

Perceptions of Meaningfulness  
Among High School Instrumental Musicians

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Musical Arts

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May 2012

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this multiple case study was to investigate what students in three high school music groups perceived as most meaningful about their participation. I also examined the role that context played in shaping students' perceptions, and sought potential principles underlying meaning and value in instrumental ensembles.

Over the course of six months I conducted a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with six student wind ensemble members, five student guitar class members, and six jazz band members at three high schools in Winnipeg, Canada. I interviewed the participants' music teachers and school principals, observed rehearsals and performances, and spoke informally with parents and peers. Drawing upon praxial and place philosophies, I examined students' experiences within the context of each music group, and looked for themes across the three groups.

What students perceived to be meaningful about their participation was multifaceted and related to fundamental human concerns. Students valued opportunities to achieve, to form and strengthen relationships, to construct identities as individuals and group members, to express themselves and communicate with others, and to engage with and through music. Although these dimensions were common to students in all three groups, students experienced and made sense of them differently, and thus experienced meaningful participation in multiple, variegated ways. Context played a substantial role in

shaping not only the dimensions of meanings most salient to participants but also the ways that music experiences became meaningful for those involved.

What students value and find meaningful about their participation in instrumental music education has been neither well documented nor thoroughly explored. This study raises questions about the ways that meaningful musical engagement might extend beyond the boundaries of school, and contributes student perspectives sorely needed in ongoing conversations concerning the relevance of music education in students' lives.

This work is dedicated to my grandparents, Beth and Don Peto

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to the many people who have supported me over the course of this study. Heartfelt thanks to my advisor and committee chairperson, Dr. Sandra Stauffer, and to the members of my committee, Dr. Jeffrey Bush, Dr. Margaret Schmidt, Dr. Jill Sullivan, and Dr. Evan Tobias, for their invaluable support and guidance in shaping this document.

I am grateful to the teachers, administrators, and especially the students who participated in this study and who shared their music experiences with me. Without their generosity this study would not have been possible.

Thank you to my doctoral compadres—Wes Brewer, Lori Gray, Keith Kelly, Steve Martin, Michelle McConkey, and Sam Tsugawa—for contributing so substantially to one of the richest periods of my life. Thank you especially to Jeananne Nichols for your incredible support and friendship.

Finally, thank you to my family. You are the foundation on which everything good in my life is built. Thanks Mom, Dad, Brent, and especially Sonia for your love and encouragement.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

My relationship with school music has not always been easy. A devoted pianist and enthusiastic member of our elementary school choir, I entered the seventh grade eager to conquer the trumpet. Band was a bitter disappointment. I disliked my new classmates and teacher, hated the music we played, and rarely practiced. Each term, band contributed the lone C—always by one percentage point—to the collection of A’s on my report card. I was ineligible for the school honor roll for three years running.

When the time came to select courses for high school, the opportunity to play piano in the school jazz band proved impossible to resist. Having vowed never again to unlatch my trumpet case, I tried to talk my way out of the co-requisite band class. Luckily, I was unsuccessful. Within weeks most of my free time was spent in and around the band room. I switched to the French horn and began to practice with an older student each morning before school. Soon after, I was invited to join the school’s top instrumental ensemble. Three years later I chose a career in music education, hoping to offer students an ensemble experience that was as transformational as what I had experienced.

What makes music education meaningful to students, and how do ensemble experiences become highly meaningful? Are experiences prized when they fulfill individual needs? Do the needs, desires, and attitudes of the ensemble members influence what is perceived as meaningful? What role does the teacher play in facilitating meaningful band experiences, and what part does music itself

play? I have reflected at length on what made my high school music experiences so important to me, particularly in contrast to what I perceived as a mundane middle school experience. In the years since high school, I have been a member of many instrumental ensembles. None has felt as meaningless as my junior high band, nor has any had the deep and lasting impact of my high school wind ensemble. What made the difference?

Music educators generally acknowledge the importance of making education meaningful. Leonhard and House (1972) wrote, “Without meaning there can be no learning. The meaning may be obscure or scanty, or it may be of an entirely different order than we intend it to be, but meaning of some kind is an essential ingredient of learning” (p. 122). Reimer (2003) proposed a philosophy of music education that might “provide a system of principles for guiding in creating and implementing useful and meaningful music education programs” (p. 2). The authors of the Housewright Declaration (1999) agree, “Music educators must lead the development of meaningful music instruction and experience” (Madsen & Music Educators National Conference (U.S.), 2000). Meaningful education, in the abstract at least, is easy to support. However, these statements beg further consideration. What is meant by meaningful? Whose perceptions of meaning are considered when planning and carrying out instruction?

Jellison addresses these questions in the MENC publication *Vision 2020* (2000) in a chapter entitled “How can all people continue to be involved in meaningful music participation?” She argues that teachers are in the best position and are the most qualified to decide what is meaningful for students. “Who better

to decide what music experiences are important and meaningful for students and adults than music teachers?” she asks (p. 134). Jellison’s remarks follow a well-worn path in music education. As Westerlund (2008) observes, the traditional views espoused by music educators “[do] not grant the student any particular authority when it comes to questions of value” (p. 84).

Jellison’s remarks also illustrate the ambiguous sense in which “meaningful” is used. Music teachers might well offer informed perspectives about what is meaningful *for* students and adults to know and do in music. Meaningful in this sense stands in for other terms, such as “worthwhile,” “valuable,” and “significant.” On the other hand, experiences that are meaningful *to* someone are personal and individual. In this sense, meaningful refers to that which is “valued,” “cared about,” or “prized” from a certain perspective. Music teachers may indeed be highly influential, but cannot dictate what means the most *to* the students with whom they work.

Understanding the aspects of music education that are most meaningful *to* students—upon which they place the most personal value—is an important step in making music education relevant in their lives. Music educators have focused much more intently on what is meaningful *for* students. Philosophers, advocates, policy-makers, and teachers have proposed and fiercely defended a variety of “ends” that they believe music and music education should serve. These stakeholders “propagate, then perpetuate, and eventually legitimate certain paradigms . . . they take to be real, good or valuable” (Regelski, 1997, p. 49). The

following overview outlines some of the philosophical and advocacy perspectives that have influenced professional discourse.

### **The Value and Meaning of Music Education: Professional Discourse**

#### **Utilitarianism**

Utilitarian roots run deep in the landscape of Western music education. Plato and Aristotle each referenced utilitarian benefits in their rationales for the teaching of music. Plato believed that music education promoted cultural values and traditions, and had a civilizing effect, and Aristotle argued that while music was not necessary or useful “in the same manner as reading and writing,” an education in music was valuable because it was “liberal or noble” (Mark, 1986, p. 69). The “extramusical” benefits of music education were equally foundational in its inclusion in early American schools. As Jorgensen observed, “proponents of performing as a musical good generally cite religious, experiential, physiological, social, and cultural reasons. Returning to the roots of public school music education in the early nineteenth century, we see these sorts of justifications invoked” (2008, p. 137). In 1838, the Boston School Committee adopted music as a curricular subject because “it had met the same requirements as other school subjects—it had been judged in terms of potential for developing children morally, physically, and intellectually” (Mark, 1986, p. 70).

Utilitarian rationales often form the base of contemporary music education advocacy efforts. Supportmusic.com, a joint initiative of the National Association



for Music Education<sup>1</sup> and the National Association of Music Merchants (NAMM), cites research linking music education with improved cognitive abilities, social skills, discipline, and overall success in life. In response to the question “Why learn music in school?” a brochure available on supportmusic.com (National Association for Music Education & National Association of Music Merchants, 2007) offers the following:

Because music . . .

- Keeps students engaged in school and less likely to drop out
- Improves the atmosphere for learning
- Helps students achieve in other academic subjects like math, science and reading
- Helps communities share ideas and values among cultures and generations
- Is a disciplined human endeavor with intrinsic value to society (p. 2)

While utilitarian reasons to value music education are multiple and varied, some argue that they are an insufficient foundation upon which to support music education and are antithetical to the true value of music education. In the 1960s Charles Leonhard of the University of Illinois and Allen Britton of the University of Michigan “were the foremost early leaders away from the utilitarian philosophy” (Mark, 1996, p. 57). Britton first articulated the philosophy that later became known as aesthetic education in 1958, which was “characterized by total emphasis on the aesthetic development of the child and rejection of extramusical

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<sup>1</sup> Formerly MENC: The National Association for Music Education

values as part of the philosophical justification of music education” (Mark, 1982, p. 18). Britton lamented that many advocates for music education “tend to place too heavy a reliance upon ancillary values which music may certainly serve but which cannot, in the end, constitute its justification” (1958, p. 195).

Leonhard (1965) agreed with Britton, arguing:

The business of the school is to help young people undergo meaningful experience and arrive at a system of values that will be beneficial to society. . . . While reliance on statements of the instrumental value of music may well have convinced some reluctant administrator more fully to support the music program, those values cannot stand close scrutiny, because they are not directly related to music and are not unique to music. (p. 43)

Some four decades later, Gee (2002) cautioned against the reliance on utilitarian aims to justify music education in contemporary advocacy efforts. She points out that educators are often persuaded or find it necessary to “sell” the benefits of music education by touting values that are inconsistent with their true motivations for teaching. In “The ‘Use and Abuse’ Of Arts Advocacy and Its Consequences for Music Education,” Gee writes, “Organized advocacy initiatives inform us how to talk and think about art in relation to ‘quality of life,’ ‘community cohesion,’ ‘economic impact,’ and ‘educational reform’” (p. 953). The result, she argues, is that “our ‘most precious’ artistic and intellectual pleasures [are] presented to others in a package that is unrecognizable to ourselves and largely beside the point . . .” (p. 953). Jorgensen (2008) concurs:

. . . outside the public sphere, and sometimes within it, music teachers have believed in musical performance for its own sake since Antiquity. And wherever musicians have been in charge of music education, they have justified performing through musical arguments rather than in other ways. (p. 138)

Despite these critiques, utilitarian or “extramusical” rationales for music education remain prevalent in discourse surrounding music education. However beginning in the 1950s these rationales were challenged by a movement toward aestheticism.

### **Aestheticism**

According to the tenets of aestheticism, the value of music is intrinsic to the music itself. Alperson (1991) notes that aesthetic education seeks to heighten the appreciation of these intrinsic goods through “disinterested” perception of an art object, undertaken “for the sake of its contemplation alone, apart from any personal, moral, political, or otherwise practical interest or purpose it might have” (p. 219).

One of the earliest proponents of aesthetic music education was Harry S. Broudy who, in the early 1950s, began writing about aesthetic education as a means to achieve a richer and more satisfying life. He argued that education should refine one’s tastes toward connoisseurship, and he promoted creating and appreciating in arts education (Colwell, 1992). Broudy believed that this approach could reduce emotional tension in adolescents, enrich experience, reinforce mental fluidity, and serve as a source of “durable and almost

inexhaustible enjoyment” (Broudy, 1951). While these might be considered utilitarian benefits, Broudy’s view of aesthetic education as “an education of feeling” has endured in the work of Reimer and others.

Broudy was heavily influenced by the work of Susanne Langer and Leonard Meyer, both of whom sought a connection between musical form and the emotional responses associated with musical experiences. Langer (1957) took up Kant’s aesthetic philosophy and argued that music is cognitive, “a particular instance of symbol-making in which humans engage in order to make meaning” (Countryman, p. 4). She posited an “isomorphic, symbolic relationship between musical pattern and feeling” (Bowman, 2003, p. 5). Meyer (1956, 1967, 1969, 1973) built on Dewey’s theories relating expectation and emotion. A music theorist, Meyer believed that the meaning of music could be found by analyzing its form (Colwell, 1992).

Reimer developed an aesthetic philosophy of music influenced by Broudy and Leonhard that both extended and differed in many ways from the work of his mentors. His *A Philosophy of Music Education* (1970) “offered the music profession a challenging and affirming image of itself . . . at a time when educational practices in general were subject to uncomfortably intense scrutiny” (Bowman, 2003, p. 2), and has since had a significant influence on the philosophical discourse of the profession (Alperson, 1991). Reimer argues that “the art of music is a basic way of ‘knowing’ about reality” (1970, p. 9). He views music as a presentational symbol that expresses the patterns and forms of

human feeling, and argues that music education is essentially an education of feeling.

Over three editions (1970, 1989, 2003) Reimer's thinking evolved on the subject of music and meaning. In 1970, Reimer felt strongly that "the experience of music as expressive form is the be-all and end-all of music education, for such experience is the only way of sharing music's aesthetic meaning" (Reimer, 1970, p. 69). The purpose of music education was to enhance aesthetic sensitivity and depth of perception; student *opinions* of particular works were beside the point. "Art does not exist in order to be 'liked,' in the sense of providing simple, transitory pleasures," wrote Reimer. "The way to share art's power is to aesthetically experience it—not to taste it to find out whether it pleases the palate" (p. 84). Reimer was chiefly concerned with whether a work of art was fully perceived and understood.

Over thirty years later, in the third edition of *A Philosophy of Music Education* (2003), Reimer reaffirms the fundamental premise upon which he bases his aesthetic philosophy: "the nature and value of music education are determined primarily by the nature and value of music" (p. ix). However, he adopts a more moderate and pluralistic stance on many aspects of his philosophy, including perspectives on meaning. "All the theorizing in the world cannot, by itself, yield musical meaning," Reimer writes. He continues:

Such meaning occurs within each individual who experiences music, of any sort, encountered in any way. Both the music and the person engaged with it contribute to the meaning. *What music means, then, is everything a*

*person experiences when involved with it.* Music education exists to nurture people's potential to gain deeper, broader, more significant meanings from musical involvements, by helping them know within and how, assisted by knowing about and why. (p. 165)

Reimer refers to "meaning" in relation to knowledge, a position Alperson (1991) dubs "aesthetic cognitivism" (p. 227). According to Reimer, ". . . education increases knowledge (what is perceived and understood) so that life can be more meaningful (the significance, or import, or sense of what is known)" (2003, p. 134). Reimer believes that cognition is multifaceted and that there are many ways of knowing (p. 140), and he argues that aesthetic meanings not conveyed or even conceived of through language are a unique and invaluable form of knowledge. While Reimer emphasizes the ability of music to make experiences special and views music education as an education of feeling, he does not explore in any detail what students might find most meaningful.

### **Praxialism**

In 1991, drawing on Francis Sparshott's theory of the arts (1982), philosopher Philip Alperson suggested praxialism as an alternative to aesthetic views of music. The praxial view offers an attempt "to understand art in terms of the variety of meaning and values evidenced in actual practice in particular cultures" (p. 233). The basic aim of a praxial philosophy of music, says Alperson, "is to understand, from a philosophical point of view, just what music has meant to people, an endeavor that includes but is not limited to a consideration of the function of music in aesthetic contexts" (p. 234). Because music is grounded in

human practices, “the results of human action cannot be understood apart from the motives, intentions, and productive considerations of the agents who bring them into being” (p. 236).

David Elliott and Thomas Regelski each built on Alperson’s praxial conception of music education, and have contributed significantly to philosophical discourse in music education. Elliott (1995) takes as his starting point the fact that music is, at root, a human activity—something that people do. Musical practice is composed of two interlocking forms of human activity: music making and music listening, and Elliott believes that the most important thing students should learn is musicianship, a rich form of procedural knowledge that can be gained through performing, improvising, composing, arranging, conducting, and listening.

Elliott identifies self-growth, self-knowledge, musical enjoyment (or “flow”), and self-esteem as the most important outcomes of both music and music education. Citing the work of Csikszentmihalyi (1990), Elliott argues that human beings “have a drive to know our own capacities, to bring order to consciousness, or to gain self-knowledge . . . [and] strive to ensure the integrity and growth of the self” (1995, p. 113). For Elliott, music and music education have value as means by which to accomplish these aims.

Regelski’s approach to praxialism differs from Elliott’s in some key respects. While Elliott interprets Aristotle’s notion of “praxis” or “right action” to mean “active engagement in productive music making” (1995, p. 175), Regelski critiques this as an incomplete and limiting interpretation of an important concept

(2005, p. 227). He evaluates “right action” according to the requirements of human situations and the goods that particular musics are called upon to serve.

Regelski draws on pragmatism, existentialism, phenomenology, and “practice theory” as well as “expanded notions of praxis from Marxism, neo-Marxism (critical theory), other social theory, sociology, and postmodernism that offer a richer and more comprehensive concept of musical praxis” (p. 227). In contrast to Elliott, who values understanding brought about through the performance of various established musical practices, Regelski promotes the pragmatic notion that “the goods of music . . . are rooted . . . in the situated and highly specific conditions of the here and now” (1997, p. 26) and in the practical consequences that come about from their use. He likewise locates musical meaning “not in disembodied, metaphysical hypotheses concerning aesthetic meaning” (2005, p. 234) but with individuals and the perceptions and values that arise from their practices. “[M]usic’s meaning and value,” he writes, “are in and for personal agency, and such personal agency constructs an infinite variety of meanings from the same musical affordances according to personal and other situated conditions” (p. 235). Moreover, Regelski argues:

Meaning is thus not received ready-made but is uniquely apprehended or constructed by each individual. Self-actualization is, in fact, a matter of self-creation; and self-actualization is an agency that both reveals one’s values and proposes them as models for others to explore. Learning, valuing, and meaning, then, are all highly unique products of personal agency. (p. 227)



## **Additional Perspectives**

Philosophical perspectives influenced by postmodernism, feminism, and critical theory also exert influence on contemporary educational discourse. These perspectives challenge music educators to consider issues of power and to attend to multiple viewpoints and voices that have been marginalized or silenced.

Various scholars have argued that education should disrupt the traditional teacher/learner dichotomy typified in many music education classrooms and should empower students (e.g. Abrahams, 2005a, 2005b, 2006, 2007; Allsup, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008; Benedict & Schmidt, 2007; Green, 1988, 2002; Green, 2005, 2008; P. Schmidt, 2005; Schmidt, 2008a, 2008b).

Drawing upon the work of Paulo Freire (1997; 2000), Patrick Schmidt (2005) argues that education is only effective when it prompts “a critical understanding of the relationship between word and world” (p. 5) and contends that music educators should empower their students to challenge dominant discourses about who they are and to what they ought to aspire. “Personal meaning, interpretation, self-social-cultural understanding and expression, as well as a wider knowledge of the world should come first in the conceptualization of music education,” he argues (p. 8). Abrahams (2006) likewise draws from Freire and suggests that music education should empower students through conscientization, when students “know that they know” (p. 2). For true learning to have occurred, Abrahams contends, music education should “enable students to become more musical and better musicians and in the process effect change in both the students and their teacher” (2005a, p. 8).

Other scholars, including Bowman (2000, 2004, 2005c), Bresler (2004), Cusick (1994), Hebert (2009), Stublely (1998, 1999, 2000, 2002), and Shusterman (2000, 2004, 2008) contend that the body plays an important role in musical experience. Rather than focus solely on musical knowledge as a cognitive phenomenon, these scholars contend that music is experienced in the body and is known both cognitively and somatically.

Cusick (1994) observes that, for performers, works of music are something to be *done*. She contends that performers are therefore “knowers whose knowledge comes from their bodies and their minds” (p. 19). Bowman adopts a similar perspective, adding that musical knowledge “draws together *knowing, being, and doing* as nothing else does” (p. 4). “To me,” Bowman says, “music is a unique way of being in the world in no small part because it’s a unique way of being in the body” (2000, p. 4).

Hebert (2009) connects embodiment and meaning in music education. He points to chills and other “intense visceral responses” that people experience in music and observes that musical experience is reflected in embodied metaphors such as “movements” of symphonies and “high” and “low” pitch (pp. 47-48). “Musical meaning,” Hebert argues, “is deeply rooted in embodied experience” (p. 48). He continues:

Musicianship is both subjective and culturally shared, and warrants being conceived of in terms of embodied practice. It is not a simple accumulation of musical information and skills but the sharing of a lived practice—shared in a community of practitioners (of whatever kind of

musicking is at stake) and available only within that community, since the practice in question is “defined” or “carried” collectively, not in the mind of any individual practitioner. (p. 48)

### **Need for the Study**

The discourse surrounding any profession is powerful; it creates and reinforces specific practices and perspectives while marginalizing others. While student viewpoints are sometimes considered in music education, the profession appears to view questions of value as the domain of adult professionals. Inquiry into what is meaningful *to* students requires a shift in focus from the perspectives and values of those adults empowered to make educational decisions to the perspectives and values of those engaged in the day-to-day business of learning.

Predominant rationales for music education have long been guided by adult perspectives and priorities and grounded in what adults believe is valuable *for* students. Music educators have neither carefully attended to what students find meaningful, nor developed a sophisticated understanding of why certain aspects of participation become meaningful to them. The philosophies summarized above do not necessarily take into consideration the perspectives of those learners they purport to serve. Conversely, researchers who do look at meaning from student perspectives (e.g. Hylton, 1980) do not necessarily ground their work in philosophical thinking. The intersection of student perspectives of meaning and educational philosophy is fertile ground for exploration.

What is most meaningful *to* students has bearing on issues of relevance and efficacy. Kratus (2007) observes that while “the relationship between

adolescents and their music is potent and deeply personal” (p. 45), music education as a whole has become disconnected from the prevailing culture and thus flirts with irrelevance. He urges educators to explore ways to make music education “potent and irresistible” and to “connect people to music in ways that are both personally fulfilling and educationally valid” (p. 46).

The current study will benefit music education by providing much-needed insight into what students find meaningful about their participation in school music, the conditions that facilitate and impede meaning in various contexts, and the ways in which meanings are constructed and understood. It will put meat on the bones of existing theory, building on the findings of Hylton (1980, 1981) and others who claim that meaning is a multidimensional construct. In addition, it will shed light on the ways in which dimensions of meaning impact music education.

Inquiry into what students involved in school music ensembles value and find meaningful is a relatively recent undertaking. This is due, in part, to the late emergence of qualitative inquiry and its attendant epistemological perspectives in mainstream educational research. In addition, postmodern, feminist, and critical theorists have encouraged researchers to attend more closely to a variety of perspectives, including those of people not in positions of power and whose views are otherwise overlooked (e.g. Apple, 1999; Apple, 2000, 2006; Bakhtin & Holquist, 1981; Foucault & Rabinow, 1984, 1997; Freire, 2000; Lather, 1991a, 1991b; Lyotard, 1984; Lyotard, Harvey, & Roberts, 1993; Shor & Freire, 1987; St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000).

Researchers have approached that which students value and find meaningful obliquely through studies of motivation and attitude (e.g. Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Asmus, 1986a, 1986b; Austin, 1988; Boswell, 1991; Bowles, 1991; Hallman, 2002; J. C. Jorgensen, 1974; Mudrick, 1997; C. P. Schmidt, 2005; Werpy, 1995). These studies examine the relationships between factors such as performance achievement, music experience, and musical aptitude and the motivation and/or attitude of participants. Addressing another aspect of motivation and attitude in music education, other researchers have employed attribution theory (Asmus, 1986a, 1986b; Austin & Vispoel, 1992, 1998; Weiner, 1974) to examine students' perceptions of their success or failure in music.

Previous motivation and attitude studies are predominantly quantitative; typical results are therefore broad, general, and lacking in contextual detail. While these studies offer important generalizations about meaning, they cannot provide a nuanced understanding of how students come to value or derive meaning from their participation. Just as grades may be motivational without being meaningful, measures of motivation cannot easily distinguish mere incentive from that which is prized.

Another group of related studies concerns intense or powerful experiences in music education. Maslow (1959, 1962, 1968, 1971) investigated "peak" experiences, which he understood as heightened moments of happiness and fulfillment. Maslow believed that peak experiences happened frequently during engagements with music, prompting interest within the music education community. Researchers have since examined peak experiences (Panzarella,

1977, 1980; Pennington, 1973; Sloboda, 2002), as well as “strong” (Gabrielsson & Lindsrom Wik, 2003), “intense” (Gabrielsson & Lindsrom Wik, 1989), and “powerful” experiences in music education. Other researchers (Custodero, 1997; Freer, 2003; Gangi, 1998; Jaros, 2008; Kraus, 2003; Matthews, 2003; Reinholdsson, 1998; Rybak, 1995; St. John, 2004; Sutton, 2004) have investigated heightened or “peak” musical experiences utilizing the theory of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2003; 1988). In this theory of motivation, an optimal balance of challenge, skill, and focused attention can lead to a state of flow, characterized by total immersion in the task, fulfillment, and a loss of sense of time. These studies document a particular phenomenon that may occur when students are engaged in something they value. However, my preliminary work (Cape, 2008) suggests that not all students who find music education meaningful experience this phenomenon.

A third group of related studies looks more specifically at what students perceive to be the meaning of participation in various school ensembles. Farrell’s (1972) study of urban adults participating in recreational vocal music and Hylton’s (1980) dissertation *The Meaning of High School Choral Experience and Its Relationship to Selected Variables* are foundational in this line of inquiry. As Hylton observed, “experts have stressed the importance of providing meaningful musical experiences, and numerous theories of meaning have been posited, [however] little is known about how students view their participation in high school choral ensembles” (p. 17). Hylton concluded that meaning was a multidimensional construct for high school choral students, a finding echoed in

subsequent quantitative studies of the meaning of school music ensembles (Mills, 1988; Sugden, 2005; Wayman, 2005).

