to write down the notes!” Maddie settled, saying, “Okay, fine.” Ryan stated, “We just need to come up with the words.” Maddie, making a face, said, “Okay, Mr. Smartypants. Okay . . . but we don’t know what to call it.” Ryan replied, “We don’t need a name.” Maddie said, “We do need a name!” They told me that their song was about the seasons. Ryan said, “So we know what it’s about, but we can’t call it about ‘The Seasons’ because that’s already taken. By Vivaldi!” Maddie asked me, “Don’t we need a name?” Bianca said, “We should have a name.” Maddie agreed, “Yeah, every single song has a name.” After bickering in a lighthearted manner, Ryan asked, “Okay, guys, do you know the tune?” Maddie sang half of the song on a neutral syllable, and then Ryan sang it in German. Maddie stated, “Okay, so . . . we should start working on the lyrics, ‘cause we haven’t
accomplished anything.” While listening to the orchestral version of “Ode to Joy” on YouTube, Maddie bobbed her upper body and sang on a neutral syllable under her breath. Afterward, Maddie said, “Well I came up with some lyrics,” before singing quietly to the tune of “Ode to Joy.” It was time for chorus to end, but before they packed up, they wrote, “autumn winter spring and summer,” under “Seasons song lyrics” on the staff paper.

This group continued to write their song quite slowly, but finally altered their conceptions about notation when Ryan, the perceived leader of their group, insisted that they did not need to notate the music in order to create the lyrics. Bianca and Maddie were afforded more leadership in week eight as Ryan finally took their suggestions about titling the song.

Week 9: Ryan and Bianca sat in their usual spot in the gymnasium before Maddie arrived late. Ryan created a note on the iPad and typed, “Autumn, Winter, Spring, and Summer, all the seasons of the year.” He told Bianca that they needed a second line, and sang the first line twice, trying to think of the next part. Bianca did not reply; she looked tired and unhappy. Ryan spent time placing an emoji where each line of text should go, and described that he had placed a frog indicating the beginning of each line. Bianca, not amused, asked, “So we need a second line?” Ryan said yes, and told her that the second line has 15 syllables. Ryan suggested that they write something about the equinoxes, but Bianca said that she barely knows what that is. Ryan replied, “That can be easily fixed” and read a description of equinoxes out loud from Wikipedia. Arriving late to choir, Maddie sat down next to her group and Ryan told her that they have the first line down, and the second line will be about equinoxes.
Bianca told Maddie that next week they will compose for half of the time and share for half of the time; Bianca added that she did not think that they would be ready to share. Ryan smiled and said that he thought that their group was the closest to finishing. Bianca said, “We’re probably only closest cause we didn’t make up a tune.” Maddie agreed, “Yeah, probably.” Ryan gestured to The Informals, stating, “They didn’t make up a tune either. That’s a Halloween song.” Ryan pointed to The Serious Songwriters, “I think they made up a tune but not the lyrics.” The group talked about off-topic things such as how many pieces of lead their pencils have, and Bianca continued to state that they needed a second line.

*Seventeen minutes into composing, the group had gotten nothing new accomplished. This made me feel frustrated, to watch this group as they continually did not spend their time making music together.*

Bianca kept asking what the next line should be, and Ryan finally improvised new words while singing, saying “something like . . . ‘The equinoxes happen’” After another few distractions, Ryan figured out the next line and sang, “The equinoxes happen only twice a year.” Bianca stated that they should revise that line, because “equinoxes” is too much too say. Ryan said that he thought that it was not enough to say; there aren’t enough syllables for notes, but if they extended it the way he did [singing one syllable over multiple notes], it would be fine. Bianca accepted his view, but looked tired and bored, perhaps frustrated with Ryan’s insistence on having things his way, or maybe tired because of the early hour. Though Ryan kept humming the tune, trying to think of more words, Bianca and Maddie did not actively brainstorm new material. Bianca criticized that both lines ended with the word, “Year,” but no
one acknowledged her comment. After Ryan took a break to play on GarageBand, he said, “Okay. Third line.” Maddie told me that their group was “kind of stuck.” Bianca explained that it bothered her that both lines ended with the same word; she added that a lot of the songs she listens to have words at the end of the lines that rhyme. Ryan disagreed, stating that their words work. I told them that they could revise the words they wrote, but that it was up to them. Maddie brought up the topic of the other groups and said that she thought that they were progressing the slowest. Bianca disagreed, noting that they made some progress, but that she thought that a lot of groups were stuck. Ryan added that their group is doing something more complicated than the other groups, which is why they are not finished.

*From my viewpoint, their approach was the simplest out of the four groups: assigning new words for a pre-existing tune.*

Bianca said that Ryan should look up synonyms for “year.” She says that the word did not have to “rhyme with ‘year,’” but that it had to “go with ‘year.’” Ryan found a synonym online, “12 month.” He says, “I think I’m gonna use 12 month. How’s that?” He sang the phrase, trying to fit in “12 month,” and Bianca questioned him, “Twice a 12 month?” Bianca said that they could still talk about the equinoxes, but change to wording of the line. Ryan sang the words that he came up with, and asked Maddie and Bianca if they liked it. Because neither Bianca nor Maddie clearly stated how they felt, Ryan moved on, saying that they had two more lines to go. At this point, the group had to pack up because it was the end of choir and time for All-School Meeting.

*Week 10: For the first 15 minutes, Ryan and Maddie did not accomplish much. They were missing their third group member, Bianca. When I mentioned to the group that*
they had 15 minutes until the sharing session, Maddie told Ryan to “think of words.” Ryan continued to mess around, talking about letters that are also words and subsequently beat boxing. Maddie, not amused, said, “Come on. Seriously. We only have not even three lines.” Ryan corrected, “We have two lines.” Maddie replied, “Two and a half.” Ryan argued, “It’s two lines.” They started to fight over the pencil, laughing. Ryan sang what they had so far, up to the end of the line about the equinoxes. When Ryan started to beat box again, Maddie got nervous, stating, “Come on. Come on . . . we only have 15 minutes.” After arguing about exactly how long they had left, Maddie yelled, “COME ON!!!” Ryan continued to mess around, and Maddie took over Bianca’s usual role of keeping Ryan focused. Ryan said, “We did the equinoxes. What about the solstices?” Ryan provided a weak definition, but got distracted again, sticking his foot near the lens of the iPad. Maddie hit him with a pencil, saying, “Come on. We’ve gotta, we’ve gotta work . . . Come on. I’m not good at coming up with words.” Ryan grabbed the paper, and Maddie said, “Okay. We, we need Aimee’s help.” Ryan said, “No we don’t. We need Bianca’s help. We came up with two lines. We need two more.” Ryan sang their lyrics from the beginning, but when I returned with a five-minute warning, Maddie told me that they still only had two lines. After I walked away, Ryan sang the next part on a neutral syllable for Maddie, and they finally wrote words for the next section after sounding out the number of syllables in “solstices.” Maddie asked what the tune is for “this part.” They both sang from the beginning, but she paused to listen when they reached the third line. When I came around five minutes later, telling them to “wrap it up,” Ryan exclaimed, “Perfect timing! We just finished!” Maddie, with a smile on her face, asked, “Wait, the entire song??” They both seemed really excited to have finished
before the “deadline.” Ryan did almost all of the leg-work; Maddie did not do much to contribute; she seemed happy to let Ryan take the reigns.

*As a teacher, I felt disappointed that Maddie and Bianca did not have more of an integral role in creating the song.*

At the sharing session, Ryan and Maddie walked to the front of the room as other students tossed dice back and forth. I reminded the other students what a good audience member looked like, saying, “Good audience members don’t throw things.” Maddie introduced their song: “This song is called ‘Seasons.’” The two students began to sing a capella without a starting pitch, but stopped in the middle, where they had not practiced as much, and started over again at the beginning of the third line. As they got to the end of the line and got confused, Ryan stopped, saying, “Yeah we’re kind . . . yeah we’re kind of not really don’t . . . We don’t know what to do from here.” I said, “two comments.” Joslyn said, smiling, “I sense your hand in this. You stole the tune from ‘Ode to Joy.’” Ryan, laughing, exclaimed, “Yeah!” Eloise said, “It’s interesting, though, that way.” No one else offered a comment so we ended, and I asked them to get ready for All-School Meeting.

Week 11: After seven minutes of Ryan playing with the iPad camera, Bianca asked him, pointing at the lyrics, “How does this part fit in? I wasn’t here.” Ryan replied, “I know you weren’t here. I’m trying to make it make sense.” When Maddie arrived, Bianca asked her while pointing to the lyrics, “You were here last week. How does this part go?” Maddie started to sing the tune on a neutral syllable, and Ryan loudly criticized, “She knows the tune, Maddie.” Maddie said, “I know, I know.” Ryan, struggling to copy the screenshot of “Ode to Joy” into a note on the iPad, made
comments over and over, asking “How do you copy this thing?” He was totally invested in his own agenda, and Bianca tried to re-direct her group members, pointing to a part of their lyrics, “Can you, how this fits in, just sing it, or whatever?” Maddie, after trying to sing the part under her breath without success, said, “Okay. Okay. This part does not fit, I don’t think.” Ryan ensured them that it did fit, but did not help them.

*Ryan’s own agenda drove the progress of the group because of his dominant personality. This made me feel frustrated because Bianca and Maddie wanted to make progress, but were totally dependent on Ryan.*

After a long time of Ryan fiddling with the notes function on the iPad and “photo bombing” The Informals’ video, he asked, “Okay, so. Do both of you know the tune?” Ryan sang the tune while pointing to the words on the iPad. Bianca asked, “What are equinoxes?” Ryan smiled, stating, “OH MYY.” As he handed the iPad to Bianca, Ryan held up the lyrics to the camera, stating, “Because they need to know.” Maddie tried to sing the song by herself under her breath. Bianca tried to further clarify the lyrics, asking, “Why are they [the equinoxes] nice to play around in?” Ryan exclaimed, “I don’t know! They are! I know that for a fact!” After more off-task behavior, I went over and asked the group if they were ready to teach. Ryan replied, “Um, I think we’re pretty ready.” Maddie disagreed, “No.” and Ryan revised his stance stating, “We need to finish one line and after that we’re done . . . You repeat those two lines.” Bianca clarified, “Okay . . . why do we repeat the first two lines?” Ryan asked, “What do you mean?” Bianca said, “You said you repeat the first two lines.” Ryan pointed to the repeat sign in the music, and then showed them the lyrics,
and told them which lines they would repeat since the repeat sign is there. Bianca said, “I’m just kinda confused just because . . . lyrics.” Maddie agreed, “Yeah . . .” Bianca asked again, “The solstices are nice to play around in?” Ryan finished the phrase, “In the cold and warm! Solstices are cold and they are warm!” Bianca repeatedly questioned, “Why are they nice to play around in?” Ryan said, “Because it makes sense for a song! Songs don’t have to make sense.” Maddie disagreed, “Yeah they do.” Ryan replied, “No they don’t, Maddie.” Bianca, tired of the bantering, said, “Okay, let’s finish the line.” Ryan pointed to the lyric sheet that he was writing, and stated, “Okay. Each tick mark is a note.” As he sang through what they had so far, he stumbled, and Bianca suggested, “We can make this note longer instead of [the word] ‘only.’” Ryan replied, “‘Only’ isn’t actually longer, I just realized.” Ryan seemed to dismiss all other ideas other than his own, making minor revisions about which notes to hold shorter/longer. Maddie and Bianca sat quietly while he pointed to each note on the iPad simultaneously pointing to the words on the paper as he lined up each note with a corresponding syllable.

*If he was audiating the song accurately, there would be no need for Ryan to try to meticulously align his singing of the new words with the original notation. Ryan’s confidence appeared to outshine his actual musical achievement.*

Before the groups started to teach each other, Ryan turned to the iPad, and said in an ominous tone of voice, “The playing of everyone’s song will now begin in a few moments . . . it is now happening . . . NOW.” As The Parodies ascended the stage to teach their song, Bianca clarified that she did not know all of the notes because she was absent, and Ryan said that he could not play the piano and sing at the same time. I
suggested that Ryan just sing for now, and he asked how much to sing at a time. I suggested that they teach a line at a time.

*I felt as if I was intervening in the teaching process, but I recognized that if I wanted as many groups to teach as possible in the span of 25 minutes, I would have to help to move their teaching along.*

The Parodies sang the first line, but everyone looked unsure about what to do. I said, “Okay. And then can they sing back?” No one sang for a minute, and then Sabrina and Danielle sang it partly correctly, while smiling. I suggested that they try again. This time, Danielle, Layla, and Sabrina sang along while The Parodies sang the first line, but they messed up the words. Bianca clarified the words, and Ryan said, “Okay. We’re just gonna say it line by line now.” The students were very chatty, and Ryan said, “I’m waiting” before the girls replied that they were waiting for him to start.

*Ryan had picked up on teaching techniques (such as separating text from melody) and management tools that choir directors and teachers often use, and he chose to use them to help scaffold the choir as they learned The Parodies’ song.*

The three members of The Parodies spoke the first line, and the other groups repeated it back. He commented that they did not have to say it “all monotone.” They moved on to speak the second line, and the choir members asked about the text “12 month.”

When I mentioned that they have five minutes left, Sabrina became exasperated at The Parodies’ slow pacing, and asked, “Can you just show us your script and we just sing it? It’ll be easier!” Ryan, handing her the words, said, “Okay.” Eloise and the three girls in The Informals started to sing. When they got stuck, Bianca told them, “the little lines are how many notes it gets.” When the group needed help, Ryan demonstrated, until they had learned the whole thing. After a bit of shuffling, the
group decided to try singing the song one more time. Ryan counted to three and then everyone started to sing. Though the group sang varying conceptions of the melody at the end of the song, I determined that we did not have time to correct their song, because we needed to move on to another group.

Week 12: Bianca’s baby sister was born on this day, so only Maddie and Ryan were present for the performance. In the rehearsal prior to the performance, I said, “Ryan take the lead.” Ryan started to talk about how the group sounded good on the first line, but maybe not so good on the second. I sensed that this speech would continue on for a long time, so I asked him to allow the group to try the whole thing and see how it went. He complied, and began to play the melody on the piano; the choir joined in soon after. When Ryan played a note incorrectly, he said, “Do that line again!” in an accusatory tone. Molly exclaimed, “We don’t know what it is, Ryan!” Ashley sang, pointing to the printed music with lyrics that Ryan had made at home (see Appendix E), showing Molly. Joslyn talked about the repeat sign, and Ryan, feeling frustrated, said that they should ignore the repeat. I suggested that they sing through the whole thing again, but he spoke through all of the words first, while most others had side conversations. After getting Ryan’s approval, Ashley said, “5, 6, 7, 8” and waved her hands in front of the group like a conductor; they all started at the same time. At the end, some students still sang the repeat, and I clarified that Ryan decided that they would not repeat that line. We moved onto the next group, and soon it was time to clear the stage before the big Coffee House performance.