Researchers (e.g. Adderley, Kennedy, & Berz, 2003; Arasi, 2006; Countryman, 2008; Dillon, 2001, 2007; Piekarz, 2006) have also employed qualitative methods to examine meaning and value in school music participation. Countryman (2008) investigated “the nature of the high school music experience” among former secondary school music students and found that for many participants self-making, community-making and music making were entwined dimensions of a holistic experience (pp. 225-26). Dillon (2001), too, found that meaning for students resided in personal, social, and cultural aspects of their participation. These and related findings support a multidimensional construct of meaning, and add depth and much-needed context to the generalizations provided by Hylton et al. The current study contributes to this qualitative body of literature by examining meaning within three distinct instrumental ensembles.

### **Research Questions**

In discourse about curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, and other aspects of school music, educators have primarily focused on what is meaningful *for* students. The aspects of school music that are meaningful *to* students and the ways that music education becomes meaningful are not well understood. This study provides a more detailed look at the phenomenon of meaningful music education by examining what students perceive as meaningful within particular contexts. It also explores the ways in which high school instrumental ensembles

become sites of meaningful engagement for students. The following questions guide this investigation:

1. What experiences or aspects of ensemble participation are most meaningful to students?
2. To what extent does context play a role in meaningful engagement?
3. Do the perceptions and experiences of ensemble participants suggest underlying principles of meaning and value within instrumental ensembles?

Discussions of meaning and value are hindered by the ambiguity of the terms involved. Many words associated with value have double meanings related to apprehension. For example, Dewey observed that “value” is commonly used both to indicate “*prizing*, in the sense of holding precious, dear (and various other nearly equivalent activities, like honoring, regarding highly), and *appraising* in the sense of putting a value upon, *assigning* value to” (1939, p. 5). Likewise, “meaningful” can be used to indicate that something is *prized*, such as a meaningful opportunity, or to signify something, as with a meaningful look.

Consider the following word pairs:

Meaning; Meaningful

Value; Valued

Appraise; Prize

Signify; Significant

Matter; Matters



The first word of each set can be understood as cognitive, objective, rational, “cool,” while the second word in each pairing can be understood as affective, subjective, intuitive, “warm.” The first word of each set is not inherently related to cognition, nor the second to affect (“significant,” for example, can refer to something in a cognitive sense), but the pairings illustrate how these words can be interpreted dualistically.

Meaning can be parsed further. Csikszentmihalyi illustrates three “meanings of meaning” that relate to his theory of optimal experience (1990). The first usage “points to the end, purpose, or significance of something, as in: *What is the meaning of life?*” (p. 216). The second usage “refers to a person’s intentions: *She usually means well*” (p. 216). The third sense in which meaning is used “refers to ordering information, as when one says: *Otorhinolaryngology means the study of ear, nose, and throat, or: Red sky in the evening means good weather in the morning*” (p. 216). All three of these usages are essentially cognitive, relating to perception and understanding. That Csikszentmihalyi explicates a theory of optimal experience without including an affective usage of meaning in his definitions warrants further consideration.

This study aims to examine what students find meaningful and why students value certain aspects of their participation. For the purposes of this study I use “meaningful” in an affective sense, referring to those experiences and aspects of participation that students value or prize for themselves.

## Chapter 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this review of literature I examine recent studies that provide insight into what individuals value or find meaningful about music participation and in music education. The first section includes studies of motivation, including reasons to which students attribute their success or failure in music, and motivation to participate in music. The second section reviews studies of peak experiences (Maslow, 1959, 1962, 1968, 1971) and peak-type experiences, and flow experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) in music. The third section examines studies of the meaning of ensemble participation. I then review two theoretical frameworks useful in understanding meaning: symbolic interactionism and a pragmatic conception of praxialism.

#### **Review of Studies Related to Students and Meaning**

##### **Motivation Studies**

What students find meaningful in music-making experiences has been approached obliquely through studies of motivation. While not all motivators are necessarily meaningful, empirical evidence and common sense suggest that meaningful experiences are powerful motivators. Thomas (1992) reviewed research on motivation and reported that music education researchers have focused primarily on the relationship between attitudes about music and self-esteem, self-concept of ability, and attributions of failure and success (e.g. Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Asmus, 1986b; Austin, 1988; Boswell, 1991; Bowles,

1991; Hallman, 2002; J. C. Jorgensen, 1974; Mudrick, 1997; C. P. Schmidt, 2005; Werpy, 1995).

Attribution theory (Weiner, 1974), which classifies students' attributions of their success and failure according to locus of control (internal and external) and stability over time (stable or unstable), has been explored in significant detail. Asmus developed the Measures of Motivation in Music survey (Asmus, 1986b, 1986, April; Asmus & Harrison, 1990) to examine motivating factors and magnitude of motivation. Participants' responses to survey items yield ratings of five motivational factors (effort, background, class environment, musical ability, and affect for music) and indicate the magnitude of their motivation with regard to personal commitment, school music, and music compared with other activities. Asmus (1986b) found that students' attributions shifted over time. Younger students were more likely to attribute their success or failure to effort, whereas older students were more likely to attribute their success or failure to innate ability. Asmus observed that the shift from effort to ability attributions took place during the sixth and seventh grades and noted that music teachers often have difficulties keeping students in music during these years.

Research into motivation has frequently identified two dominant learning orientations: task/learning and performance/ego (e.g. Dweck, 1986; Nicholls, 1984; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Marsh, Craven, Hinkley, and Debus (2003) examined the "implicit but largely untested assumption" (p. 189) that these two learning orientations were higher-order factors of academic achievement motivation. Marsh et al. found that task orientation among high-achieving Australian students

in grades 3-6 was correlated with mastery and intrinsic motivation orientations, whereas performance orientation was related to motivation orientations of competition, ego, failure avoidance, and success approach. C. P. Schmidt (2005) reexamined these findings within the context of instrumental music education. Using motivation variables drawn from Asmus and Harrison's (1990) measure (mastery, intrinsic, individual, cooperative, competitive, ego, success approach, failure avoidance) and adapting motivation orientation scales used by Marsh et al. (2003), Schmidt generated a survey and administered it to 300 band students in grades 7-12. Results indicated that ratings of performance and effort "were most strongly correlated with self-concept and intrinsic motivation, respectively" (p. 134) and revealed three motivation orientations. Learning/task orientation was positively correlated with practice time, ratings of performance and effort, solo festival and private-lesson experience, and grade level; performance/ego orientation was negatively correlated with grade level and solo festival ratings; and individual orientation correlated positively with ratings of performance and effort, and solo and festival ratings (p. 134). Schmidt summarized:

Overall, instrumental students in this study tended to report that their own success was best defined by mastery and cooperative orientations, while they placed less emphasis on competitive and ego orientations.

Participants tended to agree with statements in which success was perceived as reaching personal goals, and sensing improvement or accomplishment. Similarly, subjects on average tended to agree that they learned the most or did their best when working with other students. The

results suggest that students may respond best to the intrinsic or cooperative aspects of instrumental music, rather than its extrinsic or competitive aspects. (p. 144)

Studies of motivation to participate in a particular ensemble or activity address value and meaning more directly than those dealing with attribution theory. Seago (1993) used the items from Hylton's (1980) *Choral Meaning Survey* (discussed later in this chapter) to study motivational factors influencing participation in selected southern Baptist church choirs in Houston, Texas. Seago collected data from 20 directors and 956 members, a majority of whom were female (72%), Caucasian (87%) and between 31-49 years of age (55%). Findings suggest that choir participants are motivated by all of the factors identified by Hylton, including achievement, spiritualistic, musical-artistic, psychological, communicative, and integrative factors (p. 82). Whereas high school student participants in Hylton's (1980) study found the opportunity to achieve to be most meaningful, participants in Seago's study rated spirituality as the strongest motivation. The importance of achievement for students and spirituality for churchgoers, while perhaps not surprising, suggests that meaning (or motivation) may be contextually situated. Seago suggests that "participant motivation is enhanced when directors organize and utilize opportunities for socialization, skill development, challenges associated with performance and operate within positive psychological environments" (p. 92).

Mudrick (1997) examined what motivated students to participate in four successful high school choral programs in south central Pennsylvania. He

selected and interviewed forty students<sup>2</sup> over the course of two months (p. 45) and also interviewed the choir directors at each of the four sites. Mudrick concluded that students in these successful high school choral programs were motivated by:

1. feeling authentically competent and autonomous in performance
2. feeling relatedness, having fun with friends, and meeting new persons
3. having a variety of high-quality performance opportunities
4. being part of an elitist program
5. feeling musically secure because of advantageous rehearsal scheduling
6. continuing a family legacy of participation in their program
7. continuing the school's tradition of excellence in Broadway-style musicals
8. upholding the school's reputation of success in PMEA and MENC festivals
9. preparing for trips, competitions, and adjudication [sic] festivals
10. performing high-quality, eclectic (multicultural) repertoire
11. having dedicated, rigorous, energetic, and charismatic directors
12. following directors' specific, clearly articulated musical goals
13. integrating their directors' rules and values
14. understanding that hard work leads to success in all aspects of life
15. receiving honest, appropriate assessment from their directors
16. acknowledging their directors' care and concern for them
17. responding favorably to their directors' senses of humor. (pp. 156-157)

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<sup>2</sup> Student quotations are not attributed to individual students, and it is unclear whether this figure represents number of students interviewed at each school, or the total number of student who participated in the study.

Mudrick presents four relatively homogenous portraits of successful choir ensembles and the motivations of participants within them. He cautions that the results were produced in particular contexts and may not be transferrable to dissimilar contexts.

Studies concerning students' motivations to participate in school music and those concerning perceptions of meaning and value may cover common ground, however the implications can differ considerably. Researchers who conduct motivation studies often promote their findings as a means by which to move students toward higher achievement and deeper commitment. Authors of meaning and value studies, on the other hand, aim their findings toward increased enjoyment, quality of life, and depth of experience. While there may be considerable overlap, the basic orientation differs nonetheless. The next section examines studies examining optimal or peak experiences in music.

### **Studies of “Peak” and Related Experiences**

In the 1950s and 1960s, humanistic psychologists such as Maslow (1959, 1962, 1968, 1971) and Rogers (Rogers, 1969; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994) concentrated on studies of human fulfillment and meaningful living. Maslow wrote extensively about “self-actualization,” by which a person reaches the pinnacle of their humanity and becomes “fully human” (Maslow, 1971). He argued that “the goal of education—the human goal, the humanistic goal—is ultimately the ‘self-actualization’ of a person” (p. 149) and suggested that the arts “could very well serve as a model . . . by which we might rescue the rest of the school curriculum from the value-free, value-neutral, goal-lacking

meaninglessness into which it has fallen” (p. 153). According to Maslow, “peak experiences” or “moments of highest happiness” move one toward self-actualization and can be accessed through, among other things, music and art.

Music education researchers have since investigated the phenomenon of peak experiences (Panzarella, 1977, 1980; Pennington, 1973; Sloboda, 2002), as well as “strong” (Gabrielsson & Lindsrom Wik, 2003), “intense” (Gabrielsson & Lindsrom Wik, 1989), “significant” (Finnäs, 2006), and “powerful” (Cape, 2008) experiences in school music contexts.

Pennington (1973) defines the musical peak experience as “a highly positive emotional experience lasting from approximately a minute to several hours in which music was sounding and was perceived by the individual as the primary cause of his experience” (p. 3). He designed the Musical Peak Experience Scale to address the deficit of information about the nature of the musical peak experience. The instrument attempts to measure the intensity and importance of peak experiences in people’s lives.

The pilot study, a survey administered to 95 elementary education majors, asked participants to describe the most significant musical experience they ever had. Pennington described the most difficult analysis task as deciding whether or not the reported experience was indeed a “peak” experience, and if so, to what degree. Respondents sometimes described what they considered peak experience but which had none of the common characteristics or, conversely, described the characteristics of a peak experience but did not rate it as such. From the pilot



study, Pennington concluded “it might be possible and desirable to make a more controlled study of peak experience in music” (p. 9).

The final version of the Scale consisted of two forms of 20 questions each, the first form dealing with peak experience and the second concerning self-actualization. The primary sample group for the main study consisted of 556 students at five Ohio colleges. A quarter of these students returned unusable forms, which were eliminated from the study. Many of the 138 eliminated forms were found unusable because the participant described “musical experience participation in musical group over an extended period of time” despite written and oral instructions not to do so (p. 69). Pennington suggests the relationship of extended experiences to peak experiences is an area for further investigation. Other forms were eliminated because participants misunderstood directions or elected to complete the form but provided what Pennington considered to be obviously insincere responses (p. 70). From the original sample of 556 students, only 245 participants answered all questions and talked about specified types of musical experience; these respondents became the Refined Primary Sample. From that group, 40 respondents participated in secondary testing, including the Shostrom Personal Orientation Inventory, the Gaston Test of Musicality, the Seashore Measures of Musical Talents, and a researcher-designed Musical Mood Perception Test.

Pennington found the Musical Peak Experience Scale to be internally reliable (consistently around .90), with scores approximating a normal distribution. Three variables significantly correlated to “peak-score” (the overall

score measured by the scale): the duration of the peak emotion, the musical experience as cause to seek new musical experiences, and habits of attending live music events (p. 114). Personal factors, socioeconomic factors, and musical facts were non-significant correlates to peak-score. Pennington concluded that the Musical Peak Experience Scale is a viable research instrument for measuring “the intensity and importance of musical peak experiences in persons’ lives” (p. 9). The high number of responses eliminated because they fell outside Pennington’s operational definition of a peak experience suggests that people experience a range of “significant musical experiences” that, while not considered peak experiences, may still be meaningful.

In a study of peak experiences in music drawing on Maslow’s work, Panzarella (1980) sought to “define more precisely in phenomenological terms the nature of peak experiences” in music (p. 71). Panzarella devised a questionnaire based on characteristics of peak responses identified by Maslow in which respondents were asked to report an “intense joyous experience” of listening to music or looking at visual art (p. 71). Participants were asked to describe the temporal stages of the experience (the beginning, build-up, most intense point, and after-effects), to report personal information and art or music background, and to complete a number of personality tests. Respondents were allowed to fill out the questionnaire on their own time, and some took weeks to do so. Most participants participated in the requested follow-up interview, which provided more in-depth information about responses. Panzarella recruited participants from art galleries and concert venues, and from the acquaintances of those who

agreed to participate. Thus, some people may have had a higher degree of connoisseurship than the average person. Of the nearly 500 people who expressed interest in participating and received a questionnaire, only a quarter of the participants followed through with complete responses. Panzarella followed up with those who had received but had not completed their questionnaire and found that in many cases the very value of the experience led to their reticence to report it. Participants either couldn't adequately describe their experience or worried that the act of description would diminish the experience and inhibit its recurrence. Those who did complete the questionnaire, however, reported that doing so was a positive reminder of the experience and "in most cases had set off afterwaves of other peaks" (p. 72). A total of 103 participated in the study, with 52 describing visual art experiences and 51 reporting music experiences. Of those reporting music experiences, 40 reported that they played a musical instrument.

From the questionnaire results, Panzarella identified four kinds of experiences. In "renewal ecstasies," participants were able to see the present world as better and more beautiful than they had before (p. 74). "Motor-sensory ecstasies" consisted of physical feelings such as "'high' and 'floating' sensations" (p. 76), quickened heartbeat, chills, shivers, or a desire to move. "Withdrawal ecstasy" experiences involved "a loss of contact with both the physical and social environment" (p. 76). These experiences were equally common in music and art encounters and involved a narrowing of perception "as attention [was] riveted to the aesthetic stimulus" (p. 76). Finally, "fusion-emotional ecstasies" were

experiences of “merging with an aesthetic object” (p. 77). Fusion-emotional ecstasies represented 27% of musical accounts.

Panzarella analyzed three temporal stages of the experience: onset, climax, and post-climactic. In the first stage, cognitive phenomena were most prevalent. Stage two brought about a loss or gain of motor responses, and in visual art the losses of normal functioning including “loss of sense of time, loss of spatial orientation, loss of reality testing, and loss of sensations” (p. 79). Stage three was where most emotional and transformational responses took place. A majority of social responses happened in stage three music experiences, and motivational responses such as a desire to paint happened most in stage-three visual art experiences. These effects of peak experiences were reported to be long-lasting or permanent by 90% of respondents.

Panzarella reports that while classical or “serious” music triggered the majority of peak experiences, responses indicated a wider variety of music than previously thought could lead to a peak experience. Panzarella also noted, “The number of cognitive perceptual responses in music reports was virtually equaled by the number of sensations . . . [suggesting that] music is a more physical experience than most aesthetic theories take into account” (p. 83).

Finnäs (2006) investigated ninth-grade Fenno-Swedish students’ descriptions of “significant” experiences with music, visual art, film, theatre, literature, dance, and nature. He examined the frequency of students’ experiences in each area, and compared the frequency of experiences in active and passive modes of confronting music. This line of investigation stems from Maslow’s

earlier work on “peak experiences,” as well as subsequent studies by Pennington (1973), Panzarella (1977), and Gabrielsson (Gabrielsson & Lindsrom Wik, 1989, 2003). Finnäs notes that these kinds of studies usually involve asking participants to describe earlier musical experiences; particularly in the case of adults, these experiences may have happened many years earlier. He also observes that earlier research focuses mainly on adults.

Finnäs surveyed 776 fifteen- and sixteen-year-old students living in rural and urbanized areas of Finland and asked them to describe “significant” experiences—particularly those that had occurred within the last two to three months. Students participated in several warm-up activities that made clear what kinds of experiences they were to report; experiences not “clearly related to some aesthetic area” (p. 319) were considered irrelevant. A pilot study indicated three most commonly reported “irrelevant” strong experiences with music: “those connected with love and friendship, with one’s own or others’ accidents and with one’s own or others’ successes and failures in various activities; reporting such experiences were [sic] not ‘allowed’” (p. 319). Experiences that occurred in a musical setting but that were described in social rather than musical terms (10) were classified as “social” events not belonging to any aesthetic area and not as musical experiences (p. 320).

Music generated the greatest number of significant experiences overall; however music generated fewer significant experiences for rural students than for students living in towns or in the capital city of Helsinki, and music was surpassed by encounters with nature among town girls. Of interest are the

relatively low frequencies of significant experiences in other arts areas such as visual art and dance. Finnäs did not detail the kinds of music with which students had significant experiences. He did note that a clear majority of reports concerned pop and rock music, that experiences related to rock band activities were almost always reported by boys, and that experiences connected to solo singing were only described by girls (p. 323).

Finnäs asked students to rate the strength of their experience on a scale from 4 to 10, with 4 indicating a “barely strong” experience and 10 indicating an “overwhelmingly strong” experience (p. 319). The strength ratings with the highest means came from encounters with music (8.1) and dance (8.5).

Performance was the strongest mode of engaging with music with a mean strength rating of 8.3. Finnäs suggested that, compared with earlier data for older participants, performance might be particularly important for generating feelings of competence and of social status and appreciation, “feelings which may play an especially crucial role in such teenagers’ lives” (p. 328).

Finnäs’ study, like many others, focuses on aesthetic experiences in music. Experiences that concerned relationships or that marked important events were deemed irrelevant to the study; social and personal contexts were excluded as were experiences outside of the recent past. Recent experiences might provide more data, but potentially important experiences may have happened some time earlier. Research is needed to investigate the experiences that aesthetic experience studies overlook.

Studies of peak-type experiences document a particular phenomenon that may be deeply valued by students. However, my preliminary work (Cape, 2008) suggests that not all students who find music education meaningful emphasize peak experiences. In the next section, I will review studies of a closely related experience that Csikszentmihalyi calls *flow*.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2003; 1988) developed a theory of optimal experience or “flow.” Growing out of the work of Maslow (1959, 1962, 1968, 1971) and other psychologists, and based on the accounts of hundreds of participants, Csikszentmihalyi describes flow as a state of “ordered consciousness” in which “people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (1990, p. 4). Flow is most likely to occur “when psychic energy—or attention—is invested in realistic goals, and when skills match the opportunities for action” (p. 6). A person in flow is fully absorbed in what she or he is doing, has clear goals and receives clear feedback, loses self-consciousness, and may lose sense of time while the activity is underway.

According to Csikszentmihalyi, flow theory relates directly to meaningful experiences and the creation of a meaningful life. “Creating meaning,” he explains, “involves bringing order to the contents of the mind by integrating one’s actions into a unified flow experience” (p. 216). A sense of purpose, resolution in the pursuit of one’s goals, and the harmony of consciousness that can result from

these endeavors have the capacity to “unify life and give it meaning by transforming it into a seamless flow experience” (pp. 217-18).

Csikszentmihalyi contends that music has the potential to organize the consciousness of those who attend to it, thereby potentially leading to flow experiences. Flow has been investigated in various musical contexts, including choirs (Gangi, 1998; Jaros, 2008; Matthews, 2003) and instrumental ensembles (Kraus, 2003), and across a broad age range extending from early childhood (Custodero, 1997; St. John, 2004) to late adulthood (Rybak, 1995).

Using flow theory as a lens, Gangi (1998) examined the nature of the musical/aesthetic experience of adolescent choral musicians over three years to determine how and in what ways their experiences changed over time. He examined the following dimensions of choral experience: “social aspects; play function; imitation without authenticity; seeking to please the maestro; producing a spectacle; or [*sic*] experiencing authenticity by integration of the body, intellect, imagination, and spirit; the experience in relation to the conductor, to the group, and to the audience” (p. 15). Gangi also considered the impact of the rehearsal/teaching method of the director.

Using a modified survey based on Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson’s (1990) study of visual experiences, Gangi surveyed student members of his own high school concert choir a total of six times over a period of three years. Of the approximately 175 choir members who participated each year, 25 students completed all questionnaires over the three years. From these, Gangi selected five participants “because of the richness of their responses” (p. 66) and, in part, “to



hold up these students' musical/aesthetic experience as a potential model for what could be for other choral groups" (p. 66). It was unclear whether Gangi selected participants based on the nature of their comments, the quantity of data they generated, or other criteria. Gangi coded these participants' responses and constructed a model of their experiences. This model examines numerous facets of students' experiences including: perceptual dimension; emotional dimension; intellectual dimension; communication dimension; attentional element; skills and challenges; discovery; human quality; temporal element; group experience; performer as perceiver and creator; preparation for the occurrence when the work can be perceived; ownership through perceiving/creating process; therapeutic or healing quality; sense of accomplishment; insight into author of the work; and different encounters with the same work.

Gangi found that the musical/aesthetic experience is multifaceted and individual. The musical/aesthetic experience changed for participants over time, but changed in different ways for different participants. Gangi noted that, though participating in the same rehearsal context, the participants' experiences were remarkably varied. He suggests that his rehearsal approach, which he believes "gives singers the time to inform their imaginations in all of its [*sic*] array" and considers "the musical, vocal, poetic, visual, and physical/sensual," (p. 158) facilitates these rich and multifaceted encounters with music.

Gangi addresses the importance of meaning in music education. He asserts:

Meaning must be given to all processes of education. Students must not merely be told how meaningful something is. They must be brought through the experience of finding out for themselves that something does indeed have meaning, in and of itself as well as meaning to and for the student. It is the responsibility of the educator that the student experience that meaning. (p. 158)

Gangi recommended a variety of ways that teachers may help students to experience meaning, including through physical movement (to exemplify phrasing or dynamics, for example); through reading poetry; through research that may inform students' understanding; through the use of folk dance; or the elimination of sight or hearing to "heighten awareness of other facets of the workings within a certain musical composition" (p. 159). Although these recommendations are intended to inform students of the "meaning" of various works, students may also find the music increasingly *meaningful* as they engage in multiple ways.

Numerous aspects of this study limit its usefulness to the present study. Gangi does not present a clear analysis of themes present across the five cases. He purports to identify several "common threads" but these are stated ambiguously and obscured within the narrative. Despite having informed the study, flow does not figure into Gangi's analysis in any substantial way. Gangi may have addressed his five broad research questions in general terms, but this too was difficult to discern. Gangi concludes that experience is multifaceted but presents very few findings that extend beyond general observations about his

students' experiences. The scope of the model developed may have confounded analysis.

Jaros (2008) investigated whether, when, and to what extent adolescent choir participants experienced flow. Using stratified random sampling, Jaros randomly selected six female and six male participants from among a 43-member choir, which was assembled during a two-week summer choral festival. He utilized the *Choral Singing Experience Form*, a researcher-developed instrument that rated three aspects of affect (excited-bored, involved-distracted, and satisfied-frustrated) on a seven-point Likert-type scale, and rated the nine dimensions of flow (merging of action and awareness, sense of control, concentration, loss of self-consciousness, time transformation, unambiguous feedback, challenge-skill balance, clear goals, and autotelic experience) on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Jaros cued participants to complete the *Choral Singing Experience Form* four times during each rehearsal, over a period of seven days.

Jaros found that singers experienced all nine dimensions of flow. Flow increased steadily over the first three days of rehearsal, as participants learned the repertoire. Flow then declined, but peaked during the sixth rehearsal. Jaros observed that a spike in affect during the third measure on the sixth day coincided with the performance of an African-inspired piece in which participants were “joyfully clapping their hands and moving their bodies in rhythm” (p. 86). The high peak, Jaros concludes, was a result of repertoire choice. Jaros also found that participants' years of experience in choir related to only one dimension of

flow: sense of control. No significant effect of gender on flow and affect was found.

Jaros noted “a discernible pattern of rise in affect” during later portions of rehearsals and suggests that ensemble directors may wish to pace their rehearsals to take advantage of this pattern. Jaros did not take into account, however, the pacing of *that* director’s rehearsals or the effect of repertoire on affect. It could also be that a master teacher paced rehearsals to create a rise in affect toward the end, when participants might otherwise be getting tired. This was the case on day six, when the director indicated that he noticed the group’s energy was low. He stopped to tell a humorous story, and then shifted to the energetic African-inspired piece.

Jaros’ study had several significant limitations in addition to the small sample size ( $n=12$ ). Jaros also selected an uneven number of male and female participants per experience group, and did not take into account how repertoire selections might affect flow. Finally, Jaros assigned labels above the questionnaire items making the results categorical data rather than continuous data. “Elimination of these supplementary labels in future investigations,” Jaros wrote, “will more clearly represent continuous response measure to which the statistical procedures used herein will be more appropriate” (p. 57). Given the limitations of the study I am reluctant to apply its findings.

In a grounded theory study, Matthews (2003) investigated the flow experiences of three beginning adult singers engaged in private voice lessons in which improvisation was an integrated element. Matthews taught these voice

lessons, and used challenge indicators from Custodero's (1997) study of flow in young children (anticipation, expansion, extension, self-assignment, self-correction, and deliberate gesture) to generate a descriptive "flow narrative" for each participant. To measure skill, Matthews used the Vocal Skill Indicators Form (VSIF), a researcher-generated 4-point scale rating breath support, intonation/tone, vocal freedom, and phrasing and expressivity. Matthews also generated data from brief interviews with each participant, transcribed student-teacher interactions, and "spontaneous verbal self-reporting" that occurred during the videotaped lessons.

Drawing upon the literature, Matthews generated the following definition of flow: deliberate gesture & 1 challenge indicator +  $\leq$  average skill = flow. Using this operational definition, Matthews sampled participant lesson events and examined the relationships between the flow narrative and the quantity of challenge indicators found there, and the VSIF, which measured skill. He specifically focused on the difference in flow between improvisational and non-improvisational activities.

Matthews found that, across cases, improvisational activities showed consistently higher flow occurrences than non-improvisational activities. 86% of improvisational events showed flow, while 26% of prescribed events showed flow. Matthews also noted that more than half of the events sampled were accompanied by "significant spontaneous verbal self-reporting" (p. 131). Improvisational activities and non-improvisational activities produced qualitatively different "psycho-emotional and kinesthetic experiences" across

cases (p. 132). Finally, Matthews found that when challenge indicators showed high challenge, participants' average skill levels were also higher. Matthews speculated that when the attention of a beginner singer is focused on something besides "the pure mechanics of producing tone" the voice is better able to work in a natural way (p. 135).

Matthews' study may be germane to the present study in that it suggests that challenging, creative activities can facilitate flow-type experiences that participants may find meaningful. Though the quantitative aspects of this study should be read with caution due to the very low number of participants ( $n=3$ ) the overall findings still may have bearing on this study.

Kraus (2003) studied the phenomenon of flow among undergraduate and graduate student participants in a university wind ensemble. Utilizing a qualitative case study design, Kraus observed and recorded the rehearsals of one university wind ensemble, located in the southern United States, over a two month period, and interviewed ten student participants to determine whether and to what extent they experienced dimensions of flow. Kraus also used an adapted Experience Sampling Method (ESM) and self-report forms to determine whether or not participants were experiencing characteristics of a flow state at various points during the rehearsal. When signaled, participants chose between four word pairs describing flow and non-flow states: challenged/bored; relaxed/tense; confident/worried; focused/distracted. Following the rehearsals during which the ESM took place, Kraus interviewed participants to find out what they experienced in greater detail.

Kraus analyzed participants' experiences according to the nine dimensions of flow identified by Csikszentmihalyi (1990). These dimensions included a balance of challenge and skill, presence of clear goals, immediacy of feedback, sense of control, focused concentration, a merging of action and awareness, loss of self-consciousness, distorted sense of time, and autotelic experience. He found that students did experience the nine dimensions of flow in rehearsals, but noted that certain dimensions were more prevalent. The balance of challenge and skill was the most prevalent dimension of flow identified by students, and was, Kraus said, "a prerequisite element of the flow experience" (p. 151). Participants perceived technically demanding repertoire as the greatest source of challenge.

Kraus also examined participants' experiences according to internal and external dimensions of flow. Internal dimensions related to "how the individual perceived and reacted to the experience," while external dimensions "related to context and influences beyond the students' control and included conductor feedback and the balance of challenge and skill" (p. 142). He found that both internal and external dimensions played a role in flow experiences, but that those who exhibited autotelic traits—abilities that enable individuals to create enjoyable experiences for themselves—could create flow experiences regardless of external conditions. Kraus noted one student in particular who created musical challenges and goals for himself even when the rehearsal was not challenging. His autotelic personality helped to control the quality of his experience despite his environment.

Kraus' investigation of flow in a university wind ensemble setting is potentially relevant to this study. Kraus identifies conditions conducive to flow experiences within an instrumental music-making setting, and examines the influence of rehearsal procedures. He also examines the role that students' individual characteristics play in creating flow, including age and level of experience, attitude and depth of involvement, and autotelic potential.

### **Quantitative Studies of Meaning and Ensembles**

Researchers have investigated participants' perceptions of meaning in a variety of music ensembles. These studies have predominantly focused on the perceptions of choir members, but have also examined the perceptions of general music and instrumental ensemble participants. Farrell (1972) and Hylton (1980, 1981) conducted early studies of perceptions of meaning among ensemble members.

Farrell (1972) investigated how urban adults perceive the meaning of recreational vocal music experiences. She also investigated whether participants could be grouped into types based on the meanings that they perceived. Farrell surveyed 184 amateur vocalists from groups including choral societies, church choirs, gospel groups, and barbershop quartets. She used a Q-sort procedure (Stephenson, 1953) in which participants were asked to rank a collection of 67 statements, printed on cards, from most meaningful to least meaningful. Farrell generated the 67 statements of meaning from reviews of literature and responses to an open-ended question about meaning administered in the pilot study. The 67 statements related to eight factors:



1. Integrative—to be with other people, shared group experiences, other-directed, ecumenical sense.
2. Spiritualistic—singing is essentially “good” and holy, a sense of serving God.
3. Incidental—aside from the music itself, smart business-wise to sing with this group, escape from other situations.
4. Communication—opportunity to send messages which can be sent in no other way.
5. Musical purist—for the sake of art, aesthetics, the music fanatic.
6. Social status—indication of social class, either by the seeking or confirmation of.
7. Psychological—personal experience, emotional effect, satisfaction of needs.
8. Collective—deepens cultural bonds, reaffirms heritage.

Based on the clustering of responses, Farrell identified seven types of singers: the Happy Fella, the Music Missionary, the Proud Groupie, the Music Addict, the Music Achiever, the Earnest Musician, and the Music Acculturizer. Eighty-six percent of respondents fell into one of three types: the Musical Missionary, who feels that “music is most meaningful as a worshipping medium” (n=70); the Proud Groupie, who indicates attachment to the group and strong feelings of pride connected to singing (n=68); and the Earnest Musician, who is “characterized by his [*sic*] commitment to learn, excel, and produce good artistic music” (n=20) (pp. 72-74). Farrell found a significant association between choral

group affiliation and singer type. Earnest Musicians were likely to sing in a choral society, Music Missionaries were associated with church or gospel groups, and Proud Groupies were most often found in barbershop groups. These findings support the notion that different types of ensembles either attract singers with similar priorities or promote and reinforce certain meanings for their members.

Hylton (1980) was among the first music researchers to look directly at what public school music students perceive as meaningful about their participation, and his study became a model for subsequent studies of meaning. According to Hylton, “the value of music education experiences for individuals is intimately connected with their perceptions of the meaningfulness of such experiences” (p. 125). He suggests that an understanding of what students perceive as meaningful can equip educators to respond to their individual needs. In approaching this problem, Hylton posed the following questions:

1. What do members of selected high school choral ensembles perceive as the meaning of choral singing experience? Do there exist underlying dimensions in the meaning construct?
2. If underlying dimensions are found to exist in student perceptions of the meaning of choral singing experience, what are the interrelationships of those dimensions?
3. What is the nature of the relationship between the dimensions of meaning and the musicality of participants, as measured by Gaston’s *Test of Musicality*?

4. What is the nature of the relationship between the dimensions of meaning and the musical background of participants, as measured by an investigator-constructed questionnaire?
5. What is the nature of the relationship between the dimensions of meaning for individual participants and the performance level of the ensembles?
6. What is the nature of the relationship between the dimensions of meaning and the directors' perceptions of the meaning of choral singing for students? (pp. 17-18)

In the first phase of the study, Hylton developed and piloted the Choral Meaning Survey, a Likert-type survey consisting of seventy-two statements derived from 189 students' prior written statements about the meaning of choir. He divided the 72 statements into six factor categories drawn from literature—achievement, spiritualistic, musical-artistic, communicative, psychological, and integrative—and piloted the instrument with 251 subjects. In the second (main) phase of the study, 673 choir students from fourteen schools in rural, suburban, and urban Pennsylvania completed the Choral Meaning Survey.

Using factor-analysis methods, Hylton then examined the relationships of dimensions in the meaning of high school choral singing experience to the following independent variables: (a) the musical ability of each participant, (b) the musical background of each participant, (c) the performance level of each ensemble that participated in the study, and (d) the perceptions of each participating director concerning the meaningfulness of choral singing for high school student participants. Results of the main phase of the study indicated that

all six factor categories—achievement, spiritualistic, musical-artistic, communicative, psychological, and integrative—used in the Choral Meaning Survey were positively correlated to each other. The generally positive responses suggested that these students found choir to be a meaningful experience (p. 122). Students responded most positively to items related to achievement ( $m=4.08$ ), followed by musical-artistic items ( $m=3.97$ ). Items related to the spiritualistic dimension had the lowest mean ( $m=3.18$ ). Correlations between dimensions ranged from .17 to .49, and all factors were positively related. Hylton suggested that “while the six dimensions were conceptually different, they seemed to be tied to a more global concept of which they may be considered subconcepts” (p. 130).

Hylton concluded that the choral singing experience is meaningful for high school students and that results substantiate a multidimensional conceptualization of the meaning of musical experience. He emphasized that meaningfulness in one dimension (e.g. achievement) may serve to enhance meaningfulness in other dimensions (e.g. musical-artistic), and that musical ability and musical background are not requisite for meaningful choral experiences. He recommended further research into the musical meanings perceived by different populations and related to different musical experiences.

Hylton’s study prompted studies of meaning among other populations. Wayman (2005) investigated the meaning of music education among middle school general music students. Using a procedure similar to Hylton’s (1980), Wayman gathered the responses of 178 middle school students to an open-ended questionnaire about the meaning of middle school general music, then used them

to generate the Music Meaning Survey (MMS). Following pilot testing, Wayman modified the MMS to include 50 statements of meaning, grouped into five factor categories: Psychological, Future Music Goals, Academic-Musical, Performing/Music Making and Integrative (Social). The final version of the MMS was administered to 762 middle school students in Maine, Minnesota, Indiana, Idaho, North Carolina, New Mexico, Arizona, and Hawaii.

The results of the MMS indicated that students ascribed a variety of meanings to music education. After a varimax rotation, the Integrative (Social) factor had no statements with high loadings. Wayman eliminated the Integrative (Social) category and reinterpreted data using four categories: Vocational, Academic, Belonging, and Agency. Vocational factors were the strongest contributors to the variance (18%), and Wayman suggests that vocational goals such as “to perform in a concert” and “to be a singer as an adult” may be the strongest contributors to what is meaningful about music participation for middle school students.

Wayman’s study contains issues that impact its validity. Wayman places statements of meaning in questionable categories. For example, she categorizes the responses “To get things off my chest” and “To be a singer as an adult” as performing/music-making items rather than psychological and future musical items, respectively (p. 167). Many of the statements could fit into several categories depending on the respondent’s rationale. The four areas of meaning Wayman uses in her analysis—vocational, academic, belonging, and agency—are, at face value, “extramusical.” Other musical meanings, of which there were

many, were subsumed into these categories. In addition, Wayman used a four-point Likert-type scale (really agree, sort of agree, sort of disagree, really disagree) that did not give students the opportunity to report feelings of neutrality or ambivalence. Although this study is essentially a replication of Hylton's (1980) study, Wayman does not give adequate credit to Hylton nor does she substantiate why she generates a new instrument rather than modifying Hylton's *Choral Meaning Survey*.

Sugden (2005) used a modified version of Hylton's *Choral Meaning Survey* (1980) to investigate the effects of ensemble level, years of choir experience, gender, and private music study on choral students' perceived values of choral ensemble participation and musical self-concept. She administered the *Arts Self-Perception Inventory* (Vispoel, 1993), the *Choral Meaning Survey* (Hylton, 1980), and an additional survey to choir students (n=835) in nine rural, suburban, and urban public schools in Indiana. The sample consisted of 56 male and 247 female middle school students, and 120 male and 412 female high school students.

Sugden found that participants derived multiple meanings from their choral ensemble experience, including musical-artistic, psychological, communicative, social, and achievement dimensions. Neither sex nor grade level related significantly to music self-concept or choral students' perceived values of participation. The dimensions of meaning Sugden identified were highly correlated. "Participants do not perceive these dimensions as separate from one another," Sugden suggested, "but as different aspects of a whole" (p. 124).

Whereas Hylton found achievement to be the most salient dimension of meaning for choir students, Sugden found the musical-artistic dimension to be strongest. Sugden considers that contemporary teachers may place greater emphasis on their students' musical-artistic development, or that students are involved in more varied types of musical activities, thus supporting the notion that context may play a role in students' perceptions. I also note that Sugden studied the perceptions of middle school and high school students, whereas Hylton studied only the perceptions of high school students, and nearly 80% of the research participants in Sugden's study were female (Hylton did not report the gender of participants). The age and sex of participants may also have contributed to differences between the two studies.

Mills (1988) also modeled his study after Hylton's. He sought to determine what band students find meaningful about their band experiences and to investigate relationships between these meanings and types of band activities (marching and nonmarching musical activities). Mills defined meaning as "the total of the intended results and the by-products of the band experience as perceived and valued by the individual" (p. 4). He constructed the *Band Meaning Survey* from the open-ended statements of 243 high school band members and administered this survey to 1140 band members in south Florida.

Mills identified ten initial factors that indicated dimensions of meaning: group accomplishment, social enrichment, musical performance, recreation, self-improvement, musical aesthetics, school identity, interpersonal skills, musical achievement, and musical development. He performed a factor analysis and

oblique rotation to narrow the initial ten factors to five: personal development, social enrichment, musical growth, school identity, and recreative activity.

Based on data gathered in band director interviews, Mills classified student subjects as belonging to high, moderate, or low activity marching bands by number of hours of participation in marching activities and nonmarching musical activities. The high and low marching activity groups rated most aspects of the band experience higher than the moderate activity group. Mills speculates that high marching group activities may have experienced more success than moderate activity groups, while low activity groups may not have had the same expectations and thus experienced less frustration (pp. 149-50). The high activity nonmarching musical activity group rated the overall meaning of band and the final factors of musical growth, personal development, and group identity significantly higher than the other groups. Females rated group identity and social enrichment higher than males; males rated recreative activity higher than females.

Overall meaning correlated most highly with personal development and musical growth. Mills observes that the majority of statements with mean ratings above 4.0 were music-related, suggesting that while other aspects of marching band share great importance for those surveyed, “Music is central and perhaps the primary source of meaning in the band experience.” (pp. 145-146). Mills relates his personal development factor to Hylton’s (1980) self-perception dimension, social enrichment and group identity to Hylton’s integrative dimension, and musical growth to Hylton’s musical-artistic and communicative dimensions (p.



148). Mills' final factor, recreative activity, had no corresponding dimension in Hylton's study but statements similar to those in recreative activity were integrated into other dimensions. Hylton's spiritualistic dimension, which was generated in a study of choral music making, had no corresponding factor in Mills' study. Mills suggests that the frequently secular nature of band repertoire and the absence of lyrics could lead participants to find meaning in different aspects of band music than choral participants do in choral music (pp. 148-149).

As with similar studies, rich open-ended responses were pared down in Mills' study to direct statements, losing much "meaning" in the process, and final factors contained disparate and seemingly unrelated statements. For example, recreative activity contains such statements as "learn to overcome frustration," "relax," "have a reason to come to school," and, inexplicably, "learn about adults." The difficulties created by essentializing and compartmentalizing complex and multidimensional aspects of meaning suggest alternative strategies may be more appropriate for examining what students find meaningful.

### **Qualitative Studies of Meaning and Ensembles**

Arasi (2006) examined the perceived carryover and lifelong influence of participation in one "exemplary" high school choral program. Eight former choir members who graduated between 6 and 12 years earlier and who did not go on to pursue a degree or career in music were interviewed. It should be noted that of 300 emails sent to former students, participants were among only 14 who replied and may thus represent a select group of particularly motivated former students. Each participant perceived an array of enduring benefits from their choral

participation; however, three themes came to the fore. Three of the participants emphasized the achievement of excellence in their choral experiences as the predominant benefit of their participation. Two participants focused on the social aspects of chorus, including interactions with friends, and learned social behaviors. The remaining three participants cited personal growth as the most enduring aspect of their experience in the school choir.

In her analysis of the former students' comments, Arasi articulated three primary findings regarding the former student perceptions. First, "teacher personality and approach may influence perceptions of lifelong meaning and value" (p. 189). The participants "viewed [their teacher] as a significant part of the success of the program" (p. 190) and referenced personal qualities and the "life lessons" she instilled more frequently than the specific curricular content she taught. Second, "adults may recall aspects of a choral program that they perceive as enhancing lifelong learning" (p. 190). Specifically, participants cited increased self-confidence, critical thinking, and creativity as traits enhanced by their choral experiences. Finally, "adults may cite both intrinsic and extrinsic evidence of ways in which their high school choral program had lifelong influence" (p. 192). Such intrinsic and extrinsic influences of participation in the choral program included "the desire to achieve excellence; the ability to analyze critically and evaluate vocal music; the ability to appreciate diverse cultures and music genres; and enriched [sic] of socialization and personal growth" (p. 192).

Piekarz (2006) elected to interview students at one Chicago high school, a "choral juggernaut" (p. 89), to find out what they valued most about their

participation in choir. The school was a privileged one, wherein “minority populations, as well as the poor [are] significantly underrepresented . . . the vast majority of graduates attend four-year universities” . . . [and] the choral music program “has long been considered a model for schools in the state of Illinois and the Midwest” (p. 88).

Piekarz conducted focus group interviews with 26 students, which lasted between 30-45 minutes each. He then selected six students to participate in one-on-one interviews lasting approximately 15 minutes each. These interviews took place over the course of a single day. In selecting interviewees Piekarz aimed “to include students whose statements represented minority viewpoints, introduced topics that were seldom discussed by others in the focus group meetings, or presented statements not fully developed in the focus group interviews that warranted further investigation” (p. 97). It is unclear how many of the six participants were selected in order to provide disconfirming or alternative viewpoints, but Piekarz states, “sufficiency [of data] occurred during the process of selecting participants in the first place, as the search for extreme or otherwise unusual cases provided a sufficiently varied group of interviewees” (p. 98). Data analysis revealed five main themes concerning what student participants valued about their choral music education: musical growth and appreciation, performance skill development, personal growth, social growth, and contact with excellent instructors. According to Piekarz, none of these themes emerged as predominantly important.

The superficiality of data collection and the brief period of engagement with students raise concerns about the trustworthiness of this study. Piekarz “expected that the focus groups would yield a fair amount of interesting data” and scheduled individual interviews “to delve more deeply into some of the value statements made by students during the group meetings, as well as find some way of triangulating the interview data” (p. 97). He conducted all individual interviews, averaging 15 minutes each, over the course of one day, giving him no opportunity to revise questions as his understanding of the topic developed. Piekarz did not report observing the students, which suggests that total face-to-face time spent with students was limited. Participants were not provided with a copy of interview transcripts to review and only the six students who participated in both focus groups and individual interviews were provided with a “summary document” and the opportunity to respond to general themes identified by Piekarz.

Dillon (2001) investigated the meaning of music among young people in one school setting and the processes that facilitated meaningful involvement (p. 8). Approaching the topic from a curricular perspective, Dillon observed how the theoretical concept of “student as maker” drawn from his master’s thesis (1995) and adopted in one school curriculum was interpreted and implemented (2001, p. 22).

The research took place at an independent school of the Uniting Church, which served students aged three to eighteen. The school supported twenty ensembles, and “up to one third of the school’s population participates in parent-

funded private instrumental lessons” (p. 86). As a teacher at the site for six years, Dillon had previously taught all of the twenty-one student participants in the study. Students were selected “because of their experiences with different musical styles and instruments” and because “those with a high involvement . . . were considered to have a distinctive association with the phenomenon being studied” (p. 87). Ten permanent members of the music teaching staff were also interviewed. The central research question guiding this study was: “What is the meaning of music to young people in a school?” (p. 78). Two related questions included: “What are the processes that give access to and facilitate those meanings?” and “What are the implications of this knowledge for teaching, learning and community?” (p. 78).

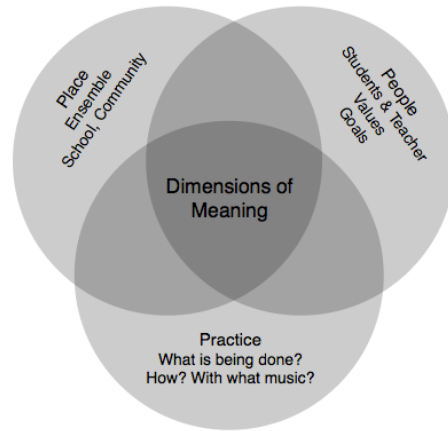
Dillon identified three sources of meaning for students involved in music education. Personal meaning, “a communication between self and music making” (p. 216), was “evocative of a personal response, a feeling of well-being and an emotive and aesthetic relationship with the music . . . [and promoted] an understanding of self as an expressive being” (p. 216). Social meaning, an attraction to music for social reasons, emerged as influencing both “initial involvement and sustained involvement with music making” (p. 217). Cultural meaning, a dimension that Dillon believed was “particularly powerful” (p. 218), is “about expressiveness and the reciprocal interaction that both the artistic product and the maker have with the community” (p. 218). On an individual level, cultural meaning refers to a sense of belonging within musical community, and relates to self-esteem and well-being (p. 219-20). Dillon concluded, “the process

of music education must provide access to all forms of music meaning” (p. 220). He made several recommendations for building an environment that provides access to meaningful experience, and proposed a holistic pedagogy that is “equally inclusive of context, making and reflection” (p. 238).

Dillon is one of the only researchers to emphasize the role of context and environment in meaning, and to suggest the role that educators play as “builder[s] of environments” (p. 185). Reflecting on his master’s thesis, Dillon notes:

The meaning of music to a student is difficult to examine empirically, as it cannot be attributed to a single source such as music education or to a particular teacher or method. What can be examined is each of the factors that make up the environment for music learning, such as the teachers, the place and the culture of the school in relation to music. The process, participants and context are observable. (p. 65)

This observation is particularly salient for the present study. In developing a situated understanding of meaningful experiences, classroom processes, participants, and context (place) were important aspects of the investigation. I illustrate the interaction between these three dimensions in Figure 1.



*Figure 1.* Contextual considerations in determining meaningfulness.

Countryman (2008) asks “how do students and teachers experience high school music?” (p. 36). She interviewed 32 former secondary school music participants “who had been involved . . . through most or all of their high school years, and who were no longer studying music in any organized way” (p. 80). Some of the participants were Countryman’s former students; others were recommended by music education colleagues, by university students in classes taught by Countryman, or by other participants. Countryman also invited four music teachers to participate in a focus group discussion of music education practices. Subsequent to the focus group interview, three additional colleagues contributed their perspectives based on the themes generated.

Countryman generated five themes based on the interviews with her own former students: personal factors, social factors, expressions of enjoyment, musical factors, and transcendent moments. She noted the similarity of these themes and those identified by Hylton (1980) and Piekarz (2006) but concluded, based on her theoretical exploration of identity making, that the separation of the personal and social aspects of musical meaning is inaccurate. Her thinking

further evolved as she applied the theories of figured worlds (Holland et al. 1998) and communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998, 2002) and found her initial five categories to be “too atomistic to capture the richness of the participants’ thoughts” (p. 92).