During the Coffee House, I introduced The Parodies’ composition. Ryan sat at the piano at the base of the stage. He began to play and the other students joined in singing as soon as they could. He stopped playing for a bit in the middle (though
everyone continued to sing) because he got lost, but then kept going at the reiteration of the A section. After performing, I saw some of the students smiling, and I introduced the next group.

Data Analysis for Research Question One

I began data analysis while concurrently collecting data, which is a typical approach in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). I analyzed the following data sources during and after data collection: video recordings, my own journals, student journals, documents, pictures, and group semi-structured interviews. As I observed the students, I kept field notes, which consisted of 11 single space typed pages. I collected 21 hours, 45 minutes, and 24 seconds of video data. Because each friendship group recorded their own video data for the informal portion of the rehearsal, about four times as much video data exists for the informal as compared to the formal portion of each rehearsal, despite roughly equal time dedicated in class to both parts of the rehearsal. Out of those 21:45:24 hours of video data, formal instruction constituted 4:56:59 hours and informal instruction constituted 16:48:25 hours. I collected between 3:08:08 and 4:04:54 hours of informal instruction per group. Video recordings served as an integral method of understanding how students composed and interacted within their individual groups in an informal learning environment. As I watched the videos, read student journals, and reviewed documents and pictures, I journaled, documenting my observations, reactions, interpretations, reflections, hunches, and explanations. My journal entries totaled 92 typed single-space pages and my interview transcriptions were 18 pages in length.

These journal entries, containing my musings, insights, and hunches about the data, served as a baseline for data analysis (Merriam, 2009). I identified a need to
condense the data to gain a broader, more overarching perspective of the data before drawing out themes. I used seven categories that emerged from the data as a way in which to further organize the data:

- **Main events:** *How can I summarize of each group’s actions?*
- **Approach used:** *How did the members of each group approach the composition process?*
- **Topics of conversation:** *What did each group discuss?*
- **Involvement:** *Which group members were involved? Did anyone emerge as a leader?*
- **Help needed:** *Did the students ask me for help? Why?*
- **General feelings:** *How were the students in each group feeling as a result of the composition process with their group?*
- **Problems:** *What difficulties did each group face?*

I created a digital spreadsheet for each group and listed the dates of data collection across the horizontal axis and the categories down the vertical axis (see Appendix H). After populating the spreadsheets, which served as a method of comparing sources and coding the data, I inductively and deductively allowed themes to emerge from the categories (Merriam, 2009).

**Findings for Research Question One**

After I read through the data for all groups, compared sources, coded the data, and created categories, themes emerged which made up my findings for research question one: *How do students approach and navigate the songwriting process in an informal learning environment?*
Because of the qualitative nature of the study and the case study design, the findings may not be generalizable to the larger population, though they may be transferrable to similar settings (Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005).

The following five themes emerged from data across groups:

1. Making music together is fun!
2. Asking for help
3. Productivity
4. Delegated responsibilities
5. Formal and informal knowledge

Theme One: Making Music Together is Fun!

Processes involving making music vs. talking about music. Each group felt happiest when they made music together, as opposed to when students were not making music or when only some students were involved in the music-making. For example, in week two, The Formals begged to play their song for me as an entire group after spending time improvising together. They ended the session elated and proud. Alternatively, in week 11, when the group attempted to write their lyrics solely through discussion as opposed to musicking, the girls felt very frustrated.

Perceived importance of task. Students felt happiest when involved with a task that they perceived as important. For example, when Ashley and Brittany excluded Molly and Silvia from the transcription process, the girls felt left out and undervalued; Molly stated in The Formals’ interview,

I love to sing and stuff, but I can’t really like, write down notes, I don’t know how to read notes, I don’t know how to write them down, so that was a really big part of the song, writing the notes down and stuff, so I
couldn’t really help, because I didn’t know anything, and I would’ve just scribbled all over the paper.

When students felt as if they were unable to help with the current task, they did not feel nearly as satisfied with their experience composing.

**Theme Two: Asking for Help**

*Feeling lost and frustrated without instructor scaffolding.* The Formals and The Parodies felt frustrated by my lack of involvement as the teacher. For example,

The Formals had the following discussion in their interview:

Ashley: Like, it was fun to make up just like the beginning, just be like “Hey! We’re gonna write a song!” but then it’s kinda like . . . halfway through it was like [made a noise with her mouth resembling a snake]

Molly and Silvia: [laughed]

Me: So then it got . . .

Molly: [Mimicked snake-like noise]

Me: Why did it get like [mimicked snake-like noise]?

Molly, Ashley, & Silvia: [Yelling, while smiling] Because you wouldn’t help us!

Molly: And we kept asking you like, [mimicking me] ‘nope you have to do it on your own.’

Though none of the students had composed in choir before, some of the students in The Formals and The Parodies had less songwriting experience than those in The Informals and The Serious Songwriters. The Formals and The Parodies also took a more formal approach to songwriting, which could have lead to their feelings of frustration with the informal approach.
Feeling independent and excited by informal instruction. The Informals and The Serious Songwriters felt liberated by my lack of involvement. For example, Danielle wrote in her journal on 1/22/16, I loved writing the song and I loved composing it. I loved it because we got into groups that we could choose, we had so many materials, and because I loved that you did not help us and that we were independent. Layla concurred in her journal, writing, “I love writing songs, because you can make up stuff and people don’t have to tell you NO that isn’t THE LYRICS! Yea that’s my point.” More students in The Informals and The Serious Songwriters had written songs informally either by themselves or with peers. Additionally, both groups embraced more of an informal approach to composition, with less of an emphasis on notation; this could have contributed to their enthusiasm for composing as it related to the informal environment.

Theme Three: Productivity

Productivity trajectory. Though all groups differed in their processes, The Formals and The Serious Songwriters shared a similar trajectory as it related to productivity. Both of the groups (which contained the older students), began with a couple of very productive weeks, with The Formals peaking with maximum productivity (as determined by my data analysis) in week two, and The Serious Songwriters peaking with maximum productivity in week three. Afterward, both groups remained productive, but plateaued for the middle weeks until the sharing session.

The Informals and The Parodies (the groups with the younger students) followed a very different trajectory from The Formals and The Serious Songwriters. These two groups spent the beginning sessions exploring various musical ideas,
discussing, and staying off-task. The Informals did not have their first focused, productive week until week seven, while The Parodies had their first focused week in week six. The groups both had their next incredibly productive week in week ten, though after their first productive week, they did have more direction to their group meetings.

**Lack of musicking.** Across all groups, a sub-theme of productivity emerged related to a lack of musicking. Students musicked less than I expected, though they spent a great deal of time talking about music. I attributed this lack of musicking to two factors: process and social dynamics.

**Process.** Not all compositional processes chosen by the students depended upon active music making. Therefore, some students only made music when their compositional processes demanded it. For example, The Formals chose to transcribe their melody, which consisted of Brittany and Ashley staring at an iPad screen and staff paper for several weeks in a row without actively creating music. The Parodies chose to talk a great deal about their approach to their composition before they even tried to sing new lyrics to the melody of “Ode to Joy.”

**Social dynamics.** The social dynamics of all of the groups often impeded upon the musicking. For example, without Danielle’s presence in The Informals, Layla and Sabrina often became so silly that they would spend several minutes tickling each other, not even thinking about music. The Parodies’ musicking was hindered by Maddie and Bianca’s hesitation to make suggestions with confidence because of their insecurities with their lack of formal knowledge. However, because they depended on Ryan as a leader, his inability to focus for long periods of time impacted the group’s musicking; the group rarely musicked until the very end of the 12-week study.
Pressure of deadlines. Though the trajectory and processes of each group differed, the pressure of deadlines increased productivity in all groups. For example, in week 10, when I organized the groups for an all-class sharing meeting, productivity increased for all groups. Brittany stated, “I know we all hate this, but we’ve gotta do something okay. It’d be embarrassing to just play music.” Undoubtedly, students felt that sharing with a larger group would be embarrassing if their songs were not up to their own standards. Individual students who normally did not step up as leaders worked to re-focus their groups because of the added pressure of a deadline. For example, Maddie in The Parodies, struggling to re-focus Ryan (which Bianca would normally do), yelled, “COME ON!!!” and said, “Come on. Come on . . . we only have 15 minutes.”

Productivity not only increased in choir, but students convened outside of rehearsal as a result of impeding deadlines. Between weeks 11 and 12, all of the groups convened during their lunches and other breaks to practice and continue to teach their songs to the whole choir. By the time that the groups reconvened in week 12, the students had managed to teach each other their own songs, which had not been accomplished in week 11. The Formals had finished writing their words, had made copies for all their peers, and their musical transitions were seamless, as opposed to the messy composition that I had seen the previous week. The choir also knew the pitches and rhythms for The Informals’ song and The Formals’ song, in spite of never having practiced them as a whole group in the choir rehearsal. The Parodies had printed out notation to their song with their own words typed underneath. Clearly deadlines assisted the students in their productivity.
Theme Four: Delegated Responsibilities

Delegated responsibilities. The Formals and The Serious Songwriters (the groups with the older students) delegated responsibilities to certain group members. I noticed that these groups consisted of more than one perceived leader, such as Ashley and Brittany in The Formals and Eloise and Joslyn in The Serious Songwriters. When delegating responsibilities for themselves and for others, the students considered everyone’s skills so as to distribute the tasks to students with talents in corresponding areas. For example, The Formals determined that Brittany and Ashley’s skills were best put to use for transcription; Molly and Silvia’s talents were not considered in this decision. The Serious Songwriters delegated Eloise to creating the music and Joslyn to writing the lyrics. These groups experienced musical problems and social problems as a result of their delegation.

Musical problems. The Formals and The Serious Songwriters experienced musical problems as a result of their delegation of responsibilities. When working on the lyrics, Silvia decided that it would be easiest to create them by singing. However, Ashley and Brittany disagreed, stating that her idea would not work because they already had composed the melody and were working on transcribing. Silvia replied, “We don’t have to put it down people! You guys have nothing! At least I have something!”

The Serious Songwriters’s musical problems were even more pronounced, emphasized by a continual lack of communication. Joslyn had audiated a melody when writing the lyrics, despite the two agreeing that Eloise would compose the melody. When Joslyn and Eloise reconvened to practice the song, the two students disagreed about the chorus:

Eloise: “You said I could be in charge of the chorus.”
Joslyn: “Wait, what?”

[Eloise played a totally different melody, singing along]

Joslyn: “Umm . . . I never said you could be in charge of the chorus. I already have it planned out.”

Eloise, throwing her hands to the side: “What?? I don’t have it written in note formation, and you’re not exactly singing that part in the key . . . I thought it sounded cooler!”

Joslyn: “Eloise we can’t change it now.”

Eloise, shrugging: “I already wrote it down.”

**Social problems.** As a result of these delegated responsibilities, The Formals and The Serious Songwriters experienced social problems. Molly and Silvia became extremely frustrated at their assigned responsibility, creating the lyrics, and in week 10, Silvia asked on behalf of Molly if they could include her in “some way that’s actually productive.” These social problems resulting from delegated responsibilities seemed to have a huge impact on Silvia’s view of the final product, because she did not feel as if she had much of a say. She stated in her journal, “I didn’t get to do much . . . I also didn’t really like the results.” Molly ended up having more of a role in the final performance, because she played the piano, and did not end the project with such a bitter attitude as Silvia. However, she still felt the social frustrations as a result of the delegated responsibilities.

Eloise, a member of The Serious Songwriters, was extremely irritated and saddened that Joslyn did not allow her to create the melody for the chorus, and stated in The Serious Songwriters’s interview that writing a song was “hard because, you know, I couldn’t just do everything I wanted, you know . . .”

**Non-delegated responsibilities.** The Informals and The Parodies (the groups with the younger students) did not delegate responsibilities; they worked on each of
the tasks as one entity. I noticed that these groups only had one main leader. Danielle emerged as the leader of The Informals, while Ryan emerged as The Parodies’ leader. As a result of not delegating responsibilities, these groups had trouble staying on-task as well as social problems.

**Problems staying on task.** These groups had issues with staying on-task either because (a) there were more people attempting to work on the same job at the same time, or (b) the age of the groups. More so than the other groups, The Parodies had difficulties staying on task, primarily because their main leader, Ryan, found it hard to stay on task.

**Social problems.** Unlike The Formals and The Serious Songwriters, The Informals and The Parodies had social problems because they did not delegate responsibilities. Because Ryan emerged as a leader of The Parodies, but was continually off-task, social problems ensued. Bianca tried to give her input, but Ryan continually rejected or ignored her ideas. When she attempted to keep the group on-task, Ryan generally dismissed her pleas for him to focus. As a result, Bianca did not identify her role as helping with anything musical, but rather with helping to keep the group on-track. By the end of the 12 weeks, Bianca had become withdrawn, simply focusing on learning what Ryan had created instead of giving her own input.

The Informals experienced different issues as a result of non-delegated responsibilities. As the leader of the group, Danielle became frustrated in week 11 with her group when they got off-track and did not make as much progress as she expected. Danielle’s irritation caused Sabrina to feel extremely upset.
Theme Five: Formal and informal knowledge

All groups used a combination of formal and informal knowledge while composing. For the purposes of this study, I defined formal knowledge as resulting “from sequenced, methodical exposure to music teaching within a formal setting” (Folkestad, 2006, p. 135) and informal knowledge as knowledge that did not result “from sequenced, methodical exposure to music teaching within a formal setting” (Folkestad, 2006, p. 135). Though The Parodies agreed to use informal processes, conflicts arose in The Formals and The Serious Songwriters related to their use of informal or formal processes.

Social problems related to process. The Formals and The Serious Songwriters (the older groups) had difficulties agreeing how to approach the songwriting process. Some students valued notation while others wished to focus more on making music as opposed to notating everything. This led to social problems within both groups. For example, when working on the lyrics, Silvia decided that it would be easiest to create them by singing. However, Ashley and Brittany disagreed, stating that her idea would not work because they already had composed the melody and were working on transcribing. Silvia replied, “We don’t have to put it down people! You guys have nothing! At least I have something!”

The members in The Serious Songwriters disagreed several times about how to approach the compositional process. For example, in week six, Joslyn watched Eloise reading her own notation, and said, “We don’t need to write music, we just need to write the song, okay?” Eloise replied, “Yeah, but I wanted to write music.” Joslyn argued, “Yeah, but music isn’t as important as lyrics right now.” Joslyn’s priorities as they related to the songwriting process differed from Eloise’s, which led to a minor tiff within the group. In another instance, in week 10, Eloise did not understand why
Joslyn wanted to re-write the words underneath the staves. Joslyn got annoyed, and told her that they will give copies of the paper to the singers, so it has their different parts with the words under them. Eloise retorted that they could just teach the singers without the papers, and if Joslyn was going to write all the words, then they would have to write all the notes.

**Formal knowledge and slower progress.** Three out of the four groups’ (groups one, three, and four) value of notation led to both a lack of musicking as well as slower progress. The Formals’ transcription process of the one melody lasted for five sessions, during which they accomplished nothing else. After transcribing, the girls still had to edit the melody based on their aural perception. Similarly, The Serious Songwriters’ progress was stunted by Eloise’s desire to notate the melody, even though she notated it from her audiation instead of a video recording. Even though The Parodies did not spend much time notating their song, their insistence that they needed to be able to read and write music caused mental roadblocks, which they had difficulties overcoming, and lead to slow progress.

Only The Informals were able to efficiently incorporate their formal knowledge into an informal context without placing an emphasis on notation. These students used their prior knowledge of piano chords and note names to improvise within boundaries such as minor tonality. Because they spent most of their time audiating and creating an aural image through improvisation, the students’ product contained a singable melody, and was well-conceived and balanced.

**Data Analysis and Findings for Research Question Two**

Perhaps more important than understanding students’ approaches to the songwriting process was the answer to the second research question: How does
participation in an informal learning environment affect students’ experiences in choir? To analyze the data for the second research question, I again read through all data, compared sources, and coded the data, from which themes emerged (Merriam, 2009).

Findings for Research Question Two

Students identified positive and negative factors related to the informal learning environment in the choral classroom. They described both musical and social problems that did not occur during the formal choral rehearsal. The following themes emerged from my analysis of question two:

1. Problems related to songwriting
2. Social problems
3. Performing original songs
4. Independence
5. Working together and supporting each other

Problems related to songwriting

Writing a song posed students with certain tasks that they would not have had to tackle otherwise in a choral class. Some of the students did not enjoy these tasks (such as writing lyrics) that were not included in formal choral rehearsals. For example, The Formals and The Parodies did not enjoy writing the lyrics to their songs. The Formals had the following conversation during their interview:

Me: Okay. So, did you like writing a song?
Ashley: Yes.
Molly: No. Wait, what?
Silvia: [Laughing]

Ashley: I didn’t like writing the words though.

Molly: I didn’t like writing the words. I didn’t like that.

Silvia: Yeahhh . . .

Ashley: The music was fun but not the words.

Molly: Yeah, like the piano me and her playing was really fun, but not the words.

The Parodies felt similarly about writing the lyrics to their song, a task that they would not have had to do in a traditional formal choral rehearsal:

Me: Did you think it was easier or hard to write a song?

Ryan: Me?

Me: Both of you.

Ryan: Umm, at the beginning it was easier . . . no. At the beginning, like, we were like, okay, ‘Ode to Joy.’ Tune: done [Laughing]. Words took a long time [Nodding]. Words were not the most fun thing on earth.

Social Problems

All of the groups had social problems, ranging in severity from minor disagreements to students feeling excluded. Because I served as a participant-observer, the students had to work out their social issues together and communicate with each other to solve their own problems, such as lack of participation, which often does not happen in formal rehearsals. The Formals had a difficult time involving everyone equally, which lead to major disagreements that did not occur in the formal choral rehearsals. The tension in The Formals centered on group members’ participation/lack of participation as indicated in their interview:
Me: So, did you find it hard working in a group, working together?

Molly: Um, me and Silvia were actually okay, we’re kind of like . . .

Ashley: [Interrupting] You didn’t do anything!

Silvia: [Yelling] We didn’t do anything, because you guys didn’t have us do anything!

Ashley: Me and, me and Brittany were fine, but they two, we, we, like, me and Brittany . . .

Molly: [Interrupting, yelling] You guys weren’t letting us do anything! You guys were just like . . .

Ashley: And then we tried to collaborate, and it kind of went boom! [throws hands in the air]

Performing original songs

Some of the students identified that performing original songs felt different than performing songs written by previous composers. They felt pressured to do well because the product was their own and they wanted others to like it:

Danielle: I loved writing a song.

Layla: The only thing that, I mean like, I was kind of nervous when we performed because it was kind of like, weird, and, I, I know I’ve performed before, but it was just awkward in a way.

Me: Okay.

Sabrina: ‘Cause you made the song.

Layla: Yeah.

Sabrina: And people might judge you for it.

Danielle: [Smiling] Yeah.

Layla: Yeah, cause I thought it was . . .

Me: Ah, so there’s added pressure then.
Layla: Yeah, like added pressure because usually when you’re singing another song like, maybe you’re singing like Adele song, and . . .

Sabrina: It doesn’t really feel bad . . .

Layla: Yeah, because . . .

Sabrina: . . .because you didn’t make it.

Layla: Yeah, cause, you didn’t make it, but . . .

Me: Ah . . .

Layla: . . .if you make it, you have like more pressure and people say if they like it or not, and I don’t know.

Danielle: [Laughing] Yeah.

In spite of the added pressure, The Informals felt happy and proud after performing their original composition, as demonstrated in this part of their interview:

Me: Anything about the performance that went well?

Layla: Uh, yeah.

Sabrina: Yes.

Layla: We didn’t fail epically.

Sabrina: Yeah, that we didn’t fail epically. But um, no, that people actually clapped a little bit.

Layla: A little bit?!

Me: They clapped a lot.

Layla: I wanna throw this piece of paper in your eyeball. They did not clap a little bit. They clapped LIKE WILD, dude!

All: [Laughing].
The Serious Songwriters shared similar, though more mature, sentiments, discussing that performing their own song felt different than performing a pre-written song, and a bit special:

Eloise: Performing was really fun.

Me: Okay.

Eloise: Yeah, I mean, composing was part of the fun, and then we got to show them, and that was really . . . it was interesting showing them what we had been working on.

[Later in the interview]

Me: Do you like performing things that you compose?

Eloise: Mmhmm.

Me: Mmhmm. [Looking towards Joslyn]. What about you?

Joslyn: [Nodding].

However, the Formals indicated that they would rather perform songs written by other people:

Ashley: And, well, the performing [our own song] was fun, but I didn’t wanna do it.

Me: Performing . . .

Ashley: If that makes sense.

Me: Okay.

Ashley: It was fun but I didn’t wanna do it.

Silvia: I, I like the actual songs that people have written before.

Molly: [Nodding and interrupting] I like actual songs too.

Ashley: I like just performing the songs.
Molly: I just like performing other people’s songs.

Whether or not the groups enjoyed performing their own compositions as compared to other person’s compositions, they all identified that performing their own compositions felt different to them than performing something pre-written, because it came with added pressure of the audience judging the product, not just the performance of the product.

**Independence**

**Social Independence.** Some of the students enjoyed the independence of informal learning. Danielle wrote the following in her journal on 1/22/16:

I loved writing the song and I loved composing it. I loved it because we got into groups that we could choose, we had so many materials, and because I loved that you did not help us and that we were independent.

Layla, also in The Improvisers, echoed Danielle’s sentiments in her journal on 1/22/16: “I love writing songs, because you can make up stuff and people don't have to tell you NO that isn't THE LYRICS! Yea that's my point.” Joslyn agreed, saying in her interview, “I liked composing . . . because . . . we didn’t compose in a choir before and . . . in the other choirs it was just [shakes head] come. Sing. Practice. Leave. Come. Practice. Practice. Leave. Come. Practice. Practice. Leave. Every single time.”

**Musical Autonomy.** In the formal choral setting, the musical selections were chosen by me, the teacher. Some students enjoyed the musical autonomy of composing a song. Eloise wrote in her journal on 1/22/16, “I liked writing a song because it helps me express my feelings.” Perhaps Eloise was able to express her feelings more authentically with a song that her group composed as compared to aligning her feelings with a pre-existing song that was teacher-selected.
Working together and supporting each other

In the informal learning environment, students were given the freedom of creating their own friendship groups, frequently conversing with their peers, playing and not staying on task, and keeping themselves accountable to each other for their time use. This informal environment functioned in opposition to the formal environment, in which students were not allowed to converse with their peers, and the learning was instructor-driven. The Parodies enjoyed the social aspect involved in informal learning:

Me: What was your favorite part and your least favorite part of choir?
Maddie: Waking up at 6:30 am and uh . . .
Me: Was your what? Favorite or least favorite?
All: [Laughing]
Maddie: My least favorite!
Me: Okay.
Maddie: Um . . . My favorite part is hanging out with my group.

The Serious Songwriters enjoyed working in a group because they delegated responsibilities, as opposed to working alone to compose:

Joslyn: Although I have, yeah, I’ve done both [composed on my own and with a group]. I’ve done this choir, I’ve composed on my own, and I’ve composed with Danielle, and Sabrina, and Callie, and there’s a big difference between composing by yourself and composing with a group.
Eloise: And it really…
Joslyn: It’s easier composing with a group.
Eloise: . . . it really worked because I’m better at, um, finding what kind of chords…I like finding chords that sound cool, and I’ll be like, ‘Yay! This should be a song,’ but, but I always think the lyrics seem cheesy, so [pointing to Joslyn] it’s nice to have someone do it for me.

Joslyn: [spreading arms, and smiling]

Me: [Laughing]. Ta da!

Joslyn: Thank you, thank you!

The Formals loved that all of the groups worked hard to learn each other’s songs because they wanted to support each other:

   Me: So, what went well in the performance this morning?
   
   Ashley: Umm . . .
   
   Molly: Eh . . .
   
   Ashley: The working together part?
   
   Silvia: [Laughing].
   
   Ashley: Like, like people supporting each . . . In the practice, like, people supporting each other to get the songs done, and they actually kind of like, cared to make, not to make other people’s song horrible and try to make it sound good so that you could see how it really sounds.

Data Analysis and Findings for Research Question Three

Along with understanding the students’ perspectives as they related to informal learning in the choral classroom, I sought to understand how incorporating informal learning into a formal choral setting might impact me as a teacher, conductor, and choral director. Research question three addressed this topic: How does the incorporation of informal learning in the choral rehearsal affect and inform my teaching practice? To analyze this research question, I read through all of the data,
compared sources, and coded the data, from which themes emerged. When comparing sources for this research question, I extracted all of the excerpts from my journal entries and field notes that related to my feelings as a teacher and put them into a separate document, writing notes in the margins of this document, as well as on the interview transcriptions in order to better view the relevant data.

**Findings for Research Question Three**

I found three themes as they related to research question three. The themes are as follows:

1. Role as facilitator
2. Not in control
3. Surprise

**Role as Facilitator**

Throughout the informal learning sessions, I frequently questioned my role as a facilitator, wanting to provide social, process-oriented, and musical suggestions to the groups.

**Social suggestions.** I frequently felt frustrated that I was unable to help mediate the involvement of the students within the friendship groups. I felt especially helpless when I noticed students who were less involved than others, such as Nolan, Bianca, Molly, and Silvia. My desire to mediate stemmed from wanting to ensure that the students did not feel left out, sad, or upset as a result of the informal learning context, as well as desiring those students to have more of a musical role. If the students lacked a musical role, I worried that they were perhaps not creating as many musical understandings as the other students. I wondered if these social consequences
were a risk of group-work in an informal context, or if it was my duty to ensure that these students remained just as involved as the others.

I also felt that I wanted to help the groups focus on their task at hand when they became off-task, feeling like the students were wasting instructional time. This frequently occurred as I observed all of the groups, but especially with The Informals and The Parodies, as I observed them playing with the camera, chasing each other around, and tickling each other. Additionally, when groups taught each other their songs, I had difficulty knowing how much classroom management to utilize, in terms of getting the choir’s attention and focusing them on the task at hand. My journal entry on 2/1/16, from week 11, reflected my feelings of uncertainty related to my role as facilitator:

“I notice that I have trouble getting their attention in this environment. Because I’m not making this a teacher-led activity, I don’t want to do any type of quiet signal. However, this makes it difficult for the groups to get started” (Pearsall, 83).

In the formal choral environment, I felt quite comfortable in my role as a choral director. I never hesitated to give a quiet signal if the time warranted one.

However, I expressed similar sentiments about uncertainty related to my role on 2/2/16, as I reflected on week 12: “I really struggled here again with my role. I wanted them to lead this, but I also knew that if we didn’t get to rehearse everyone’s songs, then it wouldn’t be fair” (Pearsall, 87). In both the small and large groups, I often desired to make social suggestions to improve efficiency.

**Process-oriented suggestions.** During small-group informal learning, I frequently felt the need to give each group suggestions about how they might better delegate tasks to improve efficiency. For example, I thought that The Formals could have delegated Molly and Silvia to writing the lyrics while Brittany and Ashley began
to transcribe. Instead, they began the transcription process in week five and only gave Molly and Silvia the job of writing the lyrics in week seven; Molly and Silvia “messed around” for two weeks, feeling left out, while Brittany and Ashley worked hard. I also frequently thought about how the groups might consider unifying their visions for the final product through discussion. For example, The Parodies rarely discussed their final product without getting off-topic, and frequently forgot their course of action within the first couple of weeks. I thought that a focused, goal-oriented discussion could have helped the group to improve efficiency.

**Musical suggestions.** I desired to make musical suggestions to improve musicality and improve efficiency, similar to how I treated the formal portion of the choral rehearsal. I noticed that when students composed in ways that I deemed as haphazard, I also deemed those processes as less musical. For example, when the students in The Formals notated the melody for their song based on the video recording instead their audiation, I perceived this as less musical, and wanted to suggest that they attempt to only use a melody for their composition that they were able to sing/audiate.

I not only wanted to make musical suggestions to improve the musical quality of the students’ compositional processes and subsequent products, but I found myself holding back from making musical suggestions in order to improve the efficiency of the students’ processes. My journal entry on 11/10/15 captured my desire to improve both the efficiency and the musical quality of the process/product for each group:

. . . I would have naturally stepped in many times to make suggestions to the various groups. To The Formals, I would say that they should record or even just come up with a simple chord progression, write lyrics, and then sing over the chord progression to figure out a melody. To The Informals, I would suggest that they keep writing lyrics, and lay
down a chord progression on the iPad overtop of the beat that they have already recorded, and sing to figure out a melody. To The Serious Songwriters, I would say that they should try to slow down while singing the melody to really find the chords that work well, though I think that this group will definitely figure it out on their own . . . To The Parodies, I would recommend something similar to The Informals, and mention that they should start with lyrics, since they are not comfortable reading music (Pearsall, 28).

My conceived, social, process-oriented, and musical suggestions for each group stemmed from my desire for efficiency in the classroom and my desire for students to quickly create a product. In this way, I noticed my tendency to focus on the product instead of the process. As the groups experienced moments of trial and error, I had a difficult time not stepping in so that I could help the groups to get their musical products back on track. As the director of performing ensembles, in which the value of the ensemble is consistently related to the products, this served as a call to action for me to focus more on students’ journey of musical understanding rather than solely on efficiency.

**Not in Control**

Throughout the course of the study, I frequently expressed in my journal entries feelings of uncertainty as a result of informal learning. Incorporating informal learning into the classroom meant handing over a great deal of the control to the students, as opposed to the traditional portion of the choral rehearsal, in which I planned out the rehearsals in a detailed manner.