Countryman identifies three important themes drawn from conversations with former student participants. First, she concludes, “musicking in high school music programs is about self-making through social interactions” (p. 223). A school music program—one of a number of worlds in which students simultaneously participate—provides a context in which students can “figure out who they are” through ongoing, improvised responses to collective experiences (p. 223). Second, “when students are in a high school music program that honours traditions and rituals seen by students as important, and when students experience some genuine sense of control over aspects of their musicking in communal situations, they may be part of a community of practice” (pp. 223-24). Countryman believes that both a sense of traditions and rituals *and* a sense of control over some aspect of musicking are necessary for a community of practice to exist. Finally, Countryman notes the difficulty that participants had putting their important experiences into words. She explains, “The embodied nature of the experience of making music is ineffable. Time and again participants indicated how difficult it was to put the experience of musicking into words” (p. 224). According to Countryman, “self-making, community-making and music making are inextricably woven aspects of the high school music experience for



many former students” (pp. 225-26). The experience of high school music, she concludes, is a holistic one.

In addition to the themes identified, Countryman emphasizes the significance that student participants in the study placed on group interactions. From the interviews with her former students she heard, overwhelmingly, of “the importance of community, of the sense of belonging that was prerequisite to a sense of musical competence” (p. 89). This, she says, counters the emphasis that music education literature places on musicking as an individual phenomenon (p. 225).

**Summarizing remarks.** Existing literature provides abundant support for the notion that musicians find many aspects of ensemble participation meaningful. Researchers identified similar meaningful aspects of participation, including social, spiritual, achievement or esteem-based, and musical-artistic aspects. While quantitative studies of meaning, particularly those utilizing survey instruments such as the *Choral Meaning Survey* (1980), give a general impression of strength they are less adroit at showing the variegations of meaning for individuals and do not allow for unanticipated meanings to emerge.

Of the qualitative studies of perceptions of meaning examined here, several were of uneven quality and others neglected context in relation to individual perceptions. Dillon (2001) and Countryman (2008) are notable exceptions; the two scholars conducted rigorous qualitative studies that examined participants’ perceptions within particular learning contexts. I was particularly interested in Dillon’s recommendation that researchers examine the interplay

between process, participants, and context. This approach is helpful in conceptualizing a situated understanding of meaningful experiences in music.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

In conceptualizing this study I identified two closely related theoretical frameworks that might be helpful in understanding what students find meaningful within particular ensembles and why. First, the foundational work of C. S. Peirce, a philosophical pragmatist, and the subsequent theory of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; McCall & Simmons, 1978) suggest that meaning is socially generated. While symbolic interactionism refers to meaning in an informational sense, I felt that examining the ways that meanings were socially generated in instrumental groups might be useful in understanding their value and significance in the lives of student members. Second, praxial philosophy as explored by Alperson and expanded upon by pragmatists such as Bowman and Regelski equates what is meaningful with “right results” that are particular to the ensemble and the praxis operating therein. In the following section I describe these two pragmatic theories in greater detail.

#### **C. S. Peirce**

Since his death in 1914, C. S. Peirce has increasingly been acknowledged as one of the most important thinkers of the modern era. Late twentieth-century scholars lauded Peirce for his unique and significant contributions to the fields of logic, epistemology, scientific method, phenomenology, metaphysics, cosmology, ontology, ethics, aesthetics, and philosophy (Goble, 1999). Two of his most significant contributions—pragmatism and semiotics—have profoundly

influenced the field of sociology. These approaches, and the theories stemming from them, may be useful in the examination of meaning.

According to Peirce, every organism establishes “habits of behavior” that will satisfy its needs. Humans also acquire “habits of mind” or beliefs that guide their actions (Goble, 2005, p. 5). When something challenges an established belief or behavior, the resulting doubt activates thought, which, according to Peirce, is aimed at generating and testing hypotheses about the situation so that one can either return to the old habit or establish a new one. Thought continues until the doubt is resolved and equilibrium—habituated thought and action—is reestablished.

Peirce is considered the father of pragmatism. For Peirce, the *meaning* of an idea or concept stems from its potential *effects*. “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have,” he wrote. “Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object” (Peirce, 1931, 5.402). Moreover, Peirce believed that communities constitute a “collective mind.” His examination of the interactions of minds within and between social groups was an important part of his semiotic theory. The meaning of an idea or concept for an individual, he argued, is influenced by the beliefs about its effects held by the individual’s community (Goble, 2005). Meaning, according to Peirce, develops within a social framework.

Peirce's ideas may be useful in understanding why a particular musical piece or activity is or is not meaningful. Goble, whose (1999) dissertation examined Peirce's pragmatic philosophy and semiotic theory, writes:

A given musical work or form of musical activity can be said to be *meaningful* for those in the community from which it stems if it is somehow related to the "habits of mind" of the members of that cultural group. By contrast, the same musical piece or practice may be regarded as too different, too highly *informational*, when it is experienced by persons who are *not* a part of that community. Since such individuals lack the necessary background to grasp its connection to the life of the community, the musical piece or practice may not be meaningful to them at all. (p. 79)

Peirce argued that an individual or community could undergo an ideological shift over time and come to identify with the beliefs of another community. Goble borrows from the language of cultural anthropology to describe this potential shift:

Observer is the term applied to a researcher who relates to the cultural group on the level of the intellect, perhaps partially understanding the views of the group, but not physically (i.e., experientially) sharing in their activities and emotions. Observer-participant is the term used to describe one who explores intellectually and participates physically in the life activities of the group, but still maintains (or emotionally reserves) his or her own ideology as an observer. Finally, "gone native" is an expression used to describe humorously those who have found the ideology of the

group being studied to be a better-fitting or more psychologically satisfying apprehension of reality than his or her own ideology, thus adopting fully the concepts, behaviors, and emotions associated with the new ideology, and renouncing the ideology they originally embodied as well as their status as observers. (1999, p. 81)

This may be salient in understanding the meaningful experiences of ensemble members. Musicians who are deeply devoted to their ensemble may have more completely adopted the group's ideology. As Goble points out, "the ideological congruity that stems from this unification of individual minds is integrally associated with all musical activity that can be described as socially *meaningful* according to Peirce's definition" (1999, p. 83).

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

The study of symbolic interaction "is the study of how social acts generate social objects" (McCall & Simmons, 1978, p. 60). Symbolic interactionism stems from the work of G. H. Mead (1932, 1934, 1938) who built on the semiotic theory of C. S. Peirce and others. Blumer (1962, 1969), a student of Mead's, coined the term "symbolic interactionism" and worked to codify Mead's theory. He set forth three tenets of the perspective:

1. Human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them.
2. The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one's fellows.

3. These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters. (Blumer, 1969, p. 2)

Mead differentiated between *things*—bundles of stimuli—and objects. McCall and Simmons (1978) explain that “things” are converted to “objects” through acts, and provide the example of a tomato:

The same bundle of stimuli, this one “thing,” releases two very different acts (eating and throwing) with two very different objects (nutrition and the expression of anger). Now this [thing, the] tomato . . . thus *becomes* an object, through the completion of an act. The tomato is not nutrition until it is eaten, nor is it an expression of anger until it is thrown. (p. 49)

Central to Mead’s theory is a “self” that may serve as the object of one’s own actions. A human “may perceive himself, have conceptions of himself, communicate with himself, and act toward himself . . . “ (Blumer, 1969, p. 62). This mechanism of self-interaction is, according to Mead’s theory, what enables humans to form and guide their conduct. As Blumer explains:

. . . [T]o indicate something is to extricate it from its setting, to hold it apart, to give it a meaning or, in Mead’s language, to make it into an object. An object—that is to say, anything that an individual indicates to himself—is different from a stimulus; instead of having an intrinsic character which acts on the individual and which can be identified apart from the individual, its character or meaning is conferred on it by the individual. The object is a product of the individual’s disposition to act

instead of being an antecedent stimulus which evokes the act. Instead of the individual being surrounded by an environment of pre-existing objects which play upon him and call forth his behavior, the proper picture is that he constructs his objects on the basis of his on-going activity. In any of his countless acts . . . the individual is designating different objects to himself, giving them meaning, judging their suitability to his action, and making decisions on the basis of the judgment. This is what is meant by interpretation or acting on the basis of symbols. (1969, p. 80)

Blumer (1969) contrasts symbolic interactionism with two predominant ways of accounting for the origin of meaning. The first perspective is that meaning is an intrinsic quality of the thing that is meaningful. As an inherent property, meaning resides outside of us; our task is to perceive and understand the meaning that exists within a thing. This position reflects the realist philosophy found most frequently in the social and psychological sciences (p. 3) and which undergirds the aesthetic philosophy of music.

The second dominant perspective is that meaning is “a psychical accretion brought to the thing by the person for whom the thing has meaning” (p. 4). In other words, meaning is attributed to a thing based on a person’s perception, cognition, transfer of feelings, and association of ideas about that thing (p. 4). This position is observable, Blumer explains, in the contemporary practice of “tracing the meaning of a thing . . . to the attitude of the person who views it” (p. 4).

Symbolic interactionism represents a different way to account for the origin of meaning. According to Blumer, “[Symbolic interactionism] does not regard meaning as emanating from the intrinsic makeup of the thing that has meaning, nor does it see meaning as arising through a coalescence of psychological elements in the person. Instead, it sees meaning as arising in the process of interaction between people” (p. 4). The meaning of a thing is particular to each individual, but is social in its construction.

Symbolic interactionism has become a major sociological perspective, and its influence can be found in other fields including cultural anthropology and psychology. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973) believes that the concept of culture is essentially a semiotic one. He writes, “Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (p. 5). Bruner likewise advocates a “cultural psychology” that takes into account the influence of culture in shaping the meanings we create. He reminds us that meaning is “a culturally mediated phenomenon that depends on the prior existence of a shared symbol system” (Bruner, 1990, p. 69). He continues:

It is culture, not biology, that shapes human life and human mind, that gives meaning to action by situating its underlying intentional states in an interpretive system. It does this by imposing the patterns inherent in the culture’s symbolic systems—its language and discourse modes, the forms



of logical and narrative explication, and the patterns of mutually dependent communal life. (p. 34)

Symbolic interactionism is potentially a useful framework for this study of individuals' perceptions of the meaningfulness of ensembles because it takes into account the role of social interaction and of individual interpretation in the making of meaning. However, symbolic interactionism focuses primarily on how people ascribe meaning in the cognitive sense of ordering information and not on what becomes *meaningful* or *prized*. Understanding students' perceptions about what various aspects of their participation *mean* (as in signify) may help to understand what they value and find *meaningful*.

### **Praxialism**

In an article entitled "What Should One Expect of a Philosophy of Music Education?" Philip Alperson (1991) reviewed the tenets of aestheticism in art, music, and music education before introducing music educators to praxialism as a possible alternative. "The basic aim of a praxial philosophy of music," Alperson wrote, "is to understand, from a philosophical point of view, just what music has meant to people . . ." (p. 234). Praxial philosophy, with its pragmatic emphasis on specific human practices and meanings, was a significant departure from the aesthetic philosophy that had become predominant in music education.

Praxialism entered into the mainstream of music education in the work of David Elliott (1995, 2005). Elliott views music as a context-specific human phenomenon comprised of two interlocking activities: music making and music listening. Together, these two activities make up musical practice. The best way

to engage in musical practice, Elliott contends, is through performance, broadly defined to include composing, arranging, improvising, and conducting. In these ways, musicians can demonstrate musicality, that is, thinking- or knowing- in action.

Elliott argues that the significance of music education is connected to the significance of music in human life. As something one fundamentally *does*, Elliott contends, music “ought to be understood in relation to the meanings and values evidenced in actual music-making and music listening in specific contexts” (1995, p. 14). Describing music as “cognitive through and through” (p. 235), Elliott sees these meanings and values as primarily cognitive and approaches meaning and value from a cognitive perspective. Music, he suggests, “is valuable and significant in itself because it propels the self to higher levels of complexity” (p. 122).

The conception of praxialism advanced by pragmatists such as Regelski (1997, 2005) and Bowman (2005a, 2005c, 2007, 2009) is particularly useful in conceptualizing this study. As a tool for understanding meaning, a pragmatic praxial view of music considers value and meaning in terms of “right results” and emphasizes the importance of contextual factors that are frequently overlooked in studies of meaning (Regelski, 1997).

A pragmatic view of praxialism, Regelski argues, takes into account “all aspects of all instances in which ‘music’ is ‘made’ or ‘done’” (1997, p. 44). Bowman explains that praxis is guided by phronesis, “the ethical discernment that is required to negotiate one’s way in the realm of practical human affairs—to act

rightly, in light of the potential human consequences of one's actions" (Bowman, 2009, p. 5). The pragmatic view that the worth of a thing can be measured by its results does not lead inevitably to relativism, however. "The point of phronesis," Bowman says, ". . . is precisely that *not* just anything goes: its concern is with *right* action, as opposed to mere activity" (p. 6).

In Regelski's view, "right results" reflect the intentionality of participants, and whereas Elliott locates praxis within particular musical traditions, Regelski, Bowman and others view musical praxes as locally situated. A shift in intentionality, whether by the ensemble members, a director, or another stakeholder, changes the praxis (p. 46). An important question, then, is who decides what action is "right" for a particular situation. In an educational setting there may be many participants each of whom has a different conception of "right results."

In a pragmatic conception of praxialism, the social dimension of musical practice is integral to an understanding of the overall experience. Bowman explains:

Not only does performing involve living through a vivid, embodied present, but this vivid presence is also and always something musical performers experience together, as "we." . . . Musical performance is not just physical, then, and not just psychological, but social as well. It is not just about sounds and selves and "flow," but also about people and relatedness. On this particular point it is important to be very clear: the social is not simply the context in which music making occurs, it is a

fundamental component both of the making and what is made. Viewed this way, performing music is always also a way of being together, and what is performed is never ‘just music,’ never ‘music alone.’ (2005c, p. 147)

In this study I draw primarily upon a pragmatic conception of praxialism when considering what becomes meaningful within instrumental ensembles and how particular aspects of participation come to be prized. This conception is useful because it connects value with context and seeks to determine the “right results” in specific situations for particular people.

In Chapter 2 I reviewed studies related to motivation, peak and flow type experiences, and perceptions of meaning. I also examined two potentially useful theoretical frameworks: symbolic interactionism and praxialism. In the next chapter I will describe the methodology of this investigation and introduce the study participants.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY

This study examines what high school instrumental ensemble members find meaningful about their participation. As an investigation of what matters to students, this study is well served by qualitative research methods. Eisner explains:

*Meaning* is an elusive term, and one way to treat such elusive matters is to neglect them entirely. . . . For qualitative researchers and evaluators meaning, though elusive, still counts. In this sense qualitative researchers are interested in matters of motive and in the quality of experience undergone by those in the situation studied. (Eisner, 1991, p. 35)

Qualitative research is conducted when “we need a *complex* [italics in original], detailed understanding of [an] issue” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Theories generated by quantitative research “provide general pictures of trends, associations, and relationships, but they do not tell us about why people responded as they did, the context in which they responded, and the deeper thoughts and behaviors that governed their responses” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). A qualitative approach is better suited for an investigation of various dimensions of meaning, and in this study will provide rich insight into the ways that students in particular musical contexts perceive meaningful ensemble participation.

Qualitative researchers seek to understand and interpret how participants in various social settings construct the world around them (Glesne, 2006, p. 4). Qualitative researchers share an ontological belief that reality is socially

constructed, multiple, and ever changing (p. 6). This belief stands in contrast to the positivist belief that reality is fixed, knowable, and measurable, and the post-positivist belief that although reality cannot be fully known, measures borrowed from mainstream science can help us to predict and make generalizations that hold for similar groups of people (Glesne, 2006, p. 7).

Eisner (1991) identifies six features of qualitative inquiry. Qualitative studies tend to be *field focused*, that is, interested in the contexts in which people interact, and the objects involved in those interactions (p. 32). To achieve this field focus, qualitative researchers study situations and participants in naturalistic settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Qualitative researchers are aware of the *self as an instrument* of research (Eisner, 1991, p. 33). Researchers do not tend to rely on questionnaires or research instruments devised by other researchers, but instead collect data themselves through observations, interviews, and the examination of artifacts. As an instrument of research, the researcher must be reflexive and monitor her or his own subjectivity. Researchers collect data from many sources in order to gain multiple perspectives, and interpret the significance of what they are seeing and hearing. In this way, qualitative studies have an *interpretive character* (Eisner, 1991, p. 35).

As noted above, qualitative researchers work closely with participants, interviewing, observing, and sometimes participating to varying degrees in the research setting. This closeness helps the researcher to learn about the emic or insider perspective. Because of the personal nature of qualitative work, researchers eschew the distanced and disinterested voice more characteristic of

quantitative work, and instead use *expressive language* and first person voice to give a sense of the person behind the words (Eisner, 1991, p. 36). Rich, expressive language is used to provide what Geertz (1973) calls “thick description,” giving the reader a sense of being there. Jorgensen concurs, “The richer the description, the more likely that one can uncover a nuanced view of ideas and practices” (2009, p. 79). Further, qualitative researchers pay *attention to particulars* throughout the research process, and strive to retain the flavor of a particular situation, individual, event, or object in their reporting (Eisner, 1991, p. 38). Finally, a qualitative study “becomes believable because of its *coherence, insight, and instrumental utility*” (p. 39). As Eisner points out, there are no statistical tests to judge significance in qualitative research. Methods of enhancing trustworthiness, including triangulation, prolonged engagement and persistent observation, thick and rich description, member checking, peer review and external auditing, negative case analysis, and clarification of researcher bias, are desirable.

### **Research Design**

This study concerns the aspects of school music participation that are most meaningful to students in three high school instrumental ensembles. I selected a multiple case study research design (Stake, 1995, 2006; Yin, 2003) that would facilitate a look at perceptions of meaningfulness within three different ensembles. According to Creswell, “case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system” (2007, p. 73). I examined what students perceived as meaningful within each instrumental

ensemble and explored how contextual elements unique to each case—the specific people, place, and processes involved—shaped these perceptions.

In a multiple case study the researcher “provide[s] a detailed description of each case and themes within the case, called a *within-case analysis*, followed by a thematic analysis across the cases, called a *cross-case analysis*, as well as *assertions* or an interpretation of the meaning of the case” [italics in original] (Cresswell, 2007, p. 75). I followed this procedure, examining individual perceptions of meaning within the larger context of each instrumental ensemble (Chapters 4, 5, and 6) and identifying emergent themes across the three cases (Chapter 7), then concluding with assertions and interpretations (Chapter 8).

Although this is a multiple case study, I approach the data with a narrative ethic. Bruner (1986) identifies two distinctive modes of thinking: the “paradigmatic” or logico-scientific mode, which is concerned with universality; and the narrative mode, which is concerned with particular meanings of experience. He explains:

There are two modes of cognitive functioning, two modes of thought, each providing distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality. . . . A good story and a well-formed argument are different natural kinds. Both can be used as means for convincing another. Yet what they convince us of is fundamentally different: arguments convince one of their truth, stories of their lifelikeness. The one verifies by eventual appeal to procedures for establishing formal and empirical truth. The other establishes not truth, but verisimilitude. (p. 11)



This study concerns the particular meanings of students' experiences in instrumental groups. It seeks to present not a singular "truth" about students' perceptions but rather to illuminate the complexities and contradictions inherent in meaningful ensemble experiences.

Narrative has only recently emerged as a method of inquiry in music education, but its lineage may be traced through anthropology, the arts, history, literary and cultural studies, psychology, sociology, and educational inquiry (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009). Within these disciplines the term "narrative" has been used in numerous ways but, as Barrett and Stauffer (2009) note, "Perhaps the most enduring description and understanding of narrative is as 'story,' an account to self and others of people, places and events, and the relationships that hold between these elements" (p. 7). The focus placed on the way individuals order their experiences makes narrative inquiry particularly well suited for an investigation into students' perceptions of meaning within an ensemble.

Referencing Bruner's ideas as applied to narrative research in music education, Bowman (2006) observed, "Narrative lends itself especially well to conveying the shape and character of human experience and should therefore be regarded as one of the basic ways humans create and share meanings" (p. 7).

Narrative inquiry is also a way attend to voices that are not always heard. The field of music education has long rallied around a number of stories that have come to represent, to ourselves and other stakeholders, what music education is, who it serves, and how. Lyotard (1984) criticized metanarratives such as these, stories purported to be universal and timeless, as being untenable. He proposed

instead small, local narratives that recover context and allow for a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. Narrative inquiry highlights these small, local narratives, and is useful in uncovering perspectives that have been hitherto excluded from music education discourse. Bowman elaborates:

Narrative inquiry . . . attempts to understand music and music education from the bottom up and from the inside out - offering to restore some of the power and significance of which they have been deprived by off-the-rack, one-size-fits-all accounts. . . . Narrative thus has considerable promise as a way of recovering the complexity, multiplicity, and polyphony of musical meanings, and music's deep implication in the construction and maintenance of identities, both personal and collective. . . . Narrative is a way of keeping alive questions, conversation, and controversy, by stirring up the sedimentary deposits of official discourses. (pp. 13-14)

A narrative approach to this study will facilitate a fine-grained examination of particular students' perspectives on the meaningfulness of ensemble participation and may trouble our assumptions about the value of music education.

### **Preliminary Inquiry**

In the spring of 2008 I conducted a preliminary study that examined the experiences that the past and present students of one high school Symphonic Band in Mesa, Arizona deemed powerful (Cape, 2008). I conducted interviews with current Symphonic Band members and their director during the final months of the school year, and observed a complete performance cycle from the initial sight-

reading rehearsals to the final performance of the school year. I also interviewed Symphonic Band graduates now pursuing degrees in music education. I kept field notes and collected artifacts, including band newsletters and content from the band program website.

Past and current students described a variety of aspects of their band experiences that they felt were powerful. They described significant friendships and feelings of belonging, and recalled important musical moments. The predominant theme that these students addressed was the deep satisfaction and elation they experienced related to achievement. The experiences identified by students as salient mirrored those emphasized by their director.

Using the lens of transformational leadership theory, I analyzed the director's leadership style to determine the ways in which it supported or inhibited certain meanings. Findings suggested that transformational strategies in the director's teaching motivated students to invest in the program and contributed to the premium they placed on achievement. Just as a performance space may bolster certain frequencies and dampen others, the director elicited and reinforced these particular kinds of experiences. There may have been other meaningful, powerful, or salient experiences in these students' musical lives, however the impact of these were muted in this particular space.

The results of this preliminary study suggest that while students find disparate facets of their ensemble participation powerful or personally meaningful, the makeup of each individual ensemble, including the goals, philosophy and teaching style of the director, the type of ensemble, the school and

community, and the behaviors and attitudes of peers may influence what students prize most.

In addition to powerful experiences, student participants described experiences that did not have an immediate emotional impact, but which greatly contributed to their lives and were therefore highly meaningful. One student remarked that the most “powerful” musical moments she could recall were memorable, but were not the most valuable to her. She and other students concurred that “the journey” meant far more than isolated powerful moments often related to performance. Their comments suggest that powerful, peak, “flow,” and other strong experiences may be components of a much larger and more complex system of valuation and meaning.

### **Site Selection**

The current study took place in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. Winnipeg is the largest city in Manitoba, with a population of approximately 633,451 (Statistics Canada, 2006). In 2005, Bowman conducted a comprehensive study of music education in Manitoba’s 680 schools. Upon surveying middle and high school programs he observed, “In Manitoba, instrumental music education means, for all practical purposes, band and band only” (2005b, p. 23). In the 275 middle- and high schools offering band, concert band is typically offered to student beginning in the seventh grade, and in 2002 almost a third of potential students were enrolled. Of participating students, Bowman reports, “approximately 16% remain in band throughout their public school years” (p. 19) with the greatest levels of attrition occurring in middle school. While 10% of middle schools

offering band mandated participation in instrumental music in 2002, band is an elective at the high school level.

Jazz bands in Manitoba schools “increased dramatically” (p. 20) in the two decades leading up to Bowman’s 2005 study. The province adopted a for-credit jazz curriculum, developed in the United States by The International Association for Jazz Education (IAJE) in 1998. In 2002, high school students received school credit for their jazz participation in 64% of schools offering jazz, whereas band credits were awarded in 95-97% of schools offering band (Bowman, 2005). “Judged by the number of participants, the number of schools offering band instruction, and by the extent of support band receives from school administrators,” Bowman concludes, “[band programs in Manitoba are] quite healthy, probably among the healthier in North America” (pp. 18-19).