**Progress.** Initially, I had planned that the students would perform their own compositions on the school’s concert in December. As the teacher in a formal environment, I discovered that I felt in control of the musical progression of the students, and I was able to adequately prepare them for the concert over a span of
eight weeks. However, in the informal environment, the students controlled their own progress, and made it clear that they would not be prepared to perform at the winter concert. This made me feel out of control as a teacher, because I had to give the students the time that they needed to develop their songs. After adding four weeks to the study, I still was unsure if they would be able to create a product in that amount of time, due to both musical and social issues.

**Quality.** Not only was I unable to control the progress of the students, but I also could not control the quality of the products. Though I wanted my students’ products to be successful and for them to feel proud of their songs, without giving them feedback, I could not effectively share my input and control what the students composed. The students gauged the quality of their own songs based on their own conceptions of music, and the songwriting processes that the students decided to use impacted the quality of their songs.

**Surprise**

Feelings of surprise often followed times when I felt not in control and unsure of my role as facilitator. I felt surprised when students effectively solved their own problems, both musically and socially, helping their groups to move forward and create products that were worthy of showing off. The songwriting process in an informal context awarded students with opportunities for problem solving, which led to students developing musical understandings that they might not have in a traditional choral model.

**Solving musical problems.** Students solved musical problems on their own, helping to involve all students in the musical endeavor. Certain students provided musical scaffolding for others who were uncertain about how to make progress on
their songs. For example, Ashley taught Molly how to play the piano part for their song. Eloise and Joslyn helped Nolan play the drum, and Sabrina and Danielle taught Layla their piano accompaniment. When scaffolding peers was not possible, and all of the students in The Parodies had trouble composing in the way that they set out to compose because they were unable to read and audiate previously written choral music, they decided upon a different strategy and moved on.

Though many of the students’ songwriting processes did not follow a progression that I would use to compose, I noticed that when given the space (without teacher interference), the students made “musical comebacks,” even when stuck in a rut or on a plateau for several weeks in a row. For example, The Formals spent five weeks transcribing their melody from a video recording of Ashley’s hands, and I felt certain that the students would not be able to produce a good product. Even though I saw their composing as haphazard, the students managed to produce a musical product that was cohesive and had voice parts and two piano parts.

**Solving social problems.** Certain students in each group emerged as social leaders, effectively keeping peace within their groups and also helping their group to focus. For example, Bianca did not have much of a musical role within her group, The Parodies, but she had a large social role, serving as the person who consistently attempted to keep her group on task so that they could progress musically. In The Formals, Brittany functioned as this person, particularly easing social problems between Ashley and her sister, Silvia, while also keeping the musical agenda moving forward by telling her group what they needed to accomplish and serving as the cheerleader of the group. Through long periods of off-task behavior, students always
returned to a process that included on-task discussion about their songs, and they were still able to produce musical products.

Social problem solving did not only consist of helping off-task students to focus, but often involved ensuring that each student felt included and happy. For example, in week 11, in The Informals, Sabrina became very upset, and Layla emerged as a social leader, helping her to feel better by teaching her the new piano part. Though Layla did not function as the overall leader of the group, she assisted in solving a social problem that negatively impacted her group’s ability to musick together. Though Nolan had difficulties understanding how to contribute to the group’s product and did not always display a great deal of interest in the musical process related to the melody or lyric-writing, Eloise (and especially Joslyn) tried to involve him, praising his hard work on the drum part, even though they did not mention him as an essential member of their group when describing each group member’s role.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore students’ experiences composing in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting. Data were collected from video recordings, my journal, documents, photographs, student journals, and group interviews in order to answer the following research questions: (a) How do students approach and navigate the songwriting process in an informal learning environment? (b) How does participation in an informal learning context affect students’ experiences in choir? (c) How does the incorporation of informal learning in the choral rehearsal affect and inform my teaching practice?
To analyze the data for all three research questions, I read through the data, compared sources, coded the data, and created categories from which themes emerged. The themes that emerged related to research question one were as follows:

1. Making music together is fun!
2. Asking for help
3. Productivity
4. Delegated responsibilities
5. Formal and informal knowledge

The following themes emerged related to question two:

1. Problems related to songwriting
2. Social problems
3. Performing original compositions
4. Independence
5. Working together and supporting each other

Three themes relating to research question three emerged from the data. They are as follows:

1. Role as facilitator
2. Not in control
3. Surprise

The research purpose, questions, and findings pointed toward conclusions, leading to implications for music education as well as suggestions for future research.
Chapter 5
CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS FOR MUSIC EDUCATION, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary

Purpose and Research Questions
The purpose of this study was to explore students’ experiences songwriting in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting. Informal learning centers around the notion of teacher as facilitator, with individual, peer, and group learning at the core (Green, 2008), as opposed to formal learning, which is primarily teacher-directed, with instruction originating from qualified mentors (Mak, 2004). Though informal learning is gaining popularity as a form of pedagogy, this is the only known research study dedicated to the implementation and study of songwriting in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting. The following three research questions guided this research: (a) How do students approach and navigate the songwriting process in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting? (b) How does participation in an informal learning context affect students’ experiences in choir? (c) How does the incorporation of informal learning in the choral rehearsal affect and inform my teaching practice?
Theoretical Lenses and Conceptual Framework

Informal music learning (Green, 2002, 2006, 2008) and social constructivism (Beals, 1998; Fosnot, 2005; Gauvain, 1998; Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978; Wiggins, 1999/2000) functioned as the theoretical lenses for the study, which elicited the following conceptual framework: Students will participate in both formal and informal musical experiences in the choral classroom, where they may construct their own understandings as well as shared understandings.

Design

The experiences of fourth through eighth grade students (n=13) enrolled in a choir at Newark Center for Creative Learning (NCCL) and me, the teacher-researcher (n=1) were studied using an ethnographic case study design (Patton, 2105) over the course of 12 weeks. The primary focus of ethnography is on human society and culture; ethnographic case studies occur within a bounded context (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In ethnographic case studies, immersion in the site as a participant-observer exists as the primary method of data collection. As the teacher-researcher, I functioned as the participant-observer, immersed in the students’ experiences in the NCCL Choir.

Procedure

As part of the study, NCCL Choir members (n=13) participated in 12 choir rehearsals held before school for 50 minutes on Friday mornings. Students rehearsed formally for the first half of each rehearsal while the second half of each rehearsal was dedicated to students writing songs in small friendship groups with the purpose of eventually teaching the choir their songs. Students created friendship groups of either three or four students, and over the course of twelve weeks, wrote songs for the choir.
I provided no direct instruction during the informal learning portion of the rehearsal. Toward the end of the study, students participated in sharing sessions in which they taught each other their songs. The students performed each group’s song in a coffeehouse performance, which marked the conclusion of the study. Throughout the study, I served as the teacher-researcher as I studied the NCCL Choir.

**Data Collection**

Because of the qualitative nature of the study, I collected data in multiple forms and triangulated the data for validity. Data were video recordings, journals, field notes, photographs, additional artifacts, a questionnaire, and semi-structured group interviews. I analyzed the data concurrently with data collection, which is a typical approach in qualitative research (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). I journaled while viewing the video data and catalogued the artifacts in digital files. The journal entries, containing my musings, insights, and hunches about the data, served as rudimentary data analysis (Merriam, 2009). During the rudimentary data analysis, the following seven categories emerged: (a) Main events, (b) Approach, (c) Topics of conversation, (d) Involvement, (e) Help needed, (f) General feelings, and (g) Problems. I created a digital spreadsheet for each group, and listed the dates of data collection across the horizontal axis and the categories down the vertical axis (see Appendix H). After populating the spreadsheets and comparing and coding the sources, themes emerged from the data. These themes constituted my findings.
Findings

Themes emerged as they related to each of the three research questions. These themes make up the findings of the study. I present the themes in relation to each of the research questions.

**Research question one.** *How do students approach and navigate the songwriting process in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting?* The following themes emerged from the data analysis of research question one:

1. Making music together is fun!
2. Asking for help
3. Productivity
4. Delegated responsibilities
5. Formal and informal knowledge

Students enjoyed making music together, though some groups enjoyed the independence of informal learning more than others. Groups with more songwriting/composing experiences asked for help less than those groups without composing/songwriting experiences. Though productivity varied between groups, deadlines increased productivity. Within all groups existed a lack of musicking, which I attributed to their songwriting processes and social dynamics. Half of the groups delegated responsibilities while the other half did not; each approach elicited its own set of musical and/or social challenges. Students’ use of formal knowledge in an informal context led to social problems and slower progress; students consistently problem solved independently of teacher intervention.
These findings related to students’ approach to the songwriting process, but do not account for how students’ experiences in choir were affected. Research question two addressed this concern.

**Research question two:** *How does participation in an informal learning context affect students’ experiences in choir?* The following themes emerged related to research question two:

1. Problems related to songwriting
2. Social problems
3. Performing original songs
4. Independence
5. Working together and supporting each other

Students encountered situations in the informal learning context that they did not experience in the formal context. Students identified problems related to songwriting as well as social problems that they navigated as a group. They described how performing original songs felt different than performing pre-existing repertoire. Finally, many of them affirmed that they enjoyed the independence, and the fact that students worked together and supported one another.

Students’ experiences were not the only ones that were impacted as a result of this study; in research question three, I sought to examine how songwriting within an informal learning context situated in a choral setting impacted my experience as the teacher-researcher.
Research question three. How does the incorporation of informal learning in the choral rehearsal affect and inform my teaching practice? The following themes emerged from the data as they related to research question three:

1. Role as facilitator
2. Not in control
3. Surprise

I often questioned my role as a facilitator and felt not in control, wanting to make suggestions and assist students. The outcomes resulting from my non-intervention surprised me; students solved their own musical, social, and organizational problems.

The research purpose, questions, and subsequent findings guided my conclusions, implications, and suggestions for future research.

Conclusions and Interpretations

The purpose of this study was to explore students’ experiences songwriting in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting. The findings related to the three research questions warranted the following conclusions:

1. Songwriting within an informal learning context in the choral setting was effective in incorporating the standard of creativity into a performance ensemble.

2. Students were self-sufficient in the choral classroom and agents of their own learning, solving problems in ways that they would not in a typical choral classroom.

3. Students transferred their formal knowledge into the informal context as they engaged in songwriting.

4. Each group’s songwriting processes followed a similar overarching trajectory, though each group took a differing approach to composition.
5. Social dynamics significantly impacted students’ songwriting process, related products, and attitudes toward the incorporation of songwriting in choir.

Because of the qualitative nature of the study and the case study design, the conclusions may not be generalizable to the larger population, though they may be transferrable to similar settings (Erickson, 1986; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2005). In this study, I present each conclusion with a corresponding interpretation that situates the conclusion within the context of the current body of literature.

**Creativity in the Choral Classroom**

Creating exists as one of the four artistic processes as addressed in the National Core Arts Standards and has been described as “essential for teaching and learning the arts” (SEADAE, 2014, p. 5, 19). Creat[ing] is defined as “[to] conceive and develop new artistic ideas, such as an improvisation, composition, or arrangement, into a work” (SEADAE, 2014, p. 5). Though not explicitly defined in SEADAE’s definition of “create,” Kratus (2016) classified songwriting as “a form of composition that relates directly to adolescents’ personal experience of music” (p. 60). Songwriting within an informal learning context in the choral setting was effective in incorporating the standard of creativity into a performance ensemble. Freer (2011) wrote that choral teachers rarely build curricula that achieve a balance of creative goals, mainly focusing on performance excellence. However, this study’s model of informal instruction paired with formal instruction in the choral classroom worked to directly address the artistic standards of creating and performing (SEADAE, 2014). Students achieved performance excellence in their winter concert, performing traditional choral selections. This level of success was attainable despite half of each rehearsal dedicated to creating original songs, thus focusing on the artistic process of creating.
Self-sufficiency in the Choral Classroom

Students were self-sufficient in the choral classroom and agents of their own learning, solving problems in ways that they would not in a traditional choral classroom. Bruner (1996) described agency as a “sense that one can initiate and carry out activities on one’s own” (p. 35-36). The students in this study were able to navigate social, musical, and organizational problems without teacher intervention, effectively creating musical and non-musical individual and shared understandings. These findings are consistent with Tobias (2015) who found that courses that allowed for overlap between students’ in-school and outside-school musical experiences led to student agency. These dilemmas that students encountered and solved independently from teacher intervention (social, musical, and organizational) were ones that students did not experience in the traditional, formal choral classroom; informal learning’s inherent demand for problem solving gave students an opportunity to create individual and shared understandings that they would not in the formal setting.

Transfer of Formal Knowledge into an Informal Context

Students transferred their formal knowledge into the informal context as they engaged in songwriting. Though the students all had received the same musical training from teachers in the past within their general music classes, each student possessed different formal knowledge as a result of private music lessons and other experiences with music outside of school. These prior experiences with music and songwriting informed their compositions (Bennett, 1976; Kratus, 1994; Webster, 1990).

The transfer of formal knowledge into an informal setting came easily to students. Danielle’s improvisation (based on her formal knowledge of chords)
emerged as a well-balanced melody and harmony practically seconds after she sat down at the piano. Other students’ knowledge of notation transferred into the informal setting as they worked to notate their compositions. Students also discussed time signatures, key signatures, and genres of music in order to create shared understandings about how to organize their song within certain constraints.

Similar to Bersh’s findings (2011), students used formal knowledge not just as a basis for their own individual contributions, but to help scaffold other students in creating new understandings. Sabrina transferred her formal knowledge of musical form in order to teach Layla the different sections of the composition. Ashley used formal conducting techniques and counted off for groups before beginning to sing/play.

Students held very strong conceptions about music from their formal musical experiences. In all cases, students’ insistence to notate their songs slowed their progress and led to less musicking, negatively impacted the musicality of their compositions, and in some cases led to decreased levels of confidence as well as negative social implications. Consistent with Hickey (2012), students perceived notation as important to the songwriting process. This is in opposition to Green’s (2002) findings about how vernacular musicians normally compose without dependence on notation. It seems that formal instruction had affected students’ perspectives about the importance of notation as a precursor to an excellent composition and performance.

**Varied Approaches to Songwriting in the Choral Classroom**

Each group’s songwriting processes followed a similar overarching trajectory, though each group took a differing approach to composition. Wiggins’ frame for
understanding children’s compositional processes (2003) accounts for much of what I perceived that the students experienced when songwriting in an informal learning environment. The frame comprises: (a) the compositional process of the individual within a group setting while accounting for (b) how students contextualize and share meaning and intent and (c) how social influences impact their work progress. Wiggins (2003) proposed that the group compositional process begins with the interaction of four key processes: selecting a sound source, deciding roles, creating text, and inventing musical material. Though students in this study attended to these issues in various orders, each group did address most of these processes before reaching the next phase in the figure (set[ting] material into context).

**Select sound source and decide role.** In some cases, selecting a sound source occurred quickly through student discussion while in other cases, individual students tried on different roles and invented musical material for each sound source before deciding on final sound sources weeks later. Some groups did not discuss students’ roles, though they became self-evident. For example, in The Serious Songwriters, Joslyn viewed herself as a singer, which became her musical role. The nature of students’ independent work often depended on their musical role in the group (Wiggins, 2003).

However, different from Wiggins (2003), I found that students could have a compositional role as well as a musical role. In fact, some students, like Joslyn, held a defined compositional role but not a defined musical role. Some groups delegated songwriting responsibilities through discussion (The Formals and The Serious Songwriters) while others did not delegate songwriting responsibilities, but rather composed as a group. For example, Brittany’s *compositional/songwriting* role was to
transcribe Ashley’s melody, while her musical role began as a violinist, but ended as a singer.

**Create text.** The groups dealt with the text in different ways. Wiggins (2003) noted that students often begin with the subject matter of the song, which is consistent with the approaches of the participants in this study. The Parodies and The Formals wrote lyrics after deciding upon musical material, but The Informals and The Serious Songwriters linked the text and melodic material very early in the process, an approach that Wiggins (2003) observed that most experienced songwriters tend to use. The latter two groups stated that they did not have trouble writing the lyrics, and they never desired teacher intervention, while the former two groups stated that they had trouble with the lyrics, did not enjoy that part of the process, and wished that I could have helped.

**Inventing musical material.** Wiggins (2003) described that songwriters can take many points of entry as they relate to the invention of musical material. The Formals first invented an instrumental part, layering more and more instruments and parts on top until they created an introduction. They composed musical material through instrumental improvisation, similar to The Informals. The Serious Songwriters began with the instrumental approach, but discarded this in favor of spontaneously singing part of the text.

In some cases, students had difficulties within their groups agreeing on a unified way to invent musical material. While some students wanted to use more formal processes such as talking about music or spending time notating music, others were more interested in making music and engaging in informal processes. These
disagreements are typical of group work, fitting into Wiggins’s (2003) framework (see Figure 1).

Wiggins (1999) wrote that many teachers construct assignments with the intent of fostering creativity, but end up restricting students’ creativity because of assumptions that they are not knowledgeable about music. Interestingly, without teacher intervention, the students in this study placed their own restrictions on their compositions, such as using notation, using pre-existing musical material, or playing within a certain keyality/tonality/meter, limiting their own creativity at times.

**Moving past initial stages.** Though students spent a great deal of time deciding their roles, selecting the sound source, creating the text, and inventing musical material, they also set their material into context and evaluated, revised, and rehearsed the material before performing their final song and receiving feedback. This process is best represented by Wiggins’ frame, which depicts the process as interactive, with groups moving back and forth through the frame.

For example, The Formals almost immediately set their introductory material into context, and moved through to the rehearsal stage for the introduction. While part of their song was in the final stages of revision and rehearsal, the verses for their song existed in the beginning stages of the frame as they attempted to transcribe the improvisation from the video. The students found themselves still organizing, evaluating, revising, and refining this portion of the song up until the performance, and the end of the process felt rushed.

Many groups did not move past the initial phases of songwriting to setting their material into context, until the initial deadline put in place by me (week 10’s sharing session). It seemed that the deadline encouraged students to set their material
in context and to move from individual conceptions to a shared understanding of the musical whole (Wiggins, 2003; Wiggins, 1999/2000).

**Social Factors of Informal Learning**

Social dynamics significantly impacted students’ songwriting process, related products, and attitudes toward the incorporation of songwriting in choir. Consistent with the outermost contextual layer of Wiggins’s frame, students held not just a musical or organizational role, but also a social role in the group. The makeup of the peer group significantly impacted every aspect of the compositional process, and each student had a social role to play in the group. Some students, such as Bianca in The Parodies, viewed their roles as primarily social rather than musical. Groups that delegated compositional/songwriting responsibilities had problems with group dynamics, namely feelings of exclusion, while groups that did not delegate compositional/songwriting responsibilities negotiated problems related to staying on task.

Productivity varied between groups, though students in all groups spent time both talking about and making music, consistent with Hopkins (2015). Like the participants in Hopkins’ study (2015), students in all groups spent time “off-task,” though some groups had more trouble than others with this, particularly the younger groups of students. This could be attributed to either the social fabric and/or the ages of the participants.

Though students experienced social dilemmas in the informal context that they did not come across in the formal context of the choral rehearsal, they navigated these tensions and emerged with shared musical and non-musical understandings. This contrasts Bersh’s findings (2011) that suggested that a teacher’s guidance (to keep
Summary

Though I questioned my role as facilitator and often felt not in control, I found myself consistently surprised by the following realization: When given time and permission, students constructed their own understandings and solved problems through the songwriting process in an informal learning context situated in a choral setting (musical, social, organizational). In this way, students became agents of their own learning, effectively transferring their formal knowledge into the informal context as they engaged in songwriting. Though each group took a differing approach to composition, they all followed a similar overarching trajectory. Informal learning in the choral classroom served as an effective way to allow students to explore musical creativity through songwriting.

Implications for Music Education

The National Core Arts Standards contain four core processes, of which creating is one (SEADAE, 2014). However, the current model of the traditional choral ensemble often fails to address one of these four major processes: creativity (Langley, 2014). This study included creativity in the choral classroom through the incorporation of songwriting within an informal context. This study’s conclusions point toward several implications for music education.

Conclusions suggest that songwriting served as an effective way of incorporating creativity into the choral classroom. Choral teachers should consider incorporating musical creativity via songwriting into the choral classroom.
Informal learning in the choral classroom can serve as an effective way to incorporate songwriting and creativity into the choral curriculum, allowing students to construct their own understandings about music and participate in school music that is culturally and socially relevant. Students were able not only to successfully compose their songs, but teach them as well. Teachers should consider informal learning as a possible means to incorporate music creativity into choral classes. Teachers should also consider allowing student leadership in rehearsal and performance as a means for assessing student understandings of music.

Though choral directors often focus on performance based practice, striving for perfection of a final product, students in this study enjoyed taking ownership of their own songs and felt proud when they performed, even though their products were far from what a traditional choral director would label as polished. Choral directors should consider placing value on process over product at times, especially with regard to creativity in the classroom.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The conclusions and implications point toward suggestions for future research. As a reflective practitioner and the teacher-researcher of this study, I suggest:

**No Friendship Groups**

Though friendship groups worked well in this context, I would recommend replicating the study with assigned groups based on factors such as social dynamics, skill sets, leadership, or formal musical knowledge to explore the varied outcomes. A researcher could investigate the impact of pairing students with more or less prior
musical knowledge, confidence, and leadership qualities on the musical processes and products.

**More Deadlines**

I noticed that deadlines increased students’ accountability and their likelihood to set their material into context. I recommend replicating the study but incorporating more frequent deadlines in order to explore if this might help students to not feel rushed at the end of the process.

**Lyrics**

The two groups that stated that they did not have trouble writing the lyrics were also the two groups who never desired teacher intervention, and linked the text and melodic material early in the process, similar to Wiggins’s observation of experienced songwriters (2003). I recommend replicating the study but encouraging students to link the text with the lyrics early on in the process. I also recommend replicating the study but clearly stating the possibility of singing on a neutral syllable so that students do not feel as if they have to write lyrics.

**No Traditional Notation**

Wiggins (1999) stated that requirements for a creative product should be sparse, allowing students to think in sound. Though I did not encourage or require students to notate their songs, I also did not discourage notation. When students chose to use notation, it served as a distraction to the groups, hindering active musicking and slowing the students’ processes. Additionally, the processes of students who lacked the skills and/or prior knowledge to read and write music were hindered by their lack of confidence and perceptions about the necessity of composition. Teachers should
consider replicating the study but incorporating the stipulation that students would not be allowed to utilize traditional musical notation.

**Shorter-term Songwriting Projects**

Not all choral teachers are prepared to dedicate half of their rehearsal time for months at a time to creative activities such as songwriting. I recommend a similar study exploring the implementation of an informal context into the choral classroom, but including shorter projects, such as writing a chorus to a song.

**Teacher involvement**

While some students found the independence liberating, and I was surprised by students’ ability to solve their own musical and non-musical problems, I suggest repeating the study with some teacher involvement, such as helping to keep students on-task, solve social problems, foster involvement of all students, and assist with musical dilemmas to explore if students still experience autonomy.

**Closing**

Policy calls for the incorporation of creativity into choral classrooms (SEADAE, 2014), though choral rehearsals tend to follow the same sequence of warm-ups, literacy exercises, and rehearsals of repertoire, often lacking in creativity and student autonomy (Langley, 2014). Battisti (2002) questioned:

> Has there been too much emphasis on the ‘drilling of students’ for performances of music . . . instead of offering students musical experiences that have the possibility of aiding in the development of their creative potential and appreciation of the musical art? (p. 254).
Joslyn, a student from The Serious Songwriters pointed out that our current model of choral rehearsals does not satisfy all student needs. Students crave creative activities in the classroom that differ from the norm and give them autonomy:


Students can create their own musical understandings when given the time and permission, successfully navigating social, musical, and organizational problems. Composing is a type of musical thinking (Wiggins, 2003) and songwriting is “a form of composition that relates directly to adolescents’ personal experience of music” (Kratus, 2016, p. 60). As choral educators, we must evaluate our students’ ability to think musically through creative activities, not only their ability to reproduce someone else’s music. We must give our students a chance to create their own music, music that is meaningful and relevant to them, and valued in the choral classroom.
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program: Philosophy, planning, organizing, and teaching (pp. 331–358).

Chicago, IL: GIA Publications.


Appendix A

CITI TRAINING REPORT

CITI Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Course In The Protection Human Subjects Curriculum Completion Report Printed on 4/17/2013

Learner: Aimee Pearsall (username: Aimee88) Institution: University of Delaware Contact Information
Phone: 814-441-3237
Email: Aimee@udel.edu

UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS:

Stage 1. Basic Course Passed on 04/15/13 (Ref # 10140944)

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<th>Required Modules</th>
<th>Date Completed</th>
<th>Score</th>
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<td>Belmont Report and CITI Course Introduction</td>
<td>04/10/13</td>
<td>3/3 (100%)</td>
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<td>Students in Research</td>
<td>04/10/13</td>
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For this Completion Report to be valid, the learner listed above must be affiliated with a CITI participating institution. Falsified information and unauthorized use of the CITI course site is unethical, and may be considered scientific misconduct by your institution.

Paul Braunschweiger Ph.D. Professor, University of Miami Director Office of Research Education
CITI Course Coordinator

Return
Appendix B

IRB APPROVAL

DATE: September 28, 2015

TO: Aimee Pearsall
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [809382-1] Informal Learning in the Choral Classroom

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
DECISION DATE: September 28, 2015

REVIEW CATEGORY: Exemption category 1

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has determined this project is EXEMPT from the applicable federal regulations.

We will put a copy of this correspondence on file in our office. Please remember to notify us if you make any substantial changes to the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Maria Palazuelos at (302) 831-8619 or mariap@udel.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.
Appendix C

CONSENT FORM

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My name is Aimee Pearsall and I am the general music and choir teacher at the Newark Center for Creative Learning. As a graduate student in music education at the University of Delaware, I am interested in investigating student perception and learning strategies as they relate to composing within an informal (student-directed) learning environment in the choral classroom.

To investigate the incorporation of an informal learning environment in the choral classroom, I plan to split the choir rehearsal into two segments, with one segment of time dedicated to rehearsing in a traditional, instructor-led manner, and the other segment allotted to workshop time. During workshop time, the students will facilitate their own learning as it relates to composing, and they will be independent of direct teacher instruction. Students may be asked to keep a journal of their experiences as they relate to choral rehearsals and workshop time, and some volunteer students may participate in a focus group in which they may share their thoughts as they relate to the choral rehearsal/workshop time. To study student learning processes and perceptions, I plan to video and audio record some of the choral rehearsals/workshop time so that I can refer back to class time and reflect on students’ processes and observe phenomena that I might not have noticed during my in-class observations. Still photos may be taken or drawn from the videotaped data in order to further document student’s experiences during choir.

Though student identities will remain confidential, excerpts of recordings may be utilized in professional settings such as educational conferences or professional journals. Student names will be replaced with pseudonyms. Should you have any questions regarding the study, please contact Aimee Pearsall at aimee@udel.edu. If you would like more information with regard to the rights of the participants in research, please contact the University of Delaware Research Office at 302-831-2137 or udresearch@udel.edu.

Sincerely,
Aimee Pearsall

----------------------------------------------
Please return bottom half to your child’s group teacher for your son or daughter to participate in the project

Parent/Guardian Consent: Your signature below indicates that you grant permission for your student to participate in the above study. It indicates that you understand the voluntary nature of this study, and that you may withdraw your student from the study without penalty. For further information, please contact Aimee Pearsall.

I hereby give permission for ________________________________ to participate in this research study.

Signed,
Parent or Guardian: _________________________ Date: ________________
Appendix D

ASSENT FORM

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Project: Informal Learning in the Choral Classroom

Investigator: Aimee Pearsall

I am asking if you want to be part of a research study. This form tells you what the study is about, what you will be asked to do if you want to be in the study, and the possible bad and good things about this study. Please read this paper and ask me any questions.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

This research study is to better understand how students compose music and work together in groups.
I am asking you if you want to participate because I want to learn more about how children like you create musical ideas and work together. This will make me a better teacher. I am hopeful that throughout this process, you will learn more about composing too!

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

Our choir rehearsals at NCCL will be split into two parts. In one part of the rehearsal, I will teach you some of our choral songs. During the other part of the rehearsal, you will work in friendship groups to compose your own songs. You will be videotaped and photographed throughout this process so that I can better understand more about how your group works together and learns to compose.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL GOOD THINGS ABOUT THIS RESEARCH?

I am hopeful that you will compose a song for the NCCL n in choir throughout the year), you can change your mind and stop participating in this study at any time. If you decide not to participate or if you decide to stop taking part in the research later, nothing bad will happen to you and no one will be upset with you. If, at any time, you decide to stop please let me know. If you decide not to take
part in this research, your choice will not affect your grades or your relationship with your classmates and your teachers.

**WHO SHOULD YOU CALL IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?**

If you have any questions about this study, please tell Aimee Pearsall at [redacted] or Aimee@udel.edu. You may also contact Suzanne Burton at [redacted] or at slburton@udel.edu or at 302-831-2577.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Delaware Institutional Review Board at hsrb-research@udel.edu or (302) 831-2137.

If you want to participate, and I have answered all of your questions, please sign below.