Although band reigns supreme in Manitoba and courses such as strings, composition, and music technology are rare, “pockets of guitar” (p. 23) exist as an instrumental alternative. In 2009 the Manitoba Classroom Guitar Association (MCGA) identified 45 schools in Manitoba (12 of them high schools) that offer guitar programs. Nearly half of these programs—including the guitar program studied here—are located within one school division.<sup>3</sup>

In the current study I selected three high school instrumental ensembles that represented contrasting instructional strategies and student populations from within two school divisions in Winnipeg, Canada. Of the eleven high schools

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<sup>3</sup> The terms school division and school district are used interchangeably in Canada.

programs in these two school divisions, I excluded from consideration two programs wherein the primary language of instruction was French, three in which the ensemble director had been working in the school for fewer than two years, and one program that was taught by my former high school teacher. I visited each of the five remaining sites and discussed my study with the instrumental music teachers. I asked each instrumental teacher to recommend one ensemble that they thought was working especially well that year and in which I would likely find students who found the experience meaningful in some way. Three teachers recommended their wind ensembles, in each case the school's top band, one teacher chose his senior jazz band, and one teacher selected his grade 11/12 guitar ensemble. I conducted an initial observation of each ensemble and administered a short, open-ended survey to ensemble members regarding their perceptions of the value and meaningfulness of participation (see Appendix C). The purpose of the survey was twofold: it provided a very general sense of how students felt about the ensemble and their participation therein, and provided an opportunity for me to introduce myself and my area interest to potential participants. Based on student responses, my observations of each ensemble, and my desire to study contrasting sites, I selected three ensembles for further study: the Maple Grove Wind Ensemble, the Pearson Collegiate Jazz Ensemble, and the Brentford Collegiate Grade 11-12 Guitar Ensemble.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> School and participant names have been altered.

## Participant Selection

I solicited each ensemble for volunteers, requesting participation from members who found participating in their ensemble a meaningful experience. From among those students who expressed an interest in participating in the study I selected a core group of five student participants from each ensemble. In these final selections I endeavored to represent male and female students of a range of ages, experience levels, and, in the jazz band and wind ensemble, primary instruments. The primary student participants ranged in age from 15 to 18 years old and had all participated in school music for at least one year. As the study progressed, two additional students, one at Maple Grove Collegiate and one at Pearson Collegiate, asked to join the study. Each ensemble’s director and school principal served as additional informants. *Figure 2* shows all of the participants from each school in this study.

School	Maple Grove Collegiate	Brentford Collegiate	Pearson Collegiate
Primary Student Informant	Ken – Percussion Grade 12	Bryce - Guitar Grade 12	Sunil - Trombone Grade 11
Primary Student Informant	Nancy - Tuba Grade 10	Dale - Guitar Grade 11	Aaron - Guitar Grade 11
Primary Student Informant	Jia – Alto Sax Grade 11	Hailey - Guitar Grade 11	Sarah - Trombone Grade 12
Primary Student Informant	Huan - Horn Grade 12	Rena - Guitar Grade 11	Trevor - Trombone Grade 11
Primary Student Informant	Sharon - Clarinet Grade 10	Rick - Guitar Grade 11	Jacque – Alto Sax Grade 11
Primary Student Informant	Eileen – Horn Grade 11		Susan - Trumpet Grade 12
Teacher	Candace Cohen	James Gardner	Ken Daley
Principal	Jason Kjernisted	Mary Turner	Reynold Thompson

*Figure 2.* Primary and secondary study participants, by school.

### **Ethics, Confidentiality and Disclosure of Data**

The current study was approved by the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance at Arizona State University. All prospective participants were provided with an informed consent form; minors were provided with a parental consent form. Interviews proceeded only after the appropriate consent/assent form(s) were signed and returned.

In order to identify potential participants I utilized an initial survey. Students were asked to identify themselves by name on a cover sheet attached to the survey, and the survey and cover sheet were linked by a unique identifying number. Survey data was compiled in a database using those numbers only (no names), and a single master list linked students' names with their assigned numbers. This list was stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office. All survey cover sheets with student names were then destroyed. Additionally, pseudonyms are used throughout this document.

### **Researcher Role**

Qualitative researchers engage in research along a continuum ranging from a strict observer, where the researcher has little to no interaction with those being studied, to a full participant or functioning member of the community being studied (Glesne, 2006). In this study I was an observer as participant (Glesne, 2006). I observed and interacted with students and teachers before, during, and after classes and performances, but did not participate in activities or otherwise engage as a member of the group.



As the primary research instrument, the qualitative researcher brings subjectivity to the study and must be aware of potential biases. If the researcher is reflexive and monitors her or his own subjectivity so that data are not distorted, subjectivity can contribute to the study. Glesne explains, “. . . subjectivity is the basis for the story that you are able to tell. It is the strength on which you build. It makes you who you are as a person and as a researcher, equipping you with the perspectives and insights that shape all you do as a researcher . . .” (2006, p. 123). Or, as Peshkin (1985) succinctly stated, “By virtue of subjectivity, I tell the story I am moved to tell. Remove my subjectivity and I do not become a value-free participant observer, merely an empty-headed one . . .” (p. 280). As a qualitative researcher I brought to the inquiry process my own experiences and perspectives. I have been a band student, a band teacher, and a graduate student in music education. These experiences have all contributed to my present notions about instrumental music education and helped me to design and conduct reflexive and responsive research.

At the time of this study I was living in Manitoba, my home, to conduct this research and was engaged for a period of one year to teach part time (.25) at one of the schools, Brentford Collegiate. I taught a different ensemble and had no guitar students in my classes. Throughout this study I worked to ensure that my experiences and perspectives, past and present, did not distort how I interpreted what participants said and did. I monitored my subjectivity by devoting a portion of my field notebook to reflexive thought, by conducting regular member checks, and by subjecting my work to peer review.

## **Data Collection**

I collected data from a variety of sources from December 2009 through June 2010. Data were primarily drawn from individual interviews and observations, but also came from artifacts and video and audio recordings of rehearsals and performances. Data collection procedures are described below.

### **Interviews**

“The interview,” says Eisner, “is a powerful resource for learning how people perceive the situations in which they work” (1991, pp. 81-82) Interviews provide the researcher with “the opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see . . .” (Glesne, 2006, p. 81). In addition, responses to interview questions can lead in unexpected directions and open up new avenues of inquiry.

I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with students, teachers, and administrators at the times and locations most convenient to them. I talked formally with student and teacher participants for between one and three hours each, and most had multiple formal interviews. The interviews focused on three main questions:

1. What is it like participating in this ensemble?
2. What aspects of participating in this ensemble are most meaningful to you?
3. What makes the aspects of participation you identified meaningful?

Sample interview questions can be found in Appendices A-C.

In the course of conducting this study I had many informal conversations with the primary and secondary participants (students, teachers, and principals). All formal interviews with participants were audio recorded; some informal interviews with participants were audio recorded and those that were not recorded were documented in field notes. I also had informal conversations with other student members of the three ensembles, friends and parents of student participants, and additional school administrators. Informal discussions with those not enrolled in this study were documented after the fact in field notes.

### **Observations**

According to Merriam (1998):

Observations can be distinguished from interviews in two ways. First, observations take place in the natural field setting instead of a location designated for the purpose of interviewing; second, observational data represent a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest rather than a secondhand account of the world obtained in an interview. (p. 94)

I conducted multiple observations of ensemble rehearsals and classroom activities outside of rehearsal time (i.e. students eating lunch, practicing, or otherwise spending time in the music room). During these observations I took detailed field notes, collected artifacts such as class handouts, ensemble handbooks, and concert programs, and took photographs of the rehearsal spaces. I attended the year-end concerts of the wind ensemble and the guitar ensemble. Unfortunately the jazz band performed on the same evening as the guitar ensemble; I arranged for a student's parent to tape the final jazz band concert in my absence and added that

DVD recording to my collection of artifacts. I also attended the guitar program's Solo Night, a student-run concert of popular music.

### **Field Notes**

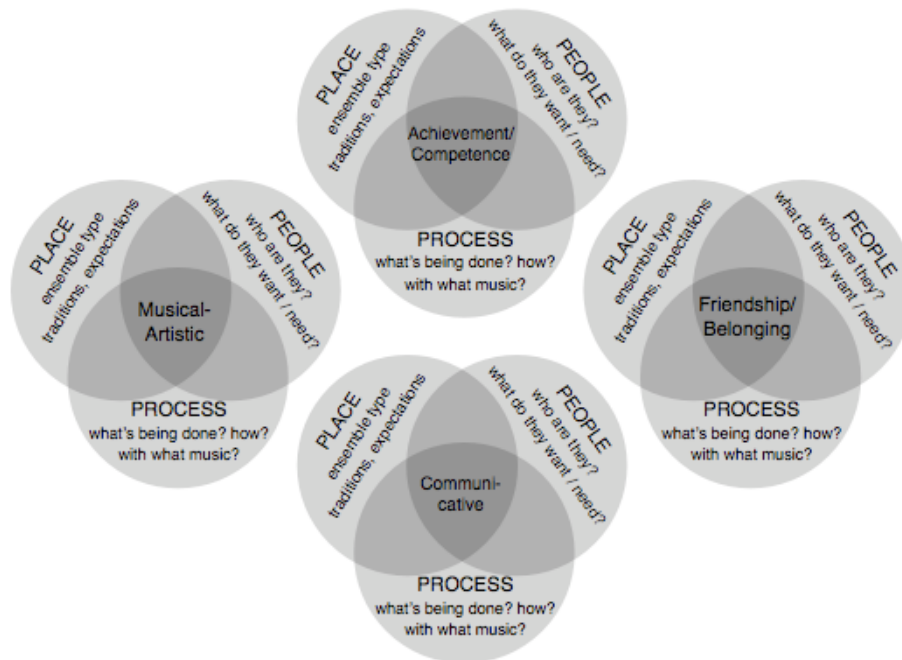
According to Glesne (2006) the field notebook is “the primary recording tool of the qualitative researcher” (p. 55). Throughout the study I maintained a field notebook in which I recorded “descriptions of people, places, events, activities, and conversations” and recorded thoughts, impressions, questions, and hunches (Glesne, 2006, p. 55). I also maintained a running account of my data collection, including dates, times, and durations of formal and informal interviews and observations. In order to monitor my own subjectivity to be aware of potential biases, I devoted a portion of my notebook to reflective notes, and I presented these notes to peers for periodic conversations to assist my own reflexivity.

### **Data Analysis**

In this study data analysis was reflexive and guided by “insight, intuition, and impression” (Dey, 1993, p. 78). As I collected and analyzed data throughout the study, I revised and “choreographed” (Miles & Huberman, 1994) my procedures in response to what I was learning. Creswell (2007) recommends a data analysis spiral—in which the researcher moves in analytic circles rather than linearly—as a guiding contour. Following Creswell's procedural stages, I moved cyclically between data management, reading and writing memos, description, classification, and interpretation, and representation and visualization in order to generate accounts of meaningful ensemble experiences within each of the cases. I

then conducted a thematic analysis of the data across the three cases and discussed my interpretation of the findings (Yin, 2003).

In the initial stages of analysis, I followed coding procedures as outlined by Creswell (2007, p. 152) and allowed categories to emerge rather than relying on “prefigured” categories (Crabtree & Miller, 1992). I used HyperRESEARCH software to encode data and identify themes, and also used MindMap Pro software to sort and organize data and identify relationships. I examined emerging themes as they related to three dimensions of context: process, participants, and place. Figure 3 illustrates four potential themes drawn from literature about meaningful ensemble participation (e.g. Cape, 2008; Hylton, 1980; Seago, 1993; Sugden, 2005), situated within these contextual dimensions.



*Figure 3.* Conceptualizing situated emergent themes.

As I worked toward representation of the cases, I considered analysis from a narrative standpoint. Polkinghorne (1995) differentiates between “analysis of narratives” and “narrative analysis” (p. 12). An analysis of narratives can be conducted with “studies whose data consist of narratives or stories, but whose analysis produces paradigmatic typologies or categories” (p. 5) whereas narrative analysis uses data consisting of “actions, events, and happenings” to produce stories (p. 6). Narrative analysis as approached by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) involves analyzing data within a three-dimensional space of interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (place) (p. 50). In order to investigate the experiences that become meaningful to people inhabiting a particular ensemble space, and interacting in certain ways within their group, I employed narrative analysis to preserve the integrity of these important contextual elements. I moved between analysis and writing of the cases and cross-case chapters with attention to matters of trustworthiness, which are explained next.

### **Trustworthiness**

Creswell (2007) describes eight strategies used by qualitative researchers to enhance the trustworthiness of their interpretations: prolonged engagement and persistent observation; triangulation; peer review and debriefing; negative case analysis; clarification of researcher bias; member checking; rich, thick description; and external audit. To establish trustworthiness, I integrated several of these strategies into the research design.

Triangulation in qualitative research refers to the “use of multiple data-collection methods, multiple sources, multiple investigators, and/or multiple

theoretical perspectives” (Glesne, 2006, p. 37). In this study I collected data from a variety of sources and used a variety of methods including formal and informal interviewing, observations, and collection of artifacts. I also considered the literature related to this study and theoretical perspectives as outlined in Chapter 2. During the analysis process, symbolic interactionism became less useful and praxialism as conceptualized by Regelski (1997, 2004) and Bowman (2009) became more useful, particularly in the final chapter.

I employed member checking with each primary participant in the study. Member checking, or soliciting feedback from participants as to the credibility of findings and interpretations is, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314). I maintained a connection with participants, provided them with copies of interview transcripts, and offered them the opportunity to make revisions or additions. Participants made no changes to the interview transcripts, but two student participants elaborated points they had made during our interviews in email messages, which became part of the data record.

Prolonged engagement and persistent observation are important means of “building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation that stems from distortions introduced by the researcher or informants” (Creswell, 2007, p. 207). Lincoln and Guba (1985) note, “If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth” (p. 304). In this study prolonged engagement was important in order to establish rapport with participants, and afforded the opportunities to move beyond surface-

level responses. I interviewed student and teacher participants formally between one and three times each, with most participants agreeing to two or three formal interviews. Most formal interviews lasted for approximately one hour, but a few interviews lasted longer—up to two hours. I interviewed two school principals once each and interviewed the third principal twice, for approximately one hour total per person. I also interacted informally with student and teacher participants as I spent time at each school site. These informal interactions proved invaluable for building rapport. Persistent observation was also necessary in order to learn the culture of each ensemble, to observe various interactions, and to become familiar with the practices of each group. I observed rehearsals in each school and performances at Maple Grove Collegiate and Brentford Collegiate over a period of six months (January to June) with most observations occurring between March and the end of the school year in June.

Describing an action or situation thickly, using rich, evocative language, is an attempt “to get beyond superficial description to see the richness of thought and purpose that might lie behind the action” (E. R. Jorgensen, 2009, p. 70). I endeavor here to use thick description in the narratives (Chapters 4-6), which helps to convey the complexity and detail of what was observed without jumping to unwarranted conclusions. As Jorgensen explains:

Actions are imbued with meaning and beliefs that have practical and ethical consequences. Since ideas impact sensory perception, there are ever-present dangers of misconstruing what is observed, claiming too much or too little of research findings, and finding what one expects to



find because one expects to find it. Hence, the importance of allowing a situation to “speak” so that one hears and is open to receiving and undergoing it rather than just actively engaging with it. (p. 78)

### **Remainder of the Document**

In the following three chapters I describe each ensemble and its members, and explore the aspects of participation that students say are most meaningful. I devote the first half of each chapter to a thick description of the site, the participants, and the processes in which they engage; in the second half of each chapter I explore what members find meaningful there, and why. Following the descriptions of each case I provide a cross-case analysis, discussing the themes present among the three ensembles. I conclude this document with a discussion of the cases and of their implications.

## Chapter 4

### WIND ENSEMBLE

#### **Part I - Context**

The school doors swing open and students clad in hooded sweatshirts and sneakers despite the frigid temperature file out of the building and down the salted steps of Maple Grove Collegiate.<sup>5</sup> Inside, lockers slam shut and the after-school din of conversation begins to fade as students head home for the day. As the school becomes quiet, the muted tones of brass instruments reverberate down the curved hallway leading to the band room, where members of the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble have begun to assemble.

The musicians are chatty and full of energy. Shuffling between rows of chairs to stash their backpacks, they catch up on the day's gossip. The room is small—too small for this thriving band program, the school principal says—but it accommodates the group of 41 with enough room left over for a mangy couch and stuffed chairs that delimit the student lounge area. I settle at the side of the room, out of the way of students who clamber over chairs and low brass cases to retrieve their instruments.

The band room is thoroughly marked by the activity of generations of band students who have passed through and others who now inhabit the space. Garland and plastic ivy spill from a bag of Christmas decorations stuffed onto one shelf. On another, a large vivid-blue tiki head named Homefry sports huge gold

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<sup>5</sup> Collegiate is synonymous with high school in Canada.

lips and a spiky brush cut. A sign, presumably liberated on a band outing in years past, warns “Please Use Escalators Properly.”

The history of this program is evident in more formal ways. On the walls, an assortment of plaques engraved with various achievements at provincial, national, and international festivals attest to the program’s lengthy tradition of excellence. Other awards stand in lines two to three deep along the tops of packed trophy cases or lie piled in dusty stacks. I scan the engraved Rookie of the Year Award (1977-1994) and recognize the names of several former student recipients who are now local music teachers. Past Maple Grove Collegiate band members are memorialized in several decades’ worth of festival photographs hung here and there and, in a more recent tradition, through the colorful personalized bricks of the band room wall painted by each graduating student.

Some musicians settle into their warm up routines right away; others use the time to socialize or to stave off hunger with a quick snack. Ken, a boisterous 12th-grade percussionist, celebrates the discovery of a forgotten ham sandwich in his backpack with high-fives all around. A second-generation Maple Grove Collegiate musician, Ken is undecided about whether to follow his parents and sister into a career in music. His mother and father, now both public school music teachers, were high school sweethearts and members of the wind ensemble. Sharon, a 10th-grade clarinetist, is an exception among the talkative high schoolers. She sits quietly in her seat, earbuds in her ears, and assembles her clarinet.

Mrs. Cohen steps onto the podium and claps her hands. Energetic and upbeat, she greets the class with a cheerful “Hi gang.” A fourteen-year veteran of teaching, Cohen took over as Director of Bands at Maple Grove four years ago when her colleague and former teacher, Mr. Andrews, began to transition into retirement. “One of our family needs help,” she announces to the group. “Not my family, the band family.” A trumpet player pitches tickets to the upcoming performance of the Manitoba Provincial Honor Band, and several students agree to buy from him.

Mrs. Cohen surveys the room and accounts for missing members. “So Sonia is at a music festival and Louise is not at school today,” she announces, “and Lian, oh you guys, Lian had gym in 6th slot and someone banged into her and hit her lip.” Gasps of sympathy, and I smile as two clarinetists mutter about the dangers of gym class. Cohen continues, “So tomorrow everybody go to the cafeteria and buy her a popsicle.” Does the cafeteria sell popsicles? The membership is momentarily drawn into debate, and Mrs. Cohen struggles to continue. “So the flute solo will be difficult. Shh . . .” Then firmly and with some exasperation, “Okay, can you guys find some focus please?” The discussion abruptly ends and Mrs. Cohen continues. “I also want to tell you that Hyun Jae’s reed is not here so she’s using my reed which is terrible, horrible. So her being out of tune is not her fault. It’s my fault. Don’t hold it against her.” Hyun Jae winces and adjusts the borrowed oboe reed.

On this day the wind ensemble students are reading a new piece, *Arabesque*, for the second time. Written by Samuel Hazo, *Arabesque* is rated a

grade 5 out of 6 and is inspired by sounds from the Middle East. The musicians play nearly up to tempo and their run-through is messy but musical. “Brace yourself for an Andrewsism,” Cohen announces with a wry smile. She sticks her stomach out in an impression of her former teacher and colleague. “You have to stroke your chin,” jokes a saxophonist. “And your belly button!” adds Ken. The students laugh as Cohen begins again in her best “Mr. Andrews” voice. “How long is the rest at the end of measure 59, trombones?” A pause, and then a trombonist ventures, “There is no rest.” “Ohhhhh, okay. . .” She strokes her chin thoughtfully before breaking character. “And then we’d go into the office later and he’d say, ‘You’ll notice all the really bright ones started smiling right away when I said that.’ He’d say that all the time! Oh, I miss him so much!” The musicians laugh and play the section again. This time the trombonists hold the note in question for full value.

The oboe solo, a slinking, seductive melody, comes out honking, wheezy, and horribly out-of-tune, and the group dissolves into giggles. “Ms. Cape,” Cohen calls to me, “this is one of the most brilliant musicians. That’s why it’s funny. We don’t normally laugh at each other!” She pauses, “Do we?” “Well,” Nancy grins from behind her tuba. They begin again, and as the music builds Cohen conducts with the intensity of a performance. The musicians respond, playing with sensitivity and expression that belies their inexperience with this repertoire. Despite the squeaks and honks of the hobbled oboist, the group plays beautifully and I find myself anticipating the final performance.

“Okay,” Cohen says at the end of rehearsal. “Maybe we should even have a clarinet sectional and maybe a trumpet sectional on this? Great! Thanks everybody. Have a great night. Go do something brilliant.” “That was fun,” says one of the departing students.

### **About the Program**

Maple Grove Collegiate is a Winnipeg high school that serves just under 1000 students in grades 10 through 12. Located in an economically and culturally diverse community near the province’s largest university, the school is known for its strong academic, athletic, and arts programs. Maple Grove Collegiate also boasts a strong international program and students from some 40 countries attend the school.

The MGC music department is composed of two programs. The choral program is the smaller of the two but has grown rapidly since the current choir teacher was hired, now four years ago. Students in all grades can choose to participate in the concert choir, an open 75-member ensemble. The most skilled vocalists may also be invited to sing in the school’s vocal jazz ensemble, a select 12-voice group.

The band program consists of the grade ten band, the symphonic band (open to students in grades eleven and twelve), the wind ensemble (which is “by invitation”), and three auditioned groups, the junior, intermediate, and senior jazz bands. Students who are invited to join the wind ensemble are also required to participate in their grade-level band, and many also participate in other music courses as well. According to Mr. Kjernisted, the school’s principal, there’s “a

fair amount of crossover” between the band and choir programs, particularly among the school’s most skilled musicians.

Eileen, an 11th-grade student, plays the horn and sings in the school’s choral program. She says the many music classes keep her very busy. “If someone wanted to just do band and wind ensemble that would be fine because that’s just three hours a week,” she tells me, “but I’m [also] in the symphonic ensemble and jazz band and choir and vocal jazz. It sounds like a lot, but a lot of us do it and you just kind of get used to it.” Jia, also in the 11th-grade, plays in jazz band, symphonic band, and wind ensemble, sings in choir, and also plays in a saxophone quartet. This level of participation is not uncommon in the music program; classes are scheduled before school, within the five slots of the regular school day, at lunch, and after school. Participation in one or more small ensembles is not uncommon at Maple Grove Collegiate, and the school is always well represented at the province’s annual Solo and Ensemble Festival. Cohen says:

[We make it] as much of an immersion program as possible for the kids. We have six bands—three concert bands and three jazz bands—but the main goal is not the bands, it’s the students. The main thing is “How do we serve this student as a music student?” . . . As much as they want to be involved they will be. It’s not limited to those six bands . . . there’s all sorts of ensembles going on in here all the time.

“Serving students” is an ethic shared by the school administration. Principal Kjernisted explains:

Most kids graduate out of here with four or five more credits than they need. We push that; we want kids in class. We don't say you have to have a limit of eight [credits], as some places do. It has a huge impact on our staffing and sometimes our class size, but I would rather have kids engaged and doing something in a bigger group than floating around so somebody can have a smaller group.

Members of the wind ensemble often involve themselves in music outside of the school as well. In addition to her school ensembles, Jia teaches piano lessons. Sharon, a tenth-grade student, plays the clarinet in a youth orchestra and is one of the few wind ensemble members who takes private lessons on her school instrument. "If I am not doing a rehearsal I'm practicing," she says. Huan, a twelfth-grader, plays the violin in a youth orchestra, plays horn in the symphonic band, wind ensemble and jazz band, and sings in choir and vocal jazz, whereas tenth-grade tubist Nancy supplements her school music classes by singing in the school division choir, performing in her church's brass band, and dancing (ballet, modern, and jazz) with a performance team.

### **Joining Wind Ensemble**

Mrs. Cohen and I sit in her office discussing the wind ensemble. "I always refer to it as AP<sup>6</sup> band," Cohen tells me. "It's by invitation and it's a very revered group in the school. The grade tens in this school sort of personify that. They always talk about who's going to get asked next to be in the wind ensemble. And they practice for it, you can hear them right now." Indeed, strains of

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<sup>6</sup> "Advanced Placement" designates a more challenging curriculum.



Grainger's *Country Gardens* and various other pieces filter through the heavy door as a dozen or so young musicians practice their parts. "They're just dying to be in that group." I ask Cohen if the students are required to audition on wind ensemble pieces. "Oh no, they're just proving to me that they're dedicated right now. That's a motivator in itself."

Cohen maintains close connections with the school's feeder programs, periodically helping out at the middle schools or bringing one of the Maple Grove Collegiate bands to perform for the middle schoolers. By the time each new class of tenth-graders enters Maple Grove Collegiate, Cohen is already familiar with most of the musicians and invites the most skilled among them to join the wind ensemble. Others are invited to join later in the year or in subsequent years.

Huan, now a senior, was among those invited to join as an incoming tenth-grader. He recalls:

I came in the first day of school. Mrs. Cohen knew me already . . . she knew how I played, so the first day of school she asked me if wanted to be in the wind ensemble. . . . Coming into MGC I kind of knew about the band program and we came to the open house and we were told it was an invitational kind of thing. So yeah, I was kind of excited.