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(Printed Name) (Signature)
Appendix E

CHOIR JOURNAL COVER

My Choir Journal

Name: __________________
Figure 7  The Formals’ Notation of the Introduction and Bridge as of Week 10
Figure 8  The Formals’ Notation of the Melody for the Verses and Bridge as of Week 10
Fog
The sun fades away
peaking from behind a wall of fog
the clouds descend to the ground
filling the sky with grey

Rain
falling down in giant drops
splashing to the ground
refreshing the plants below
and seeping into the ground

Snow
Puffs of white come from the sky
Blanketing the landscape
Crystal flakes cover the branches
covering the world in white

Sun
Pushing away the rain and snow
The sun is out
The perk of warmth comes from the sky
bringing the hope of spring
Figure 10 The Informals’ Lyrics and Piano Distribution, Page One, as of Week 11
Alone
I am standing here alone
Listening to the sounds
never heard before
I never knew
I could not trust you
You were my best friend
but not till the end

Chorus
Ooooooooooooh
Ooooooooooooh
Ooooooooooooh

Trapped in the darkness
Loneliness creeping
up the side of us
Never going to change
the faith of us
is gone now

Chorus
The web that bound us
Together is now
broken
apart
How nothing can fix
what you have broken
We were friends
but not till
the end

Chorus
Never going to change our faith
in the desperate depths of us
Why did leave me
Happiness going to change
now

Chorus
Whispering
in the dark
There’s a hole
in my heart
We were
best friends
But not till the end

Alone Alone Alone Alone
Alone Alone Alone Alone 2x

Standing here
Staying here
All raped in chains
Of what was once
my
best
friend
But not till the end

Figure 12  The Informals’ Final Lyrics for “Alone,” Page Two
If things stay the way they are,
Love for the world will fall apart,
We may claim that we've improved,
But we're causing so much de-struc-ti-on,
And I know the terrible truth,
Love for the world will per-l-ish,
(Chorus)
But we, we and us together,
We can spread the lo-ove,
The love for the wor-r-l-d,
The path to freed-o-om,

They___ let the cannonballs fly,
We___ try to ban them___
Plastic bags and soda cans
Cover the world's surfa-ace
A few humans is not enough___
To give the Earth a cu-re___
(Chorus)

Join us in-our endeavor
We will find a way___
To heal the wor-or-l’d
Sanctify its co-o-re
Earth is a thing to be shared
We must defend it___
(Chorus)
(Chorus)

Figure 13   The Serious Songwriters’ Final Lyrics for “Love for the World”
Figure 14  Nolan’s Notation for the Drum Set Part on GarageBand from Week Nine
Figure 15  Eloise’s notation for “Love for the World” from Week 10
Figure 16  The Parodies’ Lyrics and Notation (Syllables) as of Week 10
Autumn, winter, spring, and summer; all the sesons of the year
the equinoxes happen only twice twelvemonth
Figure 18  The Parodies’ Final Song, “The Year.”
Appendix G

QUESTIONNAIRE

My Musical Inventory

Name: _______________________________

How many years have you been involved in the NCCL Choir?
This is my first year.
This is my second year.
This is my third year.
This is my fourth year.

Have you ever been in a choir other than the NCCL Choir?     yes          no

Choir Name: _________________
Number of years you have been in the choir: 1        2       3         4       5
Are you still in this choir?:      yes              no

Choir Name: _________________
Number of years you have been in this choir: 1        2       3         4       5
Are you still in this choir?:      yes              no

Do you play an instrument?      yes            no

Instrument 1: _________________   Number of years: _____________
Instrument 2: _________________   Number of years: _____________
Instrument 3: _________________   Number of years: _____________
Instrument 4: _________________   Number of years: _____________
Have you ever composed music in a choir other than this one?  yes  no
   a. If so, where did you compose? ________________________________
                                                 ________________________________
   b. If so, what did you compose? ________________________________
   c. If so, what was your composing process like? __________________
                                                ________________________________
                                                ________________________________

Have you composed music in a setting other than choir?  yes  no
   a. If so, where did you compose? ________________________________
                                                 ________________________________
   b. If so, what did you compose? ________________________________
   c. If so, what was your composing process like? __________________
                                                ________________________________
                                                ________________________________
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<th>Instrument 3 Years</th>
<th>Composed in Another Choir</th>
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**Appendix H**

**Questionnaire Responses**
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Appendix I

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What was your favorite part of choir and your least favorite part of choir?

2. Did you like writing a song? Why or why not?

3. Was it easy or difficult to write a song? Why?

4. Would you like to keep writing songs in choir? Why or why not?

5. If you could change something about your song, what would you change?

6. What went well in the Coffee House performance this morning?

7. What do you think you could have done better in the Coffee House this morning?

8. What is choir?
Appendix J

THE FORMALS’ INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay, so um, what was your least favorite part of choir and your most favorite part of choir?

ASHLEY: My least . . .

MOLLY: You not helping us!

ASHLEY: My least favorite part . . . can I give you two least favorite parts?!

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: mmhmm

ASHLEY: Okay, so my first least favorite part is writing down stuff.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Writing down stuff . . . what do you mean?

SILVIA: [Laughing] journals.

ASHLEY: Like, in the journals and [yelling] worksheets!

[ASHLEY, SILVIA, and MOLLY laughing]

ASHLEY: Like, journals and worksheets. And . . . I didn’t like having to make up words.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Nodding] Make up words for the song?

MOLLY: I didn’t like making up words.

ASHLEY: Or . . . or perform it.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: You didn’t like performing it either.

SILVIA & ASHLEY: No.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

ASHLEY: It was fun, but I didn’t like performing.

MOLLY: I, I liked the beginning of the year.

ASHLEY: Yeah, a lot. It was . . .

MOLLY: It was really fun in the beginning of the year.

ASHLEY: It was fun, cause we actually sounded . . .

MOLLY: [interrupting] And, and . . .

ASHLEY: like a harmony.

MOLLY: . . . it was fun.

ASHLEY: And, well, the performing was fun, but I didn’t wanna do it.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Performing . . .

ASHLEY: If that makes sense.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

ASHLEY: It was fun but I didn’t wanna do it.

SILVIA: I, I like the actual songs that people have written before.

MOLLY: [Nodding and interrupting] I like actual songs too.

ASHLEY: I like just performing the songs.

MOLLY: I just like performing other people’s songs.

ASHLEY: Like, it was fun to make up just like the beginning, just be like “Hey! We’re gonna write a song!” but then it’s kinda like [not understandable] halfway through it was like [makes noise with mouth resembling a snake]

MOLLY & SILVIA: [laughing]
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So then it got . . .

MOLLY: [Makes same snake-like noise]

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Why did it get like [mimicks snake-like noise]?

MOLLY, ASHLEY, and SILVIA: [Yelling, while smiling] Because you wouldn’t help us!

MOLLY: And we kept asking you like, [mimicking me] ‘nope you have to do it on your own,’ and so that’s why us three went crazy and then they said, ‘oh, I’ll just get sick on Friday so I don’t have to . . .’

SILVIA: [correcting] us four.

MOLLY: Oh.

SILVIA: Brittany also [not understandable]

ASHLEY: Brittany achieved the goal, we didn’t.

MOLLY: [Pointing at Ashley] Brittany, Brittany . . . yeah. And I didn’t achieve the goal. I actually wanted to be here and do it, but, I just like, I just [inaudible because Ashley and Silvia started talking]

SILVIA: Your goal was to get sick?!

ASHLEY: Like, I wanted to do it, but [inaudible because Silvia and Molly were talking].

MOLLY: [Shaking head] No, my goal was not to get sick.

ASHLEY: No, I didn’t like, no I didn’t wanna have to be here and perform my song, but I wanted to be here and not perform my song.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay. So, did you like writing a song?
ASHLEY: Yes.

MOLLY: No. Wait, what?

SILVIA: [Laughing]

ASHLEY: I didn’t like writing the words though.

MOLLY: I didn’t like writing the words. I didn’t like that.

SILVIA: Yeahhh . . .

ASHLEY: The music was fun but not the words.

MOLLY: Yeah, like the piano me and her playing was really fun, but not the words.

[Pause]

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: How did you feel Silvia? Did you like writing a song?

SILVIA: I didn’t, I did almost anything

ASHLEY: [Raising eyebrows, smiling] She did almost..

MOLLY: [Smiling] She didn’t do anything.

ASHLEY: And it wasn’t fun when we had to, that, like, performing it, like, I don’t think it was a a very good to like, have to write it for the choir to sing.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

ASHLEY: Cause then it gave too much pressure to make it good.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: What would have been better?

ASHLEY: [Screaming, and hitting her legs] And then you wouldn’t help us!!!

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: What would have been better?

ASHLEY: [Talking, not understandable] and if it was . . .

MOLLY: Helped us.
ASHLEY: Yeah, help us! And not, not, not make it for the choir. Just make it for . . .

SILVIA: And also . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Just make it for your group?

SILVIA: Yeah, and also make it so that we can . . .

ASHLEY: So you didn’t have to make words if didn’t, couldn’t think of them.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Ohhh, cause it, you felt like, pressure to make words since the choir was gonna sing it.

ASHLEY: [Nodding]. You can’t sing [singing: la, la la la la la la la la la la la] . . . that’s not a song!

SILVIA: [Laughing] That does not sound good.

ASHLEY: La la.

MOLLY: That really didn’t sound good.

ASHLEY: [Laughing] No, it’s a la la song.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So . . . did you think it was easy or difficult to write a song?

MOLLY: We, we . . . [inaudible] okay.

ASHLEY: The first part was easy, the second part, the words, were not.

SILVIA: Well, none of us really got along.

MOLLY: Yeah, well . . .

ASHLEY: Yeah, cause we [pointing to herself and S] were in the same group. They [pointing to M and S] got along and me and Brittany got along, but then we didn’t, couldn’t, mix it up.
MOLLY: I mean . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, did you find it hard working in a group, working together?

MOLLY: Um, me and Silvia were actually okay, we’re kind of like . . .

ASHLEY: [Interrupting] You didn’t do anything!

SILVIA: [Yelling] We didn’t do anything, because you guys didn’t have us do anything!

ASHLEY: Me and, me and Brittany were fine, but they two, we, we, like, me and Brittany . . .

MOLLY: [Interrupting, yelling] You guys weren’t letting us do anything! You guys were just like . . .

ASHLEY: And then we tried to collaborate, and it kind of went boom! [throws hands in the air]

MOLLY: And the thing is, I’m not, the thing is, I’m not really into like, music as much as like, sports, but I love to sing and stuff, but I can’t really like, write down notes, I don’t know how to read notes, I don’t know how to write them down, so that was a really big part of the song, writing the notes down and stuff, so I couldn’t really help, because I didn’t know anything, and I would’ve just scribbled all over the paper.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So did you think, do you think you have to write down notes to a song to be able to compose a song?

ASHLEY: No, you don’t.
MOLLY: No, cause I didn’t. I wrote five times, four times. [throws up hands, laughing].
ASHLEY: But then you have to memorize it, and then it’s easier if you have written it down.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.
MOLLY: But I remember it.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So you thought [pointing to Ashley] it was easier if you . . .
ASHLEY: Well my part was more complicated than your part [pointing to Molly].
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: . . . knew how to read, and you thought [pointing to Molly] it was easier if you just sort of practiced it and . . .
MOLLY: [Nodding].
ASHLEY: Molly, your part was just [sings . . . dun dun], but it depends on how complicated the part is, because my part was actually lots of notes and hers was just the same thing over and over again.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, would you want to keep writing songs in choir?
MOLLY: Mmm . . . No. No.
ASHLEY: Not really.
MOLLY: Not really.
SILVIA: No.
ASHLEY: [Laughing]. Not really, I’m good.
MOLLY: No, I’m good.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay, um, and if you could hmmm. If you could change something about your song, what would you change?

ASHLEY: I would change . . .

MOLLY: Uh . . .

SILVIA: I didn’t really like the melody at all.

MOLLY: Yeah, the melody.

SILVIA: It just sounded like we just played random notes, and we just used them.

ASHLEY: Yeah, that’s kinda what we did.

MOLLY: Yes, it did.

SILVIA: Yes, but it didn’t sound all that good in my opinion.

ASHLEY: [Shrugging]. In my opinion too, but it’s what we had.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So you guys, I’m getting that . . .

ASHLEY: By the time deci . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: . . . you guys didn’t like the melody much.

ASHLEY: . . . by the time we decided that we didn’t . . .

SILVIA: No, it was too complicated.

ASHLEY: . . . by the time we decided we didn’t like the melody, it was too late to change it.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Nodding] Okay, okay.

MOLLY: So we had to put words to it.

ASHLEY: So, so we just cut out like, half the song.
MOLLY: Wait, couldn’t a song be just like, um, us playing the piano and people just sing ‘yeah, yeah yeah, yeah.’

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing] You could’ve done that if you wanted.

MOLLY: [Squealing] Ooh!

ASHLEY: No, but that would have been [not understandable].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, what went well in the performance this morning?

ASHLEY: Umm . . .

MOLLY: Eh . . .

ASHLEY: The working together part?

SILVIA: [Laughing].

ASHLEY: Like, like people supporting each other [not understandable, trailing off]. In the practice, like, people supporting each other to get the songs done, and they actually kind of like, cared to make, not to make other people’s song horrible and try to make it sound good so that you could see how it really sounds [trailing off].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Yeah, so you thought that working together before the performance went well?

ASHLEY: Mmhmm. But although we had to do it every single lunch and snack, I hated that.

MOLLY: It drove me cwazy!

ASHLEY: [Laughing hysterically] Cwazy!

MOLLY: [Laughing] Crazy. But that’s, Aimee, the thing is, I, when I don’t get my energy out, I . . .
ASHLEY: [Whispering] She goes cuckoo.

MOLLY: [Turning to Am]. Thanks. And, I, I get like really like kind of like . . .

ASHLEY: Angry too.

MOLLY: Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So did you guys want to practice it during lunch and snack?

All: No!

MOLLY: No, I wanted to go outside [not understandable because Molly and Ashley were yelling]

ASHLEY: We didn’t have a choice!

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So what happened?

ASHLEY: Well, Melanie [a teacher] made us do it, and we didn’t want to.

SILVIA: And also, we weren’t allowed to have the choice whether we wanted to have our song performed or not.

ASHLEY: Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

ASHLEY: [Raised voice] You gave us that choice then Melanie kind of . . . didn’t.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Melanie said that you had to do it.

ASHLEY, MOLLY, and SILVIA: [Nodding] Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

MOLLY: And I, I just, I, it kind of made me really, kind of like . . .

ASHLEY: Well, it was fun to do it once.
MOLLY: . . . frustrated.

ASHLEY: Like, I’m kind of, I’m glad we did it . . .

MOLLY: Same. I’m glad we did it.

ASHLEY: . . . But I don’t wanna do it again this year.

MOLLY: Every single lunch, and like break and stuff we had to doing it . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So in the end, it felt good to be able to perform with the other people but . . .

ASHLEY: It felt good, but I don’t wanna do it . . . like once a year . . .

MOLLY: . . . I didn’t like it!

ASHLEY: . . . or once every five years, or once every ten years is enough.