Ken joined the same year, though he doesn't actually recall being invited. "I don't think Mr. Andrews or Mrs. Cohen ever talked to me about it," he laughed. "I just showed up and nobody ever kicked me out, so I stuck around!"

Eileen heard about the wind ensemble from her elder sister, a trombonist in the group, and says she wanted to join as well. "I kind of just really wanted to

do everything that she did,” Eileen smiled. Having only recently switched to the horn from trumpet, she says her tone “wasn’t up there yet,” and when she didn’t garner an initial invitation she wasn’t surprised. “I didn’t really expect it,” she said. “It’s a very big thing to get invited in grade 10.” Eileen worked hard that fall and in November Mrs. Cohen asked her to join the wind ensemble horn section. “I was pretty excited,” Eileen recalls. “It was a big day.”

Nancy and Jia shared similar reactions to being invited into the group. “I was super super super excited,” Nancy laughed. “I just love music and I just wanted to push myself and challenge myself.” Jia jokes that she took “the last seat on the bus,” joining the wind ensemble a short time before the group traveled to a music festival in Saskatoon. “It was really interesting music that they played and it seemed like a challenge and I really like challenges, so I was really excited to be invited,” she said.

Mrs. Cohen says she selects people who are able to handle the challenge of the difficult repertoire but Jia believes there’s a character component to selection as well. “[Y]ou want to create a well-rounded band not only by playing, but also by personality,” she told me. Tenth-grader Sharon agrees and points to her first few weeks at Maple Grove as an illustration of Mrs. Cohen’s expectations. A talented clarinetist, Sharon wanted to join the wind ensemble from the start. “It just looked cool,” she recalls, “and I just liked wind ensembles and I thought I could get in if I tried.” Though her playing was strong enough, Sharon was initially distracted by the excitement of being “back to school.” “Mrs. Cohen said she wanted to bring me in but I was acting extremely

immature,” Sharon admitted. “But it was like the first week of school and I hadn’t seen anybody in so long so I was talking and stuff. Not really the best thing you want in wind ensemble.” After a few weeks, Sharon says, she settled down and she was invited to join the group a short time later.

### **The Ensemble Atmosphere**

From the beginning I found the students of the MGC Wind Ensemble to be friendly and welcoming. I received many smiles and nods of approval as Mrs. Cohen introduced me and explained the focus of my study. Several students approached me after the rehearsal and volunteered to talk with me. “Any help you need,” one student offered, “just let us know.” This type of warm welcome is typical of the group, according to the members who spoke with me. “[E]very time someone new comes in [Mrs. Cohen] introduces them and everyone claps,” Huan told me. “It’s pretty friendly.” Jia recalled her first day. “I felt really welcomed,” she said. “It was such a nice atmosphere.” Nancy agreed, “It’s just a friendly and welcoming place to be. It’s a really relaxed environment.”

This friendliness extends to the rehearsals. Although the group works hard and rehearsals can be intense, they rarely lose their sense of fun. Mrs. Cohen has a wicked sense of humor, and during rehearsals I often found myself laughing out loud at the banter between her and the students. Jia credits a large part of the upbeat environment to Mrs. Cohen. “I really like her,” she told me. “She’s really happy a lot and really excited about everything so it kind of makes it easier to be happier about other things because she already sets the mood and that atmosphere.” Jia also believes the humor is part of Mr. Andrews’s legacy. “I

think a lot of the jokes come from him,” she says, “[and] because he’d been there so long he used the same jokes and now we call them Andrewsisms. If Mrs. Cohen or anyone makes a joke similar to his, we call it that . . . I think that’s why all the joking happens, and it also keeps the mood light.”

Nancy says the ensemble strikes a good balance between work and fun. She commented, “I know I really enjoy getting down to work and getting things done but I also like having a little bit of humor thrown in there.” Eileen says she likes the humor most of the time. “I’m really moody so sometimes I’m like, ‘Oh my gosh,’” she says, rolling her eyes, “and then sometimes it’s a big picker upper, and sometimes it’s just hilarious. Over the past semester I’ve been sitting beside Huan. He’s just hilarious and we have a wonderful time. . . . It’s good everyone can just laugh together.”

The sense of relaxation and fun is evident in the physical space of the band room and is immediately apparent in the handwritten notes students have left for each other throughout the room. At the front of the room, a note written in loopy cursive reads, “Imalka—Your lunch is on the table behind this board.” Akki has signed the note with her name and a big heart. Near the instrument storage area, a handmade sign warns, “Dear people of the band room, if you have the misfortune of NOT being part of the trombone section please keep your JUNK off our chairs! Heads will roll.” Behind the percussion section, scrawled on a rolling white board above Music Festival rating sheets, a note reads, “So a C, an Eb, and a G walk into a bar. The bartender says, ‘Sorry, we don’t serve minors.’”

Next to the rehearsal area, a dozen or so students sit, stand, and lean on a group of elderly couches. The lounge area is an important part of band culture at MGC. There, students talk, eat, work on homework, and sleep. “There’s never, never an empty band room,” Ken says, “there’s always somebody, either a class or somebody practicing or people over on the couches not doing anything. I know that’s where I spend my spares,<sup>7</sup> sitting on the couch.” Eileen calls the lounge area “the hot spot” of the band room:

Everyone sits down, anyone can . . . pull up a chair and join the conversation. There’s always a chalkboard debate going on, or some diagram. I remember this one time, this girl did this entire drawing of why Justin Bieber, the Jonas Brothers, and Miley Cyrus are utter crap. It was the most intricate flow chart I have ever seen. Something like that is always going on. It’s stuff you can relate to and you can either agree or disagree. People always listen to your opinion, everyone is always very open, everyone wants to hear new things. That’s what I’ve found. You can say what you want and people will be interested. They will either shut you down or they will completely support it.

The band room is a social hub in the school and a place where many students spend their free time. Though frequented most often by members of the band program, the room is open to all, provided they respect the space and the equipment there. Mrs. Cohen works hard to make the band room a relaxed and

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<sup>7</sup> A spare is a block of free time during which a particular student has no classes scheduled.

welcoming place to be for all students, and she takes full advantage of the room's status as a hang out zone. "Anyone can go in," Eileen laughed, "but if you're not in band and you go in, you need to be prepared for Mrs. Cohen to accost you and make you join." Indeed, during the school year of this study Mrs. Cohen recruited two band room visitors to join the band program. "I think we got, like, two of them, so it's nice," Jia laughed. "It's a great accomplishment."

### **A Sense of Legacy**

The band program has been an institution at Maple Grove Collegiate for much of the school's 44-year history. Seven teachers led the program in its first six years until Ed Andrews was hired in 1975. Over the next three decades he built and maintained a highly successful band program that became known for its jazz bands as well as the wind ensemble. Due to its longevity and popularity, Principal Kjernisted says, the program became "a cultural icon" in the neighborhood and in the school:

We're at a stage of our development as a school community where second generations of kids are coming through. This area is kind of unique in that people generally don't move out, they move around. . . . And so we've got people who are coming back and their . . . kids are coming here, and so when we look at the general school population an awful lot of those kids' parents were in the band program too. So it's starting to re-populate itself. . . . It's one of those things that becomes self-perpetuating.

As Andrews began to transition into retirement, Cohen was an ideal candidate to succeed him. In addition to her strengths as a musician and teacher

in the school division, Kjernisted notes, as a graduate of the MGC music program Cohen brought with her “a real appreciation for where this program has come from and where it continues to need to be in order to maintain that.” She was hired as Director of Bands in 2006 and worked alongside Andrews until he fully retired two years later. Cohen has since maintained the high standard established by Andrews.

The Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble regularly performs university-level music. At MusicFest Canada, one of the country’s largest competitive music festivals, the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble is one of a very few ensembles nationally to enter at the 600 level.<sup>8</sup> “It’s ridiculous,” Ken says. “Like, in terms of winning a gold award, the MGC band program [has] won 27 gold awards and the entire rest of Canada [has] won 3. I may be off on those numbers, but it’s something ridiculous. We’re by far the best program in the country, and I don’t think people realize that all the time.” Though Ken’s figures are exaggerated, the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble holds a formidable record. From 1999 to 2009, bands across Canada entered at the 600 level a combined total of twenty-two times. The Maple Grove Wind Ensemble accounts for eleven of these entries and earned nine of the seventeen Gold standings awarded. The next most successful school performing at the 600 level entered three times during that period and picked up two Gold standings.

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<sup>8</sup> 600 is the highest level of competition and is considered appropriate for most university ensembles

With the ensemble's long history of achievement, I wondered how much emphasis the school community placed on awards. Principal Kjernisted downplayed the importance of awards and other formal recognition when talking with me. "I think it's a nice side effect," he said. "I would hate to think it was emphasized for its own sake. Those things are a nice way of recognizing the caliber of music that is taught and played here . . . and I think ultimately our teaching staff looks at it that way too." Cohen also downplayed the importance of awards when talking with me and with the students but admits she feels tremendous pressure to maintain the Maple Grove Collegiate tradition. "Oh huge, it's huge," she says, shaking her head. "I have two toddlers at home and I want to give everything to them. . . . If I give time to them it's time I'm not spending studying scores for here. Everywhere I am, my heart wants to be in the other place." She laughs, "I weep about it. No matter where I am I should be in the other place. I can't just work, I have to work at 100% all the time." Cohen pauses to consider this. "It'd be easier not to, but it'd be less satisfying too."

### **The Music**

It's the beginning of April and the wind ensemble is midway through an intense rehearsal of *Arabesque*. The piece is coming along, but as they finish Mrs. Cohen addresses the woodwinds. "I've got to be honest. Around [measure] 70? It sounds like you're not on that. That's just the truth. Anybody have that part totally right all the time?" From the percussion section Ken raises his hand. "Ken, you don't have to practice it then." "That's okay, I don't play there anyway," he jokes. "The nature of wind ensemble is that you're kind of expected



to just work it out,” Cohen continues in a tone that’s friendly but firm. “If you have questions, for sure I’ll help you, but let’s try to check out some of those things and we’ll work out some rhythm things. If anybody wants to do a sectional I’m willing to be there if you need me.”

Cohen shifts her focus to the group and announces, “Okay, we’re going to try the French horn part in *Eternal Father*.” “Yeaaaaaaah!” someone cheers. “The part that prevents most bands from being able to play this,” Cohen begins, “well, three things. One thing is brass, two is a French horn section that can play the hymn.” She smiles at the horns. “Three, and probably most importantly, is that part where . . . do you remember this vaguely? We’ve read this once before.” Cohen sings a fast, rhythmic part that passes from section to section. “And what most bands don’t have is a complete chain. So we’d have to commit to being seamless. Remember *Sevens*?” she says, referring to a piece they performed very successfully earlier in the year. “You have to commit! Remember, hesitation kills bands. Here we go. One, two, three, and . . .”

“It’s relatively fun music,” Jia says. “Sometimes challenging, depending on the parts.” The wind ensemble musicians perform a variety of pieces throughout the year, the majority of them at a Grade 5 or 6 level. For Huan it’s “just a totally different range of music. It’s definitely cool.” Ken describes the music played in the wind ensemble as “fun but substantial music at the same time.” He explains:

I think there’s a side of music that I like to play and there’s music that I like to listen to. For instance, like *El Camino Real*—it’s a lot of fun to play

as a percussionist, [and] *Arabesque* that we just played, a lot of Sam Hazo stuff. A lot of percussion-heavy stuff is fun to play. I enjoy playing those but as an audience member, something like *Salvation Is Created*. That's in the Symphonic Band folder. It's not much fun to play for percussion because there's timpani and crash cymbals and we have, I think, 11 percussionists in our Symphonic Band percussion section so there's not a lot to do. So it's not a lot of fun to play, but great to listen to.

Cohen takes advantage of the fact that the musicians sight read well and can polish a piece of music quickly. They read a wide variety of pieces during the school year, playing some for fun and testing others out as possible performance selections. Cohen believes it's important to find pieces that fit the particular group, and she and the students work together to determine what they will perform. "[In] symphonic band she'll tally us," Jia told me. "She'll ask us how many fingers, and we'll raise our fingers. For our [wind ensemble] it's more vocal. If you like it just say yes, if you don't, say no. . . . I think it's really opinionated, which is really good." Huan estimates the group members might read a hundred pieces in a year. "It's a lot," he says. "[We have] a big thick folder and then sometimes she hands out music, we play it and hand it back. . . . In MusicFest we get a huge list of pieces so when that list comes out we basically play everything on that list unless it's impossible for her to get."

This semester the group has settled on *Incantation and Dance* by John Barnes Chance, *Eternal Father, Strong to Save* arranged by Claude T. Smith, and *Arabesque* by Samuel Hazo as their major pieces. Though they'll continue to

work on many other pieces over the semester, this is the repertoire they will take to MusicFest in Ottawa and perform at the Spring Concert.

### **Performing**

“How are we doing, team? You feelin’ ready?” Mrs. Cohen calls as she bounds into the band room an hour before the final concert of the year. A handful of students have arrived early; two or three warm up with scales and excerpts from their band music while the others sit quietly or pace. They’re dressed in MGC concert attire: black pants, white dress shirts, black vests with gold lapels—a nod to the school colors—and black bow ties. As students arrive the sense of energy and excitement escalates along with the noise. As with the first rehearsal I observed, the musicians chat and assemble their instruments, but this evening the talk is quicker, the laughing louder.

“Concert is like panic day for me,” Jia confessed. “I’m always running around.” She says the activity serves a purpose. “I kind of like it because I like being busy but it’s sort of like a stress where you’re running around trying to set up, trying to make sure everything is perfect, and then you have to play right after that. It’s like a rush of adrenaline.”

In the school’s gymnasium, families climb rows of bleachers to find their seats. Photos from the recent trip to MusicFest play against a large white screen on the opposite side of the gym. Homefry and newly acquired Spike, the tiki head band mascots, flank Mrs. Cohen’s podium. Parents settle younger children and assemble cameras and tripods. Mr. Andrews arrives and finds a spot off to the side, but still up front.

Emptied of chairs and music stands, the band room manages to accommodate all members of the band program. This concert will feature the grade 10 band, the symphonic band, and the wind ensemble; jazz and choir ensembles will perform on another evening.

Are the wind ensemble musicians nervous about tonight's performance? "Even though I've performed so many times, I'm always nervous," Nancy told me. "But [it's] nervous excitement; I'm ready to go perform." Jia agrees, "I'm always nervous about either playing not as well as I could or screwing up." Eileen says she is calmer than she used to be. "I just think of it like, 'Oh, we're in the band room and we're doing it the way we always do,' and that seems to work," she says. "Because in the band room we get it."

The percussion section deals with pre-concert energy as a group. "We have our percussion section traditions," Ken explains. "We do a little warm-up run, do stretches. We have our own percussion section huddle and pep talk. Trevor [another percussionist] and I have to prepare speeches because we're the grade 12 leaders." Ken laughs and leans back in his chair. "A lot of times it ends up being, 'I forgot to write anything down. Let's try to look around and see what we can talk about,' but it's just something to get kind of psyched up and get the blood pumping, get the adrenaline going, get psyched up."

Principal Kjernisted serves double duty, acting as the master of ceremonies for the evening's concert and working the soundboard. As the tenth-grade students find their seats, he welcomes the audience and highlights the recent music trip, citing it as "another example of true excellence." I smile as Kjernisted

reports, “The bands were highly, highly rated by the adjudicators at the festival.” He may not emphasize ratings and awards in his own mind, but results still matter. “And so,” he says in closing, “it’s with great pride that we present this evening, our final band concert.” Mrs. Cohen nods to the band’s oboist, who plays a steady ‘A.’ Cohen appears intensely focused as the group tunes, however, as she raises her baton to begin, I see several musicians smile or laugh in response to a private joke shared between her and them.

The tenth-grade band plays well, and as they conclude Mrs. Cohen thanks the teachers of the feeder school programs. She distributes awards, including the Rookie of the Year Award. Imalka, a saxophonist and member of the wind ensemble, wins that prize because, as Cohen notes, she “contributed from the moment she stepped through the door to the band room and has managed, somehow, in grade 10, to play in all six of our ensembles.”

Members of the wind ensemble file into the gymnasium and to their seats. As the members begin to tune, a lone tubist searches for a place to sit. “Chris Peters?” Cohen says gently but with obvious amusement. “This is not your band.” Chris blushes and makes a quick exit. Cohen calls out, “But thanks for being here early, Chris!” and the audience cheers. “First time all year he’s early,” she jokes. “Yes!”

“The band in front of you is the wind ensemble,” Cohen begins. “This is a band by invitation so the staff of the program invite kids as we see they’re ready for this level of music.” She pauses. “Our first piece is called *Eternal Father, Strong to Save*, which you can only play once every 15 years or so because you

need to have triple-tonguing brass players and a to-die-for French horn section.”

Cohen smiles broadly. “We had that combination this year so we went for it.

Hope you enjoy *Eternal Father, Strong to Save*.”

The Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble begins. As the group plays, a few students from the other ensembles sneak in and sit in the bleachers or stand by the door, listening. At the difficult horn quartet, Mrs. Cohen nods encouragingly and Eileen, Huan, and their section mates enter with a full, rich sound. Cohen stays right with them as they play. As they finish, a parent next to me whispers, “She looked like she was adoring them.”

“It’s really nice [to perform],” Huan tells me later. “It’s a totally different experience. You’re in the moment, everyone is listening, and you’re giving it your total focus.” Nancy shared a similar experience of living in the moment. “It’s exhilarating,” she said, “So many things on your mind—think about your music, watch the conductor . . .” For Jia, the feeling of performing depends on the audience’s response. “In a band concert parents are there to support you,” she reasons, “so I feel really comfortable playing in front of them.” “I feel completely comfortable on stage,” Sharon agreed. “I’m not nervous at all when it comes to [performing] . . . except when you have a solo.”

Huan informs me that as much as they enjoy performing the group members rarely lives up to their own expectations:

Most of the time, we’re like, “We didn’t play as well as we could have.” I think it’s good things and bad things about [every] concert; things that never go wrong go wrong and then things that we usually don’t get are

tremendously better. So we sometimes say we didn't play as well but it was actually pretty good. Sometimes in wind ensemble we are pretty tough on ourselves. We expect a lot. . . . Because I guess we just have that much fun and we expect—we know—that we can play infinitely always better so there's always room for improvement.

Jia disagrees. After a performance, she says, "I think it's a moment of relief, and the next day it's like, 'Okay, next performance!'"

For the graduating seniors, this spring concert marks their final performance at Maple Grove Collegiate. Accordingly, it's the symphonic band (which includes wind ensemble members), not the wind ensemble that performs last. They play their first two pieces and then Cohen presents awards. Jia and Huan each receive Canadian Band Association awards. "They're almost on staff here," Cohen jokes. The Spirit and Commitment Award goes to Ken, known for his outstanding musicianship, team spirit, and "[being] able to travel the perimeter of the band room without touching the floor." As the musicians perform their final piece, Mrs. Cohen plays a slide show commemorating their time together over the past three years. Ken appears frequently, clowning around with many different people, wearing a trombone on his head, playing the flute. In the bleachers, his mother shakes her head. The symphonic band members turn to watch at every opportunity, and some peer out of the corners of their eyes as they play. The final slide reads "Thank you students for the music and all the memories. You are amazing!" and this slide stays up as the group finishes.

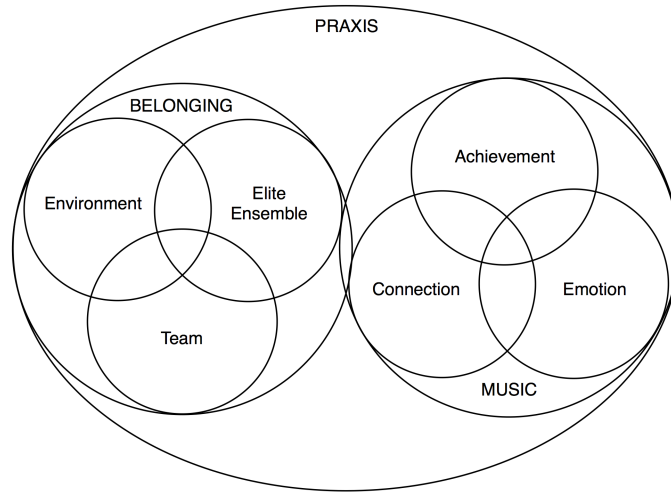
## Part II – Meaning

Members of the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble find participating meaningful in a variety of ways. Two facets of the ensemble praxis,<sup>9</sup> in particular, help to make the ensemble experience meaningful. First, students value the sense of belonging they feel as a result of participating in the wind ensemble. They experience belonging within the physical space of the band room, feel pride in belonging to the prestigious wind ensemble, and value being part of a team with other similarly devoted and highly skilled members. Second, the members find meaning through the music they perform. The repertoire provides difficult challenges for students to overcome individually and as a group, and the sonorities of the music can lead to moments of emotional intensity. The music also provides a means by which students can connect and communicate with one another. Figure 4 shows these two categories of meaning, which are explained further in the remainder of this chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> I use the term praxis to underscore the notion that the teachers in this study reflected on their practices and made conscious decisions about how to proceed. Whether formally or informally, their practices are theorized.





*Figure 4.* Themes of meaning within Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble.

### **Belonging**

For these students, meaning is strongly attached to belonging. Three dimensions of belonging in the wind ensemble came to the fore during this study: the band room as a place to belong, student feelings of pride in belonging to the MGC Wind Ensemble, and the group members’ similar goals and abilities, which foster a sense of belonging to a cohesive team.

#### **A Place to Belong**

“Somebody once told me that the band room must be a magical place,” Eileen informed me over coffee one evening in early June. The school year was drawing to a close, and Eileen was reflective about her junior year. “I think that things do happen in [the band room] that are magical,” she continued. “The people are always very supportive. Most of it is the support. If someone is stressed out or needs help with their homework, there’s always somebody there to help out, you know, sort of go to for advice; that’s very common.” The adults of Maple Grove Collegiate are aware that the band room is an important student

meeting place. “If you want to find a particular person . . . when you know they have a spare you don’t look in the hall, you just go to the band room and they’ll be there,” Principal Kjernisted says. “They’re doing homework together and they’re eating and they’re doing whatever. . . . It’s just part of the culture of that program, that if you’re part of the band program you’re always welcome in there.” Eileen agrees with Kjernisted’s assessment. The band room, she says, is a place she “can count on.”

Jia, too, spends what little free time she has in the band room and notices that the same people tend to congregate there. “Usually it’s band students,” she says, “[but] there’s no rule or anything about band students and that’s really fine because its nice to meet new people.” Over time I came to recognize a core group of band room “regulars,” but there were almost always students whom I didn’t recognize on the couches or at the back of the room. “Yeah, we just all hang out there,” Huan told me. “Sometimes non-band people will come in and sit down and we’ll welcome people. . . . [The lounge area is] kind of like our home base, but it’s open so random people come in.”

Although everyone who spoke with me characterized the wind ensemble culture as friendly and accepting, Eileen recalls that she was initially a little intimidated as a tenth-grade student “because everyone had their little community and I wasn’t quite into the band room society yet.” It took some time before she was comfortable. “It’s interesting to watch that little subculture developed over the course of a school year,” Principal Kjernisted told me, “because around about now, in April, the grade 10 students are comfortable and they feel that this place

is theirs, and so they're all in there now too, whereas they weren't so much earlier. They've been drawn into this whole band subculture that exists within this building."

Not so for everyone. Tenth-grader Sharon caught my attention because she was so often alone. When other students sat together on the couches or rehearsed together at the back of the room, Sharon usually sat by herself, warming up on her clarinet or listening to music on her mp3 player. Sharon moved to Maple Grove to get away from a negative peer group. "We left because my mom thought I'd get into, like, just a lot of bad stuff and it wasn't the best school," she shared. "I came here in hopes that I wouldn't do that. It's a good band program, I'm getting more serious with music and stuff, so it's keeping me away from it." Sharon feels that the move and her involvement with music have made a difference:

At [my old school] I was getting in with a bad crowd and, I mean, I still talk to them but I don't have time to hang out with them. It's pretty much texting and [chatting online]. . . . I've never actually done drugs, but people have tried to get me into drugs; I just kind of avoided them. It's easy to get out of that when you don't have time to see them. . . . It's an excuse; it's helped me a lot. I have this music bag right now that says, "I can't . . . I have to practice."

When I asked Sharon about the kind of people who play in the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble she replied, "They're all the band geeks." Sharon continued, "Yeah, I mean they are really nice though, and shiny, and it

seems like they're all good friends. Always at lunch time and on spares and stuff, everybody's on the chairs just talking. They seem really funny and stuff." When I asked Sharon whether she saw herself as a part of that she sighed and said, "[I'm] kind of antisocial. Yeah, I don't mean to be, but I am. It's like, I kind of want to be there. It's not like I'm nervous, but it's not like you just go up and say, 'Hi!' I don't know, its just . . ." Sharon described herself as "kind of shy, social-wise" and added, "I talk to a few people in the group but . . . [at lunch] I usually go home with one of my friends from outside of the band or just walk around here and get food."

For Sharon, involvement in the band program and other musical activities offered a place to be among positive peers, although she was not yet confident enough to enter more deeply into the band community. Mrs. Cohen offered her perspective:

It used to be that at the beginning of the year [Sharon] was so aloof and just so unable to connect, and luckily I've had enough one-on-one time with her that I know that's not who she is, so we just have to work on it. I think I just need to get her to hang in the band room so people can see the real her and she has a place to go to be the real her. I think the only time she's really being true to herself is when she's actually playing. When she sits in the room before rehearsal and she has the earphones in, she's sitting there alone. But when it's a sectional, she's chatting and goofing around and laughing so . . . you know, that's the kind of stuff, that sort of goofiness. I have to grab that and bring it into the band room and make

sure she can be that way with all of the band kids. I have to get her off of the hard chairs and onto the couches.

The lounge area, with its couches and tattered chairs, and the comfort and ownership students feel there, illustrates the sense of belonging fostered by denizens of the band room. The band room clutter is largely student generated and communicates a sense of comfort and life rather than disorganization and chaos. When I asked Huan about the band room he laughed, “Well I use it as my locker! I come in the morning, put down my bag and jacket. Yeah, it’s our own kind of thing.” “It does feel like a student-owned place,” Jia observed. “I find it more welcoming than the cafeteria, because in the cafeteria it has this school atmosphere still. In the band room . . . it kind of has this different feeling that isn’t school related. It feels like another home.”

This sense of ease and belonging is evident in the ways students behave. They lounge on the couches, scrawl humorous notes on the whiteboard, store personal belongings for later in the day, and rearrange the furniture to accommodate sectionals. While the students treat the space as their own, they are also respectful of the room and the activities therein. During one wind ensemble rehearsal I witnessed Curtis, a jazz band and symphonic band member, practicing tricks with a Chinese yo-yo. His proximity to the rehearsal initially struck me as odd and potentially distracting, however no one seemed to mind. Over time I learned that students are careful to keep lounge area noise down when rehearsals are in progress, and that boundaries between formal and informally functioning spaces of the band room are flexible and permeable. Huan explained, “We sit in

the lounge, and then [you] move over and you're in the band room. It's still like you're in the same place, it's not like we move away [into] something else." Mrs.

Cohen agrees:

It's neat because they go from the lounge, and the lounge is very close to our rehearsal space, and it's just kind of . . . you look over while we're playing and people are sitting on the couches and . . . it's just a very homey feeling. It is a place where I think they feel respected and they definitely respect each other. . . . It's an extension of where they're most comfortable.

The adults who spoke with me share the conviction that the band room and the activities therein should serve students. Cohen says that the clutter is well worth the sense of ownership and belonging it conveys:

If you come to my house you'll see everything's in its place, and I, like, wash the floors everyday and it's kind of perfect. Everything is put away. Within an hour of supper dishes have to be done. But at that school it's not like that because that's not what the kids want it to be. At first I fought that, and then I realized that that's a big part of it. They really own it. They brag about how messy their room is; they think it's . . . it's just where they belong.

Principal Kjernisted echoed the same ethic of student ownership and belonging. "They store their bikes in there!" he laughed. "It's just a bit of a gong show in there. Nonetheless . . . [i]t's a place for them in the school that they know is theirs absolutely."

## **Pride in Belonging to a High-Achieving Ensemble**

The Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble has a lengthy tradition of excellence and is highly regarded within the local community and among Canadian school bands. The wind ensemble's status is well-known among band program members, communicated through awards and photographs displayed in the band room, through the stories of parents, siblings, friends, and other former participants, and through the messages communicated directly and indirectly by Mrs. Cohen and other adults in the school. During the rehearsal of a difficult unison entrance, for example, Cohen referred to the ensemble's identity as motivation for the members to push themselves. "In most bands that would be good," she told the musicians as they played an entrance a fraction of a second apart. "Higher standard for yourselves, guys." The next time through their performance was flawless.

In such an environment, simply being invited to join the ensemble elicits feelings of pride, as illustrated in members' stories of "getting in." This exclusivity can contribute to the ensemble's appeal. Mrs. Cohen noted that proving that they're talented and dedicated enough to warrant an invitation is "a motivator in itself" for student musicians. "That's the great thing about the wind ensemble," emphasized Cohen, herself a former instrumentalist in the ensemble. "Everybody's so honored to be there that it's just . . . we're going to give this all we have."

"[It's] just the feeling of being one of the best," Nancy told me. "It sounds really stuck up, but I just enjoy having that title of being the best group in the

school.” Nancy’s pride is reinforced by the group’s reputation and their reception at festivals and other performances. “Mrs. Cohen has told stories about how we were in Banff one time and a school came out just to see us play,” she told me early in the spring. “We’ve had packed theaters just to see us play at festivals. It’s exciting. I can’t wait [to go to] Ottawa<sup>10</sup> with the band!” Other students shared Nancy’s pride in belonging to the group, as well as her caution in speaking *too* highly of themselves. Huan wavered between pride and modesty. “Sometimes you think about it,” he said, “[and] sometimes I don’t think about it—wow we got five stars again—but we’re always told we’re the best in Canada, so I think that’s really cool.” Ken, too, felt pride in belonging to the high-level group, although like his peers he was concerned about articulating his pride without seeming conceited:

I think we know we’re good, but sometimes I’m a little surprised at the level and the ability. It’s individual players [who] have some incredible talent but don’t show it off, or aren’t arrogant about it. There are some people that get big heads sometimes, but that’s just a natural thing. When you have natural talents it’s something that, it’s totally understandable to be a little cocky about it. But uh, sometimes I wonder if people [in our ensemble] realize just how good we are—our band, or just the MGC Wind Ensemble tradition.

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<sup>10</sup> Ottawa was the location of the upcoming MusicFest Canada festival where the wind ensemble would perform.



While Ken wondered whether his peers in the wind ensemble know how good they are, Nancy asked the same question about her peers outside of the wind ensemble. “I think a lot of students that aren’t involved in music don’t really know about it,” she said. “Maybe they know that our band is pretty good or really old or something like that, I don’t really know. It’s not like we have a huge student turnout to our band concerts or anything like that.” Indeed, at the year-end concert I saw very few high-school aged students in the audience who were not themselves in the performance. Belonging to the wind ensemble may be a source of pride for group members, but not due to the recognition of the larger student body.

A potential drawback of the group’s strong reputation and lengthy tradition of success is the pressure students feel to maintain it. “Yeah, I think about it,” Eileen says. “I don’t want to let them down—the teachers, the whole legacy of the school and everything.” Jia doesn’t dwell on the sense of legacy of the MGC Bands but notes, “I guess you get reminded everyday subconsciously by seeing all those names [in the band room] and actually hearing about people and what they do in life now.” Similarly, Huan feels “just a little bit” of pressure to maintain a high level of performance, but notes that the band is always well prepared. “Mrs. Cohen gives us enough practice and gives us enough time, works us hard enough that we’re pretty confident that we’ll do well,” he says. Nancy also expressed ambivalence about the group’s reputation, commenting, “Being known for the music puts a little bit of pressure on us to live up to the standards and work to be up to the other bands and stuff in the school and that’s a good

thing, sometimes.” She continued, “[It] gets us to work a little bit harder, but it also can be a bad thing being compared to other groups. We all have different strengths and weaknesses.” Ken, on the other hand, viewed the group’s reputation unequivocally:

I think people are really willing to put in the extra effort and the time and hard work to keep the standard as high as it is. . . . [W]e kind of rock, and we have for a long time. And I think people take pride in the fact that, you know what, we’re good and we’re going to show you that we’re good. We are not going to necessarily shove it down your throat, but we’re going to make sure you know that we’re good. We’re going to play it right.

### **Belonging to a Team**

Contemporary wind ensemble repertoire is, as Mrs. Cohen says, “one to a part,” which is why she chooses the most dedicated and highly skilled musicians for the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble. Students are aware of their abilities and the expectations that come with them. “[T]he teacher knows that you’re a strong player,” Huan explained. “Everyone really cares about music and with invitations everyone relatively has the skills.” Ken shares Huan’s appreciation of his skilled band mates. “The people are very talented,” he says, “[and] I think we have a common goal to put the best product out there and have fun doing it.” Similarly, Sharon notes that the group members share a common ethic. “Responsibility, having fun, and practicing,” Sharon tells me. “It’s just common values I think people in band have. To be responsible to be in a band and stuff like that.” When asked how she thought that happened, Sharon replied,

“Because [we] really like it and we’re all band geeks, so we really like playing and stuff.”

Although an undercurrent of humor ran through all but the most intense rehearsals, when the members of the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble raised their instruments to play, the musicians worked together with intense concentration. “Everybody is focused,” Nancy tells me. “Everybody knows what the task is and what needs to be done and we’re working towards the same goal. It is nice when everybody knows what the goal is and knows what needs to be done to get to that.” When asked whether she thought everyone in the wind ensemble was equally passionate about what they were doing Nancy commented, “Definitely in wind ensemble. Top band students, when we’re together we really focus on excellence and doing the best that we can.” Jia notes, “I think everyone in our wind ensemble is very excited about it just like I am, and they really want to do well. They all pull their weight.” “[Even in] regular rehearsals, everyone is, like, on task all of the time,” Huan comments. “It’s intense that way and I enjoy that.”

Ken, an amateur baseball player with professional aspirations, says that the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble “really is a good team with a lot of really nice people.” He continues, “We got lucky with some natural talent but I think [our success] comes down to the community involvement, teamwork, and a really high level of understanding of what we’re going for.” Nowhere was this sense of teamwork more visible than in the percussion section. I observed a close bond among the percussionists as they laughed and joked together, and in the way

they moved together as a well-choreographed unit when playing. Ken explained that this bond grows out of the work they do together as a section:

There's five or six people, and you need to cover all these parts. . . . You may have two or three people playing the same trumpet part, but you, you only have one person playing timpani, or you only have one snare drum. Everybody else is sitting down and you're running around trying to find stuff, "Where's the triangle, where's the suspended cymbal?" and you're trying to throw things together, and you're just goofing around having fun back there, and it becomes pretty tight-knit.

Cohen strives to foster a sense of team and impress upon the musicians the power of working together toward a common goal. "I want them to experience community and teamwork and how that can lead to excellence," she says. "[I] want them to see how, when you get together with good people and work toward a common goal, great things can happen."

As shown in *Figure 4* and described above, belonging comprises one important part of the wind ensemble praxis. In the next section I will describe elements of the wind ensemble praxis relating to the music. These include challenge and achievement, emotional intensity, and connecting through music. I will also briefly discuss how the value of wind ensemble music is contextual.

## **Challenge and Achievement**

### **Individual Challenge**

Members of the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble thrive on challenge and derive meaning from meeting the substantial challenges the

ensemble provides. The exclusive group presents a challenge even to get in, and students who are invited to join know they need to perform at a high level technically and artistically. Difficult repertoire performed in wind ensemble offers the musicians opportunities to test their abilities and to improve as individual players. Huan recalled his first day with the ensemble and the thrill that came from encountering difficult repertoire:

I can't think of my best day [but] I remember my first day, which was pretty fun. We played really really hard music; I was struggling. We played this piece . . . and the fifth movement was called "Gallop" or something. I had to laugh because the piece said, "As fast as possible, but no faster." It was fun. It went really fast and then the piece was done and I was only halfway through! I was thinking, "This is going to be fun."

Jia recalled having a similar impression of the repertoire on her first day with the ensemble:

The first thing we played was *Incantation and Dance* and the lead alto wasn't there. It was kind of scary because the whole song has running 16<sup>th</sup> [notes] of random scales. I guess I was a little intimidated at first, but I wasn't *too* afraid 'cause I really like practicing and working for it. It was nice to see a challenge.

The repertoire Sharon encountered upon joining wind ensemble was "a huge step up" from what she had performed in grade nine band, but Sharon was ready for it. "If you get challenging music you'll rise up to that," she said confidently. When asked what she liked best about being in the group, Sharon, a

clarinetist, responded, “You get practice and gain a lot of experience. The music you play is so hard, it just feels good when you’re playing all these runs right.”

Sharon smiled, “I like that.”

Nancy compared the sense of accomplishment she feels when meeting a difficult challenge in wind ensemble to the accomplishment she feels when engaged in her other passion, dance:

Sometimes [in dance] I have a hard time doing some of the routines and it’s just having to work on that over and over again. Once you finally get it the sense of accomplishment is amazing. Same with music. When there’s stuff you keep getting wrong over and over again, once you finally get it and finally do your performance it’s like, “Oh, that felt *so* good!”

Toward the end of the school year Nancy described her best day in the wind ensemble so far. “I think it would be the day I [perfected] my solo in *Armenian Dances*,” she said. “*Finally* getting that. It was really exciting and I was super happy about that.” Nancy views a sense of achievement as one of the most meaningful aspects of her participation in the ensemble. “It’s the pride of knowing that you worked hard to accomplish something and you’ve accomplished it.”

Similarly, Ken feels that many of his meaningful experiences in the wind ensemble come as a result of hard work. “To work hard for something and be rewarded for it is always a positive thing,” he says, “whether it’s in a band or studying for a math exam. . . . [W]hen you put a lot of effort and a lot of work into it, and then have some success, that gives you a really positive experience.”

Consistently meeting the difficult challenges offered by the wind ensemble takes effort that is not always easy to sustain, particularly for students whose time and energy are already spread thin. Huan admits “sometimes there’s times where we’re lazy or we have other things to do.” During these times the group’s potential for achievement is a source of motivation for individuals. “We don’t want to let [Mrs. Cohen] down and we know we can do well so there’s no sense sitting back,” he says. Eileen is similarly motivated during difficult times. “Sometimes I go to wind ensemble and I’m like, ‘Man, I would love to be at home right now on the couch sleeping,’” she laughs. “[But] I think to myself, ‘I’m progressing a lot right now,’ and I just want to keep it going.”

### **Shared Success**

The challenges presented in wind ensemble are meaningful not only as a source of individual growth but also as the focus of a group effort and shared success. As members of a team, the musicians rely on each other and derive satisfaction from meeting a difficult challenge together. Jia, in particular, emphasized this notion. A high-achiever in many areas of life, success is important to Jia. She values her own achievements as a musician but says:

I feel that the sense of accomplishment, band-related or group-related, has a larger impact than something more individual. Individually, if you have accomplishments it’s like a “self” victory but as a group it’s everybody. It feels really great celebrating with everybody else rather than just by yourself.

Ken also says that moments of group achievement are particularly rewarding. “[It’s] just like, ‘Okay, here are all the problem spots that we’ve worked out and we worked really hard on,’” he says, “and we’ve overcome it and we nail it all, and like, ‘Yeah! We finally got it!’”

For Eileen, challenging repertoire becomes more meaningful over time, as the ensemble members work together to learn and polish it. “Mrs. Cohen will be like, ‘Okay tenors, you need to practice this part,’” Eileen explained, “so when we come to that part, I’m like, ‘Oh, the tenors . . . I wonder if I can hear them?’” Throughout the rehearsal process, the members’ collective efforts—their struggles and breakthroughs and the slow, gradual improvements—imbue the music with a shared sense of history. When it comes time to perform, says Eileen, their success means more because everyone shares an understanding of what it took to get there. “I guess when you play your piece more powerfully or better than you have before,” Eileen reasoned, “it sort of—we learned about this in L.A.<sup>11</sup>—it’s like synchronicity. It feels like you’re all suddenly on the same playing field, all together in a bubble, you know?” She recalled the group’s recent performance at MusicFest in Ottawa, in which her horn section performed a difficult soli:

When we played *Eternal Father* in Ottawa that was crazy. I think it went really well. The French horns had a few As at the end and it feels so good to get those. Mrs. Cohen would always shoot me a look when we got it, and she looked so happy and it made me feel so good when we got it.

Like, yes!

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<sup>11</sup> Language arts, a required course at Maple Grove Collegiate



Mrs. Cohen tries to impress upon the members of the ensemble the value of striving for excellence, and the joy that comes with reaching a goal:

It goes back to excellence and it goes back to pushing yourself to the next level. I talk to the kids about how somebody can strive to get to the top of a mountain and it's great, the view is awesome. But then in the distance you see another mountain, you know? And it's like, "Oh, maybe I can conquer that one." And it'll take you a long time to get there, and when you get to the top of that one, what's ahead? Right? So it's all about reaching the best of our ability, but . . . also not at the expense of joy. I always say to them if it's going to kill you to get to the top it's not worth it, 'cause you can't enjoy it once you're there if you're dead. So how can we get to the best of our ability, [while] preserving joy and integrity?

Cohen is concerned with students' individual sense of joy and achievement, but in wind ensemble rehearsals and during our conversations emphasized the team effort needed to get there.

### **"Going for it"**

The wind ensemble musicians expect to do well. As they rehearsed in preparation for their trip to MusicFest, Mrs. Cohen and the band members occasionally used medal rankings as shorthand to describe the quality of their performance and their readiness for the trip. "That was a bronze," one trumpet player declared following a run-through of *Eternal Father*. "We're at about a silver with that right now, guys," Mrs. Cohen announced on another occasion.

“We’re going to MusicFest and the expectation is we’re going for gold,” Ken explained to me shortly before they departed. He continued:

If we come home without gold I’m going to be disappointed. I don’t know about other people. . . . I think just about everybody would say, “Yeah we had fun, we did our best, still it would have been nice to get a gold.” . . . It may be an afterthought but it’s still there. I think everybody wants to do well and wants to play the best that we can, at least.

The musical challenges faced by wind ensemble members are heightened by their expectations for themselves and their desire to maintain the group’s tradition of excellence. While Eileen, Huan, and Nancy each told me they feel responsible for maintaining the group’s legacy, they also indicated that greater risk can lead to greater reward. Asked to recall moments that made a significant impact on them, Ken, Eileen, and Huan told three versions of the same tale, one that took place early in the school year.

The wind ensemble members were preparing for Unifest, a music festival located a few hours’ drive from Winnipeg. Ken explained, “[W]e found out that Sam Hazo was going to be one of the adjudicators, and we had one of his pieces. We thought, ‘Okay, if we do it, we have to do it right. There’s no way we can kind of fudge it because he wrote all the notes. He knows what’s there.’” The band membership was divided: some musicians balked and suggested other selections; others wanted to perform the piece composed by Hazo, entitled *Sevens*. According to Eileen, “It was a really difficult piece. Really neat though.”

Ken recalls urging, “Why not? Let’s just go for it. Let’s just do it. So we have to play our parts right? So play them right. Learn it, do it right. Let’s go for it.”

The group ultimately decided to take the risk and prepare *Sevens* for performance. In spite of some pre-concert nerves, Huan said the performance was, in his estimation, “really fun.” “It ended up being awesome,” said Ken.

“It’s one of our favorite pieces to play . . . [and] it was probably the best adjudication we’ve ever had because we were working with the composer.”

Eileen recalled, “[Hazo] went to the piano and played every single part. I don’t know how, it was crazy.” “He actually played with us,” marveled Huan. “He played all of our parts on the piano. It was amazing.”

All three musicians emphasized the power of “going for it” and taking on a challenge. Eileen recalled:

[Hazo’s] speech was just magical. It seemed like he wrote it, but how could he have written it when we’d just played? It was about how hesitation kills bands, and it’s actually inspired me. I thought about it the other day when I was playing a first horn part I’d never played before. I was just thinking, “You know what? I’m not going to get anywhere unless I just go for it.” That’s been inspiring. It was very intense at the time.

Ken also cited Hazo’s “Hesitation kills bands” speech and called it “a reminder”:

Every time that somebody tells you you can’t do something, it makes you want to just dig in a little bit harder and prove them wrong. And I think that’s what it was. It was, “You know what? This is gonna be tough and I’m not sure if we’re gonna be ready [but] let’s just do it. Let’s make a

commitment, have your parts ready, we'll get 'em together.” And we did. It felt really good to be able to say, “Yeah, we really stuck to it and worked hard at that and earned what we got.”

### **Emotional Intensity**

After a long period of striving, achieving success has a strong emotional impact for these musicians. Making music in the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble can be emotionally intense in other ways as well. Mrs. Cohen is a skilled musician and an expressive conductor. She draws upon an expansive repertoire of gestures and facial expressions to communicate feeling in the music, and often conducts in rehearsal with the emotional intensity of a performance. The students respond by mirroring these expressions, moving with the music, and otherwise communicating their engagement with the music and each other.

“During performances I tend to get into the music,” Nancy says. “It’s really exciting; it makes me feel a bunch of different things.” Asked if she ever felt chills when playing, Nancy responded, “Oh yeah, definitely; mostly in performances. I’m enjoying myself so much and the music is all around me.” Huan says that wind ensemble repertoire “brings different emotions, depending on what [it is]” and adds that he particularly likes “whenever you get the feeling of everyone trying [hard] and making music.”

Eileen expresses the intensity she feels in wind ensemble music through her body. “Sometimes people make fun of me because I move a lot when I play French horn,” she laughs, and then cringes. “This is kind of embarrassing, but I used to keep the beat with my head and it looked really awkward. I don’t

anymore but when I sing [in choir] and stuff people always say, ‘You’re always moving, like, you’re really into it.’” Eileen’s movements are more subtle now, but she continues to feel the music as she plays. “That’s all part of it,” she says. “If you’re going to sing and if you’re going to play music you have to . . . you have to *become* the music.”

Like Eileen, Ken describes an embodied element to the music he likes best. He favors wind ensemble music “you can’t help but dance to, or you can’t help but sing along with, or it touches you in an emotional way.” He described what he calls “goosebumps moments” in wind ensemble:

I’d say [they happen] most often at performances because I think there’s that little extra bit of rush or adrenaline, or whatever it is. When I was in grade ten we performed *Othello* at Optimist Festival and that third movement was just so beautiful. I know Mrs. Cohen was crying at the end of it, and that was one of the goosebumps, oh-boy-that-was-really-good kind of moments. I get those from something that’s really powerful like that.

While Ken was struck by the beauty of the music during that performance and on other occasions, he says those moments are made all the more meaningful because of the connections they facilitate. “A meaningful musical experience [is], I think, something where you are connecting with somebody on some level, whether it’s your audience, or fellow band member, or your director, or it’s just yourself,” says Ken. He continues:

It doesn't necessarily have to be, "We're playing this piece and we get this goosebumps moment at the same time and that's the connection." No, it can be after rehearsal just sitting around talking to people and developing that relationship. That connection on some level with somebody is what makes it meaningful.

### **Connecting Through Music**

"Connect" proved to be a watchword for the wind ensemble members.

For those who spoke with me, music not only facilitates bonding through a shared sense of purpose, it creates opportunities for more personal connections. "I think that the one main thing that I could think about when you describe music is connection," Nancy told me. "Connecting with the audience in the performance and my connection with God . . . it's just everything being connected to music." She paused to consider this. "Connecting with other people as well. . . . We all have a common interest in music. Having connections with all of those people and a connection to something that we enjoy and something that we're all passionate about helps to create a good experience."

Jia suggests that connections among the band members help them to make better music together. "We have a lot of interesting people in our wind ensemble, definitely," Jia says. "It's really nice, I guess, growing as a band because you have to know everybody really well and it sort of helps the dynamic and our ability to play better." Sharon finds the social aspect of wind ensemble intimidating, yet she says close connections are "very important. Like if you're

not close together then you don't feel comfortable playing around each other so then you'll never be . . . you just won't have the confidence to try your best."

Huan performs in several high-level ensembles outside of school. Toward the end of our final interview I asked Huan whether he gets the same things out of his other ensembles as he does from wind ensemble. "Maybe orchestra or honor band," he replied. "Honor band is auditioned so it's the best of the whole province. That's really fun." Huan continued:

But orchestra, you only see [each other] once on a Saturday so it isn't always as connected. In wind ensemble we're in school together, and then after school and then after wind ensemble. . . . It has a different dynamic if you know everyone and it's just that closely knit together. You can look across a section at someone and have a smile. That's cool.

For Huan, the social closeness of the group is important to the overall experience. "[I]t enhances it more, 'cause then we kind of feel things together," he said. "And then we can joke about things—Mrs. Cohen's pretty fun about it—so in rehearsal we can also have fun while still being totally focused on whatever we're trying to work on."

Toward the end of our interview Huan told me about the last wind ensemble rehearsal of the year, his last ever with the group. "We were playing for, like, an hour and a half and just kind of making music and everyone was crying after. We can have that kind of connection while we're playing, and such good times." I asked Huan what he thought he'd miss the most. "The community

of us all playing together,” he replied. “Mrs. Cohen said that we were a strong ensemble from the beginning. It gave me chills.”

While Nancy regards the music she makes in wind ensemble and elsewhere as an opportunity to connect with others and with God, she also uses the music to communicate and to share a part of herself. “I think that music is about expressing yourself and expressing emotion,” she says. “It can be interpreted in many different ways, depending on how you feel the music or how you see the music.” “When I connect to the music and I play it the way that I think it should be interpreted,” she says, “that’s not so much connecting with the audience or connecting with the composer. It’s putting my own thoughts and my own emotions to the music . . . adding them to it.”