MOLLY: Yeah!

ASHLEY: But I don’t wanna do it two times in a year, it’s blegh!

MOLLY: Cause Aimee, I literally was like, I was like, I really wanna go outside and run around . . .

ASHLEY: And I was like, ‘No Molly.’

MOLLY: . . . and I got really frustrated I, I need to get my energy out or I’m just gonna go [throws hands in air].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, then what . . .

ASHLEY: [whispers something inaudible].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: My last question is, what is choir?

ASHLEY: What, what is choir?

MOLLY: Group of people . . .
ASHLEY: It could be anything! It’s a group of people that like music and do stuff with music.

MOLLY: It’s a group of people who sing and different harmony . . . umm . . . harmony and like . . .

ASHLEY: Well choir . . .

MOLLY: . . . melody . . .

ASHLEY: Well it could be anything . . .

MOLLY: . . . And soprano . . .

ASHLEY: because like, it was still choir but we were writing music too.

MOLLY: I know.

ASHLEY: So it could be anything.

MOLLY: And, it can be anything related with music, writing . . .

ASHLEY: Performing . . . usually it’s performing . . .

MOLLY: Performing yeah . . .

ASHLEY: . . . with like a piano, one instrument or it could be . . .

MOLLY: Multiple instruments

ASHLEY: . . . um, a capella.

MOLLY: Or a capella, like Pentatonix.

SILVIA: A capella isn’t choir. A capella’s a capella.

MOLLY: Oh yeah.

ASHLEY: But if you’re singing together in unison . . .

MOLLY: There’s usually a piano . . .
ASHLEY: . . . and then you’re singing different pitches and stuff, it can still be choir but you’re just [not understandable].

MOLLY: There’s usually a piano though . . .

ASHLEY: [not understandable].

MOLLY: . . . that’s used in it and then they sing . . .

ASHLEY: But sometimes it’s like a guitar . . .

MOLLY: . . . they sing different parts . . .

ASHLEY: . . . violin, a flute.

MOLLY: . . . or they can sing all together as like, one. So, that’s it.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Cool. Okay, um, can you go in there, and do your worksheets?
Appendix K

THE INFORMALS’ INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Um, my first question is, what was your favorite part of choir and your least favorite part of choir?

DANIELLE: Well, I loved, um, every part of choir, except for waking up early.

[laughing].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing] Okay.

DANIELLE: But it was worth it.

SABRINA: So, I liked choir a lot, waking up early and being on time was one of my biggest problems.

LAYLA: Same.

SABRINA: Yeah, but um, overall I liked it. Sometimes there was a matter of teamwork and stuff that sometimes didn’t work with the other groups, and our group a little bit, but it was mostly just, we just argued about some things, but it was fun.

LAYLA: That’s your problem.

SABRINA: [Laughing] It’s not my problem, it was all of our problems.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, okay. Okay, so.

SABRINA: But it was fun.
LAYLA: My least favorite part was just like getting up early cause my mom had to like, shake me awake, and she’d go grr, gah, I have all my stuff, let’s go, and I’m like, still in bed, and um, she actually put a cat on me to wake me up.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER, SABRINA, and DANIELLE: [Laughing].

LAYLA: My new kitten.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

LAYLA: She put me in it, and it started eating my hair, so I was like, ew!

SABRINA and DANIELLE: [Laughing]

LAYLA: So that kind of woke me up and my mom was like, ‘get out and go to choir!’

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, did you like writing a song?

DANIELLE: Yes!

LAYLA: Yeah.

SABRINA: Yes.

DANIELLE: I loved writing a song.

LAYLA: The only thing that, I mean like, I was kind of nervous when we performed because it was kind of like, weird, and, I, I know I’ve performed before, but it was just awkward in a way.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

SABRINA: Cause you made the song.

LAYLA: Yeah.

SABRINA: And people might judge you for it.

DANIELLE: [Smiling] Yeah.
LAYLA: Yeah, cause I thought it was . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Ah, so there’s added pressure then.

LAYLA: Yeah, like added pressure because usually when you’re singing another song like, maybe you’re singing like Adele song, and . . .

SABRINA: It doesn’t really feel bad . . .

LAYLA: Yeah, because . . .

SABRINA: . . . because you didn’t make it.

LAYLA: Yeah, cause, you didn’t make it, but . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Ah . . .

LAYLA: . . . if you make it, you have like more pressure and people say if they like it or not, and I don’t know.

DANIELLE: [Laughing] Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, how did you feel when you were performing it?

SABRINA: Uh, it felt kind of weird, because I don’t have a very good voice right now.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Oh, cause you, you don’t think you do cause you’re sick?

SABRINA: Yeah. But I, um, I liked playing the piano [mumbling] but it just felt like weird cause I thought like, people were gonna like judge . . .

LAYLA: [swinging legs accidently kicked Sabrina]

SABRINA: Ow, ow, ow ow!

[Laughter, inaudible comments]
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So how do you feel now?

SABRINA: I feel better because my . . .

DANIELLE: I feel great.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Good.

SABRINA: . . . parents said that they liked it, but that it was depressing [laughs].

AILAYLA: [Laugh].

SABRINA: My parents are like, ‘it’s a sad and depressing song.’ I was like, ‘yeah I know. We were trying to do that.’

All: [Laugh].

LAYLA: I actually don’t like the . . . depressingness cause I get more pressure and people like saying like ‘it’s so depressing,’ and I kind of feel embarrassed by that for some reason because I’m more like, I’m not like, personal about stuff, not like, unpersonal or whatever you call it.

DANIELLE: [Laughs]. General?

LAYLA: Like, standing out. Like, I don’t care. Like, Natalie is, Estella told me, cause she says that she was unpersonal. [laughs].

SABRINA: What?! What are you saying?!

AILAYLA: [Laughs].

LAYLA: She said, [laughing, and getting up, moving towards Sabrina], in front of boys and her bffs Natalie said, [whispers to Sabrina].

SABRINA: What?!

LAYLA: [Laughing]
SABRINA: [Laughing] Okay, tell me later.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Yeah yeah yeah, we’re moving on. So did you think it was . . .

DANIELLE, SABRINA, LAYLA: [Laughing].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So was it easy or hard to write a song?

DANIELLE: It was um . . .

SABRINA: It was medium.

DANIELLE: . . . medium, because we had all the materials, like we had iPads and stuff to help us, and we had like, papers and . . .

SABRINA: Piano.

DANIELLE: . . . piano, but like, I remember last year, Sabrina, um, Callie, another girl that left, and Joslyn and me were writing our own song, and we didn’t have that many materials . . .

SABRINA: [inaudible].

DANIELLE: . . . um . . . so we just had a sheet of paper, and a pencil, and that was really hard because we didn’t like, we couldn’t like, gah, um, we couldn’t like, compose the music because we didn’t have a piano or anything, so . . .

SABRINA: It was fun, though. I have to write it down now.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So . . .

DANIELLE, SABRINA, LAYLA: [All talking at once, not understandable].
SABRINA: I forgot to like, I forgot we were supposed to put it here [points to musical inventory paper], and so I wrote all of it down here, and now I have to write it all again, so that’s annoying.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So . . . um, wait wait wait, don’t finish writing now. So, you thought it was sort of medium.

SABRINA: Mmmhmm.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, um, do you want to keep writing songs in choir?

SABRINA and DANIELLE: [Nodding vehemently] Yes.

SABRINA: Definitely.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Looking to L] How do you feel?

LAYLA: Hmm?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: L?

LAYLA: Umm . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Would you want to keep writing songs in choir?

LAYLA: Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Yeah? Why?

LAYLA: But maybe not perform all of them?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Not perform . . . not perform like everyone else’s songs you mean?

LAYLA: I mean like, not perform all the songs that we created if . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Oh.
DANIELLE: Like, if there’s like one that’s really good, like maybe we could just perform that one?

SABRINA: Or maybe we can make all of, we can make all of our songs and they would [not understandable] here, once we’ve practiced all of them really well, and we’ve memorized them, well maybe not memorized, but like, have them like, in our minds, and it’s like much better, we can like, perform like, a big concert . . .

DANIELLE: Or make it like . . .

SABRINA: . . . in the winter concert, or maybe just in a different concert.

DANIELLE: . . . or maybe we don’t have to do it in like, a small group, we could do it in one big group, like, we could split the choir in half, and one half does the composing and one half does the like, words? And so, we could perform one bigger, better song together so . . .

SABRINA: That’d be [inaudible] . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Do you think it would be hard to work in a bigger group?

SABRINA: [Nodding]. Yes, it would be harder; but it would also be better.

LAYLA: If the three of us fight . . .

SABRINA: The whole thing is fighting, and it breaks apart. That’s the bad part about it.

LAYLA: . . . the ten of us fight. If the three of us fight, the whole ten of us fight.

SABRINA: Yeah.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, if you could change something about your song, then what would you change?

DANIELLE: Uh, the depressingness probably.

SABRINA: Uh, probably, well, I kinda like the depressingness, though, I mean . . .

LAYLA: I hate that!

SABRINA: The thing I would probably change . . .

LAYLA: Is all of it, and make it more happy.

SABRINA, LAYLA, DANIELLE: [Laugh].

SABRINA: . . . is um, is the uh, the music, um have more piano so all of us could play all the same, cause Danielle was the only one who knew all of the verses on the piano. . .

LAYLA: Cause she made it up.

SABRINA: . . . cause she made it up . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Oh, okay.

SABRINA: . . . so I would have liked it if we all did it, the piano, [not understandable]

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Do you think if you had more time then you would have . . .

SABRINA: [nodding] Yeah, we would have . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: . . . been able to do that?

SABRINA: Yeah, cause Danielle, we weren’t able to because, she like, had to make it up at the last moment . . .

DANIELLE: [Laughing] Yes.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay, okay.

SABRINA: Yeah, um, but if we had more time it would be better so that we could actually all learn it . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Got it.

SABRINA: . . . and then be able to do it.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

SABRINA: I think that would be better. [Nodding].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: What went well in the Coffee House this morning?

LAYLA: Eating food.

All: [Laughing].

SABRINA: Getting your signature.

All: [Laughing].

LAYLA: On the plate.

All: [Laughing].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Anything about the performance that went well?

LAYLA: Uh, yeah.

SABRINA: Yes.

LAYLA: We didn’t fail epically.

SABRINA: Yeah, that we didn’t fail epically. But um, no, that people actually clapped a little bit.

LAYLA: A little bit?!

TEACHER-RESEARCHER They clapped a lot.
LAYLA: I wanna throw this piece of paper in your eyeball. They did not clap a little bit. They clapped LIKE WILD, dude!

All: [Laughing].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER Um . . .

[Inaudible comments amidst laughter].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER They definitely did. So . . . um, what do you think could have gone better in the Coffee House this morning?

LAYLA: Umm . . . more food.

All: [Laughing].

SABRINA: Um, more practice for the songs.

DANIELLE: Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER More practice for the songs?

SABRINA: A lot more practice.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER Um, and last question: What is choir?

SABRINA: It’s where you learn . . .

LAYLA: Sing.

SABRINA: . . . how to sing songs, make songs . . .

LAYLA: And perform, and make songs,

SABRINA: . . . perform, work together, [whispers] and have fun.

DANIELLE: [Nodding and smiling] Yeah.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER Cool.

LAYLA: Cool.

All: [Laughing].
Appendix L

THE SERIOUS SONGWRITERS’ INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Um, what was your favorite part of choir and your least favorite part of choir?

JOSLYN: You’re just asking us the same things that we wrote down.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: I totally am.

JOSLYN: What’s the point of that?

[pause]

JOSLYN: To see if we respond differently?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Well, because, you’re gonna talk about it, and it’s different talking about it than writing it down.

JOSLYN: Good point.

ELOISE: Are you recording this?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Yup.

JOSLYN: Yeah she is. See? [Points to iPad].

ELOISE: Oh, yeah. That.

All: [Laughs].

JOSLYN: Um. Okay. Uh . . . I liked [pause]. You go [looking at Eloise].

ELOISE: Um . . . I liked singing the most.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: You liked singing the most. Okay.
JOSLYN: I liked composing . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: You liked composing?

JOSLYN: . . . because I haven’t composed . . . we didn’t compose in a choir before and . . .

ELOISE: Yeah, composing is fun.


TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

ELOISE: Performing was really fun.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

ELOISE: Yeah, I mean, composing was part of the fun, and then we got to show them, and that was really . . . it was interesting showing them what we had been working on.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmhmm. What do you mean interesting?

ELOISE: [shrugs].

ELOISE and TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughs].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay. Um, cool. So it sounds like you had a couple of favorite parts. Did you have any least favorite parts?

JOSLYN: No.

ELOISE: Uhh . . .

JOSLYN: On my paper I wrote, ‘um, well, um, well.’

JOSLYN and TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing]

JOSLYN: So . . .
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay. [Turning to E]. Any least favorite parts?

ELOISE: I don’t know what I wrote on my paper [inaudible]

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Oh, it doesn’t have to be the same.

ELOISE: I know. Um . . . I don’t know?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay. If you come up with something we’ll come back.

So, did you like writing a song, then?

JOSLYN: Mmhmm.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmhmm.

ELOISE: It was fun.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Um, did you think it was easy or hard to write a song?

ELOISE: Um it was . . .

JOSLYN: Um, easy because we could split and I could write the lyrics and you could do the melody.

ELOISE: It was hard because, you know, I couldn’t just do everything I wanted, you know, I had some input, but also I had someone to consult and be like, “Hey do you think this sounds okay?”

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmhmm.

ELOISE: So . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Do you think it would have been easier to, or harder, to compose a song by yourself?

ELOISE: Um . . . I don’t know. Both?

JOSLYN: Um, I have done that, and it . . .
ELOISE: It’s harder, because . . .

JOSLYN: . . . it takes shorter, but it’s a little bit harder because you don’t have anyone to talk to.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

ELOISE: Yeah, it’s harder because I’m like, oh man, this sounds cheesy, but that’s only me. I don’t have anyone to . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: To get their input.

ELOISE: Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmhmm.

JOSLYN: Although I have, yeah, I’ve done both. I’ve done this choir, I’ve composed on my own, and I’ve composed with Danielle, and Sabrina, and Callie, and there’s a big difference between composing by yourself and composing with a group.

ELOISE: And it really . . .

JOSLYN: It’s easier composing with a group.

ELOISE: . . . it really worked because I’m better at, um, finding what kind of chords . . . I like finding chords that sound cool, and I’ll be like, ‘Yay! This should be a song,’ but, but I always think the lyrics seem cheesy, so [pointing to J] it’s nice to have someone do it for me.

JOSLYN: [spreading arms, and smiling]

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing]. Ta da!

JOSLYN: Thank you, thank you!
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Um. Oh jeez. I was about to say something. Oh, when did you compose with, what did you compose with Sabrina and Danielle for?

JOSLYN: Cause I could.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Cause you could? You just composed for fun in school?

JOSLYN: [Nodding].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: You just wrote a song? When? During breaks?

JOSLYN: Several, actually. But we didn’t finish any of them.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

ELOISE: I wrote this song once.

JOSLYN: I don’t know, I think we finished “Rainbow.”

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Why didn’t you finish them?

JOSLYN: Hmm?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Why didn’t you finish them?

JOSLYN: I don’t know.

ELOISE: I wrote a song once.

JOSLYN: It’s hard to finish it all in one sitting and then you forget about that song and then you, and then you just, you just like [pause]. Songs come for me at least, songs come out of emotions . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmhmm.

JOSLYN: . . . and, you just, instead of brooding over the same song, I just think up something else without even trying to and then I think, ‘Oh you know, I have to write
this down!’ and then it ends up just being this stockpile of unfinished, you know, doohickeys.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing]. Doohickeys. Interesting.

ELOISE: But um, I wrote this song. It was just a piano piece, so it didn’t have any lyrics, but um, it was called ‘The [not understandable] Army,’ when I was little, younger, and I performed it in a piano concert.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Do you like performing things that you compose?

ELOISE: Mmhmm.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmhmm. [Looking towards Joslyn]. What about you?

JOSLYN: [Nodding].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So did it help, do you think, having, sort of a set time each week to compose to be able to finish a song?

JOSLYN: Yeah, cause if you’re just trying to get yourself together uh, during recess to write, it’s kind of difficult.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

JOSLYN: Especially when you have to be outside.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing]. Yeah, that’s true.

JOSLYN: You have to be cold.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Would you want to keep writing songs in choir?

JOSLYN: [Nodding] Sure.

ELOISE: Yeah. [Nodding]. It’d be fun.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing]. Okay.
ELOISE: And doing it with different people.

JOSLYN: [Nodding]. Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: With different . . . so mixing up the groups?

ELOISE: Mmhmm.

JOSLYN: Not with the same groups. Cause then it’s always . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: You spend a lot of time with one group, yeah.

JOSLYN: Mmhmm. You want . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: That’s true.

JOSLYN: . . . to mix because then you get a whole variety of songs. If you’re with the same group, it’ll be like, Category A, B, C, D, so . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmhmm. Um. So, what do you think went well in the Coffee House this morning?

ELOISE: Umm . . . that we had fun singing.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay . . .

JOSLYN: I think, um . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: . . . that’s important.

JOSLYN: . . . I think group 2’s and um, and group 1’s went pretty well.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay. Not group 3 and 4?

ELOISE: Well, I think um, I mean, I couldn’t hear so much because I was playing piano, but I thought we sounded okay.

JOSLYN: [Nodding].

ELOISE: I know I messed up a little at the piano.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So what do you think could have gone better about it?

JOSLYN: Uh, maybe if we had put, cause I know we just putting the notes for the wo . . . for the words. Maybe if we had put some of the [inaudible] to it.

ELOISE: Yeah [inaudible]

JOSLYN: Like a [sings: ching, ch ch ching. Ching]. I know that sounds weird, but . . .

ELOISE: No, I get what you’re saying.

JOSLYN: Something like that.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Do you think . . . why do you think you didn’t decide to do that?

JOSLYN: Uh, I think we just ran out of time.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Nodding]. Ran out of time, yeah. So, would you have wanted more time to work on your song, or do you feel like it was sort of finished?

JOSLYN: It, well. If at all. Well, I call that part an underbeat . . .

ELOISE: I think we . . .

JOSLYN: . . . but all all I think we needed was an underbeat. We’d like to, as Sean would say, abandon it. I’m saying that like a poem, but . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmhmm. An underbeat meaning like a harmony part, or an underbeat meaning like a drums, drum part?

ELOISE: Well we would just like . . .

JOSLYN: Uh, a harmony. I, I call it an underbeat, sorry.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: No, no, no, that, I’m just asking what you mean.
ELOISE: I mean, like, like, you know, just [sings dun dun dun while moving hand up and down as if playing chords on a piano]. Like, [inaudible] background piano.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmhmm.

JOSLYN: We did have, we did have it on the iPad, but . . .

ELOISE: That was a drum part.

JOSLYN: . . . but we knew that couldn’t get loud enough.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

JOSLYN: No, we have a clap, a drum, and a shaker.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay. So you didn’t use that cause you thought it couldn’t be loud enough.

JOSLYN: Yeah, we we had it up at full volume and we could barely hear it, so . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmmhmm.

JOSLYN: . . . we knew it would not stand a chance against the choir.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing] Okay. Um, and . . . last question. What is choir?

JOSLYN and ELOISE: Choir . . .

JOSLYN: . . . is a group of persons . . .

ELOISE: Okay.

JOSLYN: . . . that sing.

ELOISE: [Smiling]. That’s the definition. Um, here’s what I interpreted what I wrote. Quote, ‘Choir is a way of expressing my love for music. [Smiling].
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Awww. [Laughing]. That’s very nice. I like it. [pause].

Anything else that you need me to know?

JOSLYN: I’m sorry I don’t have anything nice to share about choir . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: That was very nice to share.

JOSLYN: . . . other than a group of persons that sing. [Laughing].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: No, that’s . . . that is a solid definition. Anything else you want me to know?

JOSLYN: Um

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Mocking J] Um.

JOSLYN and ELOISE: Um um um [repeating over and over].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay. You’re released!

ELOISE: We’re free!
Appendix M

THE PARODIES’ INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: What was your favorite part and your least favorite part of choir?

MADDIE: Waking up at 6:30 am and uh . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Was your what? Favorite or least favorite?

All: [Laughing]

MADDIE: My least favorite!

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

MADDIE: Um. My favorite part is hanging out with my group.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

RYAN: My favorite part was the winter concert, and I do not have a least favorite part.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: No least favorite part?

RYAN: [Shakes head].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So you liked all parts?

RYAN: Yeah.

MADDIE: That’s shocking, considering that you raged a lot. [Laughing]

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Did you just say he raged a lot?

MADDIE: [Laughing] Yeah.
RYAN: [Laughing] I didn’t.

MADDIE: He got frustrated a lot. [Laughing]

RYAN: [Smiling] I got frustrated when you guys wouldn’t cooperate.

MADDIE: Then that’s a least favorite part. Booyah. [Inaudible]

All: [Laughing].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay, so, did you like writing a song?

RYAN: Yeahhh.

MADDIE: Stressful. Boring. Rage. But, I guess it was fun.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing] But you guess it was fun?

MADDIE: [Laughing] I guess.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, um. Okay. So, what did you think Ryan? Did you like writing a song or no?

RYAN: Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Yeah? Okay. So did you think it was easy or hard to write a song?

MADDIE: Stressful. Everything was stressful. The entire year. The entire year of writing a song. [Smiling, and speaking in a sing-songy voice]. Stressful!

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So did you think it was more stressful than being in the big choir and working?

MADDIE: [Nodding].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Yeah? Okay. Why?

RYAN: I thought it was . . . I thought it was pretty . . . I, I, it was . . .
MADDIE: It was fun and funny at the same time because like, while Bianca was just sitting there, me and Ryan were just . . .

RYAN: [Laughing] Fighting . . .

MADDIE: . . . fighting over who was gonna be like writing the lyrics,

RYAN: [Laughing] Yeah, that was,

MADDIE: and,

RYAN: [Laughing] that was fun

MADDIE: and

RYAN: [Laughing] that was really fun!

MADDIE: and then like R, uh, goin’ over to, um, S’s group and saying, ‘You’re in our camera!”

RYAN: [Laughing] Yeah, that’s [not understandable] because they were so and, like, they, they, they, mm, came over to us and said, [uses mocking voice] ‘You’re in our camera’ all the time.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing, says something not understandable]

RYAN: So I was like, ‘I don’t care!’ So I leapt over and said, [in a mocking voice] ‘You’re in our camera!’ And they [mubling], and they were like, ‘I don’t care!’ [Said with a weird accent] ‘Then why do you care if I’m in your camera?!’ That was fun!

MADDIE: And I loved talking about my sister and how like, great she is, and then she couldn’t come. That was a shame. I thought that the concert was after school; she got so excited.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Aww . . . So did you think . . . sorry I’m, if I’m unclear. Did you think it was easier or hard to write a song?

RYAN: Me?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Both of you.

RYAN: Umm, at the beginning it was easier [mumbling], no. At the beginning, like, we were like, okay, ‘Ode to Joy.’ Tune: done. [Laughing]. Words took a long time. [Nodding]. Words were not the most fun thing on earth.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So what did you think, Maddie? Do you think it was easy or hard?

MADDIE: Um. [Pause]. Uhh . . . fun, stressful, rage, funny, all of the emotion, all of the above.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So you thought it was sort of easy and hard at the same time?

MADDIE: Yes, cause like, after we got the first things down, um, it was pretty easy. We still fought though. [Gesturing to Ryan].

RYAN: [Laughing] Yes, we did.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing] Okay.

MADDIE: [Gesturing to Ryan] We fought a lot.

RYAN: [Laughing] Yes.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, do you, would you want to keep writing songs in choir, or no?

RYAN: Mmm [Pause, looks at Maddie]. Maybe. I don’t know.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Looking at Maddie] What do you think?

MADDIE: Oh! I have two questions about the paper. It repeats itself.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Let me answer them after. Ask me after this.

RYAN: [Looking at Maddie] What do you mean?

MADDIE: So I just didn’t answer one. Or I didn’t really . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay, I’ll . . . Can I talk to you about it after?

MADDIE: [Nodding].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So if you could change something about your song, what would you change?

RYAN: Eh . . .

MADDIE: Length.

RYAN: Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: The length of your song? What do you mean?

RYAN: [Not understandable].

MADDIE: It wasn’t even 30 seconds long.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So you’d want it to be longer.

MADDIE: Yes, cause like . . .

RYAN: Yeah, same.

MADDIE: . . . everyone else had a sheet, while we had . . .

RYAN: A sheet!

MADDIE: [Raising voice] We didn’t have a full sheet!

RYAN: What do you mean we didn’t have a full sheet?
MADDIE: They had more words.

RYAN: Yeah, you’re right. They did have more words.

MADDIE: Yes, that’s what I mean.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: So, okay. [Looking at Maddie] You would want it to be longer. What do you think? [Looking at Ryan]. Would you want it to be longer too, or no?

RYAN: Umm . . . if I had to choose, if I had to change something, I would figure out how to make it longer . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay.

RYAN: . . . But if I didn’t have to change something . . .

MADDIE: I think the hardest part was . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Looking at Ryan] So you thought it was good the way it was?

RYAN: [Nodding].

MADDIE: The hardest part was the seasons . . . part.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: The words?

MADDIE: Yeah.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Okay. Um . . . So what do you think went well in the Coffee House this morning, in your performance?

MADDIE: Why is it called the Coffee House?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Smiling] Uh, it’s just a . . .

RYAN: Common terminology.
TEACHER-RESEARCHER: It’s a name of, of a performance with food.

MADDIE: [Gesturing to the other room, in which the students were filling out worksheets]. They said that Ryan was being loud!

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing]. So what went well in the performance this morning?

RYAN: [Rolling eyes, looking towards other room] Excuse me!

MADDIE: My face was covered.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Smiling] Your face was covered?

MADDIE: With the papers.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Oh, you thought that’s what went well?

MADDIE: No one knew it was . . . they probably did know it was me, but . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing] So, you thought . . . Why, why did you like that your face was covered?

MADDIE: [Laughing] In case I messed up no one would see my lips!

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Nodding] Okay.

RYAN: [Not understandable].

MADDIE: But my mom was pretty mad at me because she was taking a video, and it, it, yeah.

RYAN: That’s why you say ‘rubarb’ or ‘watermelon.’

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Looking at Ryan]. So what do you think went well in the performance?
RYAN: All it went the what went well? What went well? What did go well? Um. Everything.

MADDIE: Oh. And it sounded better . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Everything went well?

MADDIE: . . . than practice and it sounded better because we learned . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Looking at Maddie] You thought that it went better than when you practiced?

MADDIE: [Nodding].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Cool. Um . . . What do you think you could have done better in the Coffee House this morning?

RYAN: In the . . .

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: I just asked that.

MADDIE: [Standing up and fidgeting feet]. Not did this. Or knocked over the piano. Not did this [fidgeting fingers].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Oh, like not, not fidget . . .

MADDIE: Yes.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: . . . and stuff?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Looking to Ryan]. What do you think could have gone better?

RYAN: What could have gone better? You already asked me that.

MADDIE: Not, not not being told that that the black line and just this . . .

RYAN: [Smiling]. Oh yeah.
MADDIE: . . . and just this [pointing to heel] part was hanging out, and then everyone pushed me up in the front. That didn’t go well.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing]. Okay, so what is choir?

RYAN: What is choir? Choir is where you sing? Can I have a dictionary?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Laughing].

MADDIE: Choir is a place to sing where a group a people. [Claps, throws hands in air] In church!

RYAN: Can I have a dictionary?

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: [Looking at Maddie]. What’d you say? In church?

MADDIE: [Nodding].

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Mmhmm. Umm . . . okay. Do you have anything else you want to tell me?

RYAN: Um, you did [pointing to Maddie]. Me no.

TEACHER-RESEARCHER: Oh, you wanted to ask about the sheets. Let’s go in and grab the sheets. Thanks guys!
Appendix N

SAMPLE TIMELINE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Events</th>
<th>Week 1 (10/2)</th>
<th>Week 2 (10/9)</th>
<th>Week 3 (10/16)</th>
<th>Week 4 (10/23)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formed groups. Silvia got guitar/guitar on iPad. Ashley improvised at piano. Brittany grabbed staff paper, interested in talking.</td>
<td></td>
<td>4:41</td>
<td>16:51</td>
<td>22:50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Created introduction with ukulele and piano vamp, and notated on staff paper.</td>
<td></td>
<td>16:51</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewed introduction and revised, adding more of a baseline. Silvia notated additions. Ashley improvised for a melody, and they recorded it to notate later.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>22:50</td>
<td>17:56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to pick a topic for a song, but never did. Decided not to use Ashley's recording for the melody. Give up and practice intro.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Different. Talking about it, iPad as resource, playing piano.</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Formal. Decided on time signature and key signature. Silvia improvised on the ukalele, and Ashley created a piano part to match. They discovered that they fit together, and Silvia revised a bit before they finalized it.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informal/formal. Improvising/revising but also notating.</td>
<td>Informal. Lots of talking. Singing different songs, off-task much of the time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics of Conversation</th>
<th>Week 1 (10/2)</th>
<th>Week 2 (10/9)</th>
<th>Week 3 (10/16)</th>
<th>Week 4 (10/23)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Form, ideas for lyrics, how to approach process.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Key signature. Time signature.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling of song: happy, sad.</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order in which to do things: tune first then topic or topic then tune. Distraction of group.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>