Nancy was the only student musician who talked explicitly about expressing herself through music. Other members played very expressively in rehearsals and concerts but may not see this as a communicative act separate from connection. For Mrs. Cohen, however, connection and communication are intertwined and are among the most important parts of the wind ensemble:

I think of what I do as a vocation really, I really think that. I maybe shouldn’t speak about this as a public school teacher but I will. My undergrad degree had a minor in Theology and one of my teachers was a nun. She said, “Dear, every time you meet a student, look for Jesus in their face,” you know? I don’t know why that stuck with me, it’s just one of those things that she probably said very flippantly and whatever, but it makes me think about it that way, and I try to figure out why God put that



person in my rehearsal and try to communicate with them through the music and get them to communicate back. I think it's a very spiritual experience because there's no other time when that particular collection of souls will be together on that particular day expressing themselves and that's what God wants for us.

### **Music For a Particular Context**

The music played in the wind ensemble contributes to a variety of meaningful experiences, so I was interested to learn that several of the students who spoke with me didn't often listen to this music outside of school. However, Eileen's mp3 playlist was filled with an assortment of pop, rock, and jazz tunes. I asked Eileen whether her taste in music had changed as a result of her participation in school music. "Not really," she replied. "I guess the jazz band and vocal jazz have because I started listening to and appreciating jazz but I definitely don't listen to concert music." Eileen occasionally listens to music that the group is playing to help her prepare, however. "With *Sevens*, the piece we played in the fall," Eileen told me, "I would listen to it on YouTube to see where my part fits in or whatever. I don't really make a point of it."

Huan, a classical violinist outside of school, says he listens mostly to classical music, metal, and jazz. "I have a little bit of band music," says Huan. "I have a lot of music that we've recorded from the last years . . . some of those and honor band recordings. I think I have, like, professional recordings of other things, like *Irish Tune*, other things that we've played in band before, but professional [recordings]." I asked Huan if he enjoyed playing his horn by

himself. “Not as much,” he replied. “I practice a little bit but I don’t learn solos and such. It’s more of a band thing.”

Sharon says she enjoys playing in the wind ensemble but prefers the music she encounters as a clarinetist in her youth orchestra. “I like that ten times better than concert band and wind ensemble [music],” she says, “‘cause I really like violins—they’re my favorite instrument—and it sounds really cool.” She values the experience she gains in the wind ensemble and the challenge the music provides, but says she isn’t drawn to the music itself.

Several of Ken’s family members teach band, so unlike many of his peers Ken grew up listening to concert band music. “I think just growing up in the house that I did, having something on all of the time, is a big influence,” he explained. “I mean there are a lot of tunes in our folder that we’ll pull out that nobody else knows, and I know it better than just about anybody because it’s been on.” Though Ken is familiar with wind ensemble repertoire, he says, “I haven’t made a dedicated effort to listen to it. It’s like, ‘Oh yeah, I’ve heard this.’ It just kind of accumulates without really thinking.”

For the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble members, the music they play is far more meaningful to perform than to listen to. Their comments suggest that the music and the instruments they play have value within the context of the wind ensemble and that outside of this context the music itself loses much of its meaning.

## Chapter 5

### GUITAR CLASS

#### **Part I - Context**

The students of Mr. Gardner's C Slot<sup>12</sup> guitar class sit on the floor, leaning against the grey, carpeted risers that divide the classroom into levels. In pairs and small groups scattered throughout the room, they strum, pluck out melodies, and talk. The room is large enough and the acoustic guitars quiet enough to comfortably conduct conversation. Two dark-haired girls discuss the upcoming weekend as they thumb-type furiously into their cell phones. A boy with dark blonde hair and a Led Zeppelin t-shirt sits alone on the floor, his head propped on a chair, apparently asleep.

At the back of the room, eleventh-grade students Dale and Rick sit at Mr. Gardner's desk and work out by ear the lead guitar part for "Twist and Shout." Rick plays the Beatles tune through a pair of computer speakers connected to his mp3 player. He follows along on his guitar, fingers moving lightly across the fret board, until he reaches the section that has stymied them for the last several minutes. Dale searches the Internet for a transcription while Rick listens once more to the recording. He alters a note earlier in the sequence and hits on the right progression. "I got it, Dale!" Dale grabs his guitar and follows as Rick shows him the pitches. As they play together with the recording, Dale smiles and

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<sup>12</sup> The school day is divided into five "slots" labeled A through E plus a one-hour lunch period.

bobs his head with the music. He switches to the bass part, Rick plays chords, and the two begin to sing. “Well shake it up baby, now . . .”

This spring, the city’s arts organizations have planned a series of cultural events highlighting The Beatles and their music. Mr. Gardner has arranged for the guitar students to perform at the Manitoba Museum’s Beatles exhibit, which features “Eighty-four never-before-published images of The Beatles”<sup>13</sup> as well as replica instruments and microphones. Nine members of the C Slot class have volunteered to participate this weekend, a prime performance opportunity. They have selected their favorite Beatles tunes to cover and assembled themselves into groups according to the parts required. Dale likes to play the melody and loves to solo. Rick and eleventh-grader Hailey consider themselves “chorders” while Rena, also in the eleventh grade, usually chooses either melody or bass. Some students like to sing while others would rather not. One of the twelfth-grade boys, a skilled guitarist, is also the go-to when drums are required. The students arrange much of the music themselves using lead sheets, tablature, their ears, and an occasional guiding word from Mr. Gardner. Those not participating in the event practice music from class or, as Hailey puts it, “just relax.”

Down the hall from the guitar room between two sets of doors that lead outside, Rena and her cousin sit and practice their arrangement. The warmth and gentle hum of the heater creates a cozy rehearsal space. They sit on the floor, legs stretched out in front of them, and glance from time to time at the chords and lyrics printed on their lead sheet. “Okay, let’s do it again,” says Rena. Mr.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.artvisionexhibitions.com/BeatlesExhibition.html>

Gardner comes to check on them, and the three play their guitars together while Gardner sings. “Okay, great,” he says. “You can use a strum pattern there so it’s not all solid chords.” The girls experiment with several options, and while Rena plays the bass line her cousin switches from block chords to an arpeggiated pattern. “Yeah, that’s good,” Gardner coaches. “Strum down on the pulse. Rena, try playing that note up here and then you can slide to the G.” He demonstrates a bluesy slide that Rena immediately imitates. “Okay, now what are you going to do here at the solo section?”

Back at Mr. Gardner’s desk, Dale, Hailey and another student sit on amps and talk while Rick quietly plucks the strings of his guitar. One of the seniors enters the room carrying a banjo from home, and Dale moves in fast to be the first to try it. He strums an open G chord and then slowly plunks out a tune, testing the unfamiliar intervals between the strings. When Mr. Gardner returns from the hall Dale offers him the instrument. “C’mon Gardner,” he goads. “Show us your redneck.” Students around the classroom stop what they’re doing to watch as Mr. Gardner takes the banjo and sits down on one of the grey risers. As he carefully tunes the instrument anticipation in the classroom builds, but Gardner just smiles and casually passes it back to Dale, prompting a disappointed “aww” from one of the girls.

“Gardner, did you see Toronto play last night?” asks Rick, an avid hockey fan. “No, [my] boys had [hockey] practice and then I had a game,” Gardner replies, “How was it?” Rick and several other musicians gather around Gardner and recount the highlights of the NHL game. “Hey Gardner, can you help me

with my singing at lunch?” asks a dark-haired senior who has wandered in from another class. He and Dale are preparing “Norwegian Wood” for the upcoming Beatles performance and he has had problems singing in key. “Sure,” answers Gardner. “Just give me a few minutes to get something to eat.”

As class ends, the students pack their bags and hang the school guitars on hooks. “Okay,” Gardner calls out, “we have Thursday for the Beatles and then that’s the last time to do it. Next week we’re back to ensemble playing.” The lunch bell rings and over the next hour Rick, Dale, and several other guitar students return to practice their Beatles arrangements, jam, and hang out.

### **About the Program**

Brentford Collegiate is a Winnipeg high school serving just under 500<sup>14</sup> students in grades nine through twelve. Located in a predominantly working-class neighborhood, the school focuses primarily on preparing students for employment after graduation and offers educational programs such as Employment Preparation, Career Internship, Co-op Education, and Skills for Living. “We have a real focus on ensuring the kids have the skills, the attitudes, the knowledge they need to be successful in a variety of ways and that shows up in the programs that we offer,” says the school’s principal, Mrs. Turner.

In the past, the school offered several bands, choirs, jazz, and guitar ensembles, however the music programs at Brentford and its feeder schools have struggled in recent years. A string of itinerant teachers has come and gone over the past decade, leaving band students without a sense of community or

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<sup>14</sup> 498 students were enrolled in the year this study was conducted.

continuity. Enrollment in choir, vocal jazz, and jazz band has been too low for the courses to run. The small student population at Brentford Collegiate has also created timetabling difficulties, particularly for those junior and senior students who participate in work internships or who plan to attend college. These students regularly find themselves unable to fit band into their schedules. Of the 33 students enrolled in band at Brentford Collegiate this year, 21 are freshmen and only three are seniors.

Brentford Collegiate's guitar program is far healthier. The program serves 96 students—a fifth of the student body—and continues to grow. "I don't recruit," Gardner says. "I think the reputation that the students share about the program in the community is all that Brentford needs. Kids talk, and if quality experiences are happening then the word will spread. . . . We're turning students away because we fill up the guitar sections."

Gardner is a veteran guitar teacher and has spent his career in the same school division.<sup>15</sup> He taught for several years at the middle school level and at the time of this study was in his eighth year at Brentford Collegiate. Principal Turner says the guitar program has benefited from Gardner's longevity in the community. "He's had some of these kids [before] and has developed relationships with families that span six or seven years already," she says. "That makes a big difference."

Guitar students at Brentford Collegiate are placed in classes according to grade level rather than ability, and they progress through the grade nine, grade

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<sup>15</sup> Winnipeg schools are organized into divisions rather than districts.

ten, and combined grade eleven and twelve guitar classes. The C Slot Grade 11/12 Guitar class—ten boys and five girls this year—meets for 70 minutes every other school day and focuses primarily on classical guitar repertoire played on acoustic guitars. A second section of Grade 11/12 Guitar is offered later in the day and students in the two sections perform together as one ensemble. Starting in the tenth grade students can also choose to supplement their “regular” guitar classes by enrolling in Grade 10 or Grade 11/12 Jazz Guitar, where they learn a variety of rock and jazz pieces and perform on electric guitars. The majority of C Slot Guitar students—the participants in this study—also take Jazz Guitar.

“There are all the same people . . . except a couple less,” eleventh-grade guitarist Dale told me. “It’s mostly the better people in Jazz ‘cause we play harder songs [there] and it’s a different style.”

Most of the students who enroll in guitar at Brentford Collegiate have taken guitar as a middle school elective. However, as Gardner explains, “Kids with no guitar experience join all the time. Most [join] in grade nine but I have students from all [grades] join.” Hailey was one such student. Now in the 11th grade, Hailey joined the Brentford guitar program a month into her tenth-grade year. “I was on and off in jazz band, always played in concert band, and then in grade 10 Mr. Gardner was my homeroom teacher,” Hailey recalled. “We were just playing around on the guitars and I could play ‘Ode to Joy’ and he was like, ‘Hey, why aren’t you in guitar?’” Hailey signed up and initially played in both the guitar and band programs, then moved completely to the guitar the next year. “I kind of preferred it over the concert band,” she explained.



Like Hailey, most students who take music classes typically decide to specialize in either band or guitar at Brentford Collegiate. Very few students—only one at the time of this study—participate in both band and guitar. Having experienced both programs, Hailey says guitar and band tend to attract different students. “Usually the guitar group is a *lot* more people,” she says, “[and] usually cooler people are in guitar.” Principal Turner notes that the guitar program attracts a wider variety of students. “You’ll get your kids who are your honor students and you’ll get your kids who, you know, on the weekends spend a little too much time involved in high risk activities,” she says, “and they’ll be equally dedicated to the guitar. Whereas for band instruments I think you’re more likely to get the honor roll kids.” “It’s a different kid,” Gardner agrees. “Different [kids with] different backgrounds. Guitar . . . I’ll say it: guitar is a whole hell of a lot more work. It’s a different kid.”

### **Class Atmosphere**

Seated on a tall wooden stool at the front of the guitar classroom, Mr. Gardner consults the score spread out across four stands in front of him and surveys the students seated in small groups along the first three levels of the guitar room. “Seconds . . . Rena, you’re on second right? Seconds and thirds, let’s go again from 21.” Gardner and the second and third guitarists assigned to “Couleur tango” begin playing an arpeggiated series of eighth notes in a syncopated Latin style. In the corner, two boys start singing along with the guitars in comic falsetto, “DOO-doo-doo-DOO-doo-doo-DOO-doo.” Gardner is unfazed. “Good,

okay,” he coaches. “Dig into those accents a little more. Let’s add the firsts to that at 21.”

Guitar class operates in two modes. During group rehearsals like this one Mr. Gardner teaches from the front of the classroom and works with the entire class on their ensemble repertoire. On other occasions guitar class operates more like a workshop. Members of the class work independently or in small groups to learn and refine their music, and Gardner circulates, assisting when needed. Whether rehearsing as a group or practicing independently, the class atmosphere is relaxed and informal. While waiting to play some students munch on the contents of their lunch boxes, work on homework, or quietly talk. Others practice by moving their fingers across the strings without picking the notes. Rick works on his part to “Couleur tango” this way, while Dale uses the technique to practice his “Black Magic Woman” solo for jazz guitar class.

Students sit where they like and frequently get up and move at will. “Right now people are just sitting with friends,” Dale informed me. “Sometimes you’ll sit beside somebody who plays your part or who can help you.” “It’s not like band where you’re stationary,” Hailey later explained. “You can get up and move. . . . You can say, ‘Mr. Gardner, I want to go practice this one little lick,’ and you just pick up your guitar and you go to the other side of the room and you kind of just play quietly to yourself.” Hailey smiled, “He’s totally okay with that as long as you’re working on something.”

“Okay, let’s have everybody from [measure] 29,” Gardner announces. Twelfth-grader Stephanie hurriedly finishes composing a text message. “Hey

Gardner, what's the chord at 36?" Rick asks. Gardner refers to his score. "It's an E minor," he replies. "Here we go at 29." "Where are we starting?" calls Stephanie. "29," Gardner answers. "Where?!" Stephanie asks again. Gardner rolls his eyes and laughs, "Stephanie, 29 before I paper-cut your arms off!" "Okay!" she grins. The group plays together and the second part shows some improvement. "You're getting it," Gardner says. "Play closer to the bridge there, ponticello. Get it nice and snappy. Okay, let's go again, everybody from 29." "Where?" jokes Rick.

This kind of ribbing is an integral part of the Grade 11/12 Guitar culture. As Gardner pauses to help two students in the front row, Kyle abruptly calls out, "Nice kicks, Dale. Mine are better." Without missing a beat Dale shoots back, "What are those, New Balance? Are those your mom's shoes? Are you six years old, Kyle? Nobody wears New Balance anymore." "We bug each other a lot," Dale laughed when asked about the exchange. "When I first joined guitar a lot of them would make fun of me and a lot of the girls thought I was a creepy Emo kid." Dale gestured to his tight black jeans. "They'd be like, 'You're wearing girl pants,' and I'd joke and say, 'When we go [on the guitar trip] I'm going to get man pants.'" Dale says the constant back-and-forth is all in fun. "You kind of get to be friends with everybody," he said. "We've spent so much time together . . . the jock kids and everybody, we all get along." Rena echoed this sentiment and added, "[Mr. Gardner] tries to keep us all learning in some way so that we're too busy to notice the differences."

## Guitar Students

Students come to guitar from different social groups and have a diverse range of characteristics. Some students are conscientious and do well in their academic classes while others barely get by. Some are artistic, others athletic. Some students are gregarious while others are more reserved. Rena characterizes her cousin as “the quiet shy person” and three of the senior boys as “the crazy jock types.” She considers her other classmates:

Hailey is really energetic. She talks to everyone. Dale, he just plays whatever he wants. Anything. He’s just insane when it comes to guitar; he can play anything by ear. And then Rick, he always plays chords. He likes them, it’s easy for him. And he’s kind of quiet but energetic at the same time.

While Rena had little trouble characterizing most of her peers, Bryce baffled her. “I don’t really get where he fits in,” she said. “He just kind of sits there. He doesn’t do much. . . . I think he learns [the music] sometimes but he’s not one of the people who are like, they get it, they learn it, they play it all the time.” Bryce drew my attention and I, too, wondered where he “fit in.” Bryce often sat alone, earbuds stuffed in his ears, chin length black hair hanging down across his face. During group rehearsals he often declined to play and rarely interacted with his peers.

When I spoke with Bryce, he revealed himself to be articulate and enthusiastic about music and guitar class, but admitted he was “kind of shy and quiet,” especially at school. “I just kind of stay to myself,” Bryce told me. “I’m

more open with my family.” Asked about his reluctance to play in class Bryce explained, “That’s when we’re playing farther ahead than I know.” Bryce prefers to work on his guitar ensemble music at home. “It’s kind of hard to hear your guitar [in class] when thirty other guitars are playing at the same time,” he says. “[At home] it’s a lot easier to learn.” This strategy seemed to work only partially for Bryce. Over the course of the semester he picked up the main parts of each piece, yet struggled to play some of the more difficult sections with the rest of the group.

Bryce was not the only student in C Slot Guitar to learn his parts incompletely. While everyone who spoke with me during this study enjoyed playing the guitar, not everyone in the class was similarly motivated. A few students spent the bulk of their time in class talking with friends rather than working. “There’s people that are in it to get better and stuff [and] a lot of people take it because Gardner’s a really good teacher,” says Dale, “[but] some people just take it for the easy credit [or] for the trips we go on.” Asked his opinion of peers who he believed were after an easy credit Dale answered, “They’re nice people . . . I could really care less.” Rick shared a similar perspective. “There are people [who] fool around a lot,” he said, “but I just do my part. . . . [Gardner] tells us to work on something [and] I try to work.” Hailey felt somewhat differently. “I think the noodlers are the people who think that they’re able to get by without really trying,” she shared. “Those people kind of annoy me ‘cause I work my butt off to learn the songs.” While Hailey sometimes wishes that these peers were

more committed, she accepts the varied levels of focus as a part of guitar class.

“What are you going to do?” she shrugs. “We’re a group of characters.”

Mr. Gardner says that the variety of interests and ability levels make this year’s Grade 11/12 Guitar students “the most challenging or diverse group that I’ve had in a long time.” “It’s a program that’s made of very dedicated and talented musicians,” Gardner says, “[as well as] an equal balance of those who are team players but without a lot of commitment or ability.” While Gardner is occasionally frustrated by the less-committed students, he tries to look realistically at their interests and what they want to get out of the program. “That’s who they really are,” he says. “And you know what? As long as they can still take, I don’t know, fifteen chords out of it so they can sit around the campfire and remember that . . . that’s value to them. . . . To the rest of the [students in the] program that’s not as valuable, but they still have a role and I don’t want to become elitist.”

### **Music Played**

A vertical red line divides the white board at the front of the room neatly in half. On one side of the board Mr. Gardner has listed several upcoming performances: a trip to Edmonton to perform at a music festival and at a local Arts high school; a performance in the lobby of the Winnipeg Concert Hall for patrons of the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra’s Beatles concert two weeks later; the school’s Spring Concert in early June and, finally, Solo Night. While the students say they look forward to the upcoming events, the opposite side of the board has unquestionably captured more interest and inspired a great deal more

debate. There, Mr. Gardner has recorded the students' picks for the Stanley Cup finals.

It's lunch time, and Mr. Gardner returns from the staff room with a brown paper lunch bag. At his desk, three students eat and browse the Internet. Four others sit on nearby amps. "Gardner, is this a good price for this amp?" one of the students calls out. Gardner checks the computer screen. "Yeah, that's a very good price," he answers. "Are you getting it?" "Yeah, I think I'm gonna get it next month," says the student. Though his tone is casual he is obviously excited. Two seniors girls from the afternoon section of Grade 11/12 Guitar return from a Wendy's run and pass out french fries and burgers. "Hey Gardner, wanna see my grad dress?" asks one of the girls. "Move!" she barks at Ken, who relinquishes his seat in front of the computer. She navigates to a website and finds the dress she plans to buy. "It's this one but it'll be blue," she explains. "I'm getting my hair straightened and put up." "That's really nice," Gardner says sincerely. "Have you picked out your shoes yet?"

Dale and Rick sit on the riser just below Mr. Gardner's desk, cradling guitars and chatting with Hailey. "Let's play 'Mellow Yellow,'" Rick suggests. He begins to play the chords and another student joins in with the bass part while Dale plays the melody. As they finish, Rick plays the opening riff of "Summer Lovin'" from the musical *Grease* and Hailey joins in. A friend of Rick's who is not enrolled in guitar taps his water bottle rhythmically to the music. Dale beckons to Mr. Gardner. "Can you help me work on this?" Dale asks, pointing to

a creased lead sheet of The Beatles' "Blackbird." Gardner sits beside Dale on the carpeted riser and they begin to play.

In spite of their many differences the students who play in guitar share a love of music. They listen to music on mp3 players, play music videos for each other on Mr. Gardner's computer, and talk about their favorite groups. They wear t-shirts of their favorite bands to school and discuss concerts they plan to attend. For his birthday Rick received concert tickets to see Our Lady Peace and was devastated to discover that the school's guitar trip to Edmonton took place that same weekend. With much regret he sold the tickets. "I've always liked music," says Hailey. "I find music definitely adds a rich quality to life." Rena tells me that music is "something that's always been a part of who I am," and Rick puts his love of music in even stronger terms. "Music *is* my life," he says. "Without it I don't think I'd survive. It's like, obviously there are friends and family and stuff, but I just love music that much. It's not something you can just stop."

The students' love for music is directed first and foremost toward their own music. Those who spoke with me were eager to share their favorite bands and revealed varied tastes in music. "I like anything that's upbeat," Rick shared, "and maybe sometimes music that isn't so upbeat sometimes, like Nirvana." Other favorite bands include Led Zeppelin, Green Day, Aerosmith, Mötley Crüe, and The Beatles because, "They're really fast and [they're] what made music today, pretty much." Hailey calls Led Zeppelin her "absolute favorite band of all time" and loves to listen to jazz. Though she dislikes contemporary country music because it's "twangy and annoying," she enjoys "old country" like Johnny



Cash and Bluegrass folk music. “I want to learn how to fiddle,” Hailey says. “That’s my lifelong dream.” Rena, too, likes a wide variety of music including, “Country, classic rock, some 80s, pop music . . . everything except techno and screamo.”

Dale used to like a variety of rock, metal, and metalcore but has recently become more interested in jazz and blues. “I kind of stepped away from that heavy stuff for a while,” he says. “Stevie Ray Vaughn, he’s really big. He’s probably my favorite guitarist.” Bryce, on the other hand, remains a devoted fan of metal and says his favorite music enables him to express a different side of himself. “It’s the energy,” he says. “[It’s] a bunch of people that are pretty much like me, quiet and shy, and not having to be shy anymore.” Metal is Bryce’s favorite music, but he also listens to bands like The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, and Red Hot Chili Peppers. “It’s [music that’s] softer [and] more like me everywhere else,” says Bryce.

Popular guitar sheet music is widely available and usually free via the Internet, and the guitar students find music for themselves online, both in class and at school. Rena says, “If I can’t figure it out by ear and I really want to know it then I’ll go on the Internet.” “Ultimateguitar.com!” Hailey enthuses. “Yep. I play a lot of Led Zeppelin, those are my favorite ‘cause it’s a combination of chords, a combination of rhythms, and different riffs and stuff like that. I like playing Bob Dylan too.”

At school, students often use the computer at Gardner’s desk to find tablature and to play recordings for themselves and their peers from YouTube and

other sites. At home they find even more music. Rick says he typically practices at home for three hours each day and on the weekends he regularly plays for five hours or more. “. . . there’s only like 10 or maybe a small number of songs I learn school,” he says. “I learn a lot more [music] outside of school.”

### **Guitar Class Music**

Gardner is attuned to the musical tastes of his students and he welcomes their music into the classroom. At lunch and during independent rehearsal times in class the students play selections for him on the classroom computer, and they regularly solicit his help on pieces they’ve found for themselves. Gardner takes these interests into account when choosing repertoire for the class. He aims to select a variety of popular and classical pieces that will both appeal to the students and provide them with the technical and musical challenges they need to progress as guitarists. During the semester I observed, the guitar class worked on a series of pieces by Thierry Tisserand entitled “Couleur tango,” “Couleur dixieland,” and “Couleur milonga,” a piece entitled “Irish Folk Melody,” as well as several Beatles songs including “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds,” “Eleanor Rigby,” and “While My Guitar Gently Weeps.” “I [teach] classical technique through a variety of mediums,” Gardner says. “That can include folk, pop, a little bit of rock, but [it’s] basically a simple song structure with classical technique. That’s the key.” Asked why he emphasizes classical technique Gardner says he believes it provides young guitarists with a solid foundation:

It enables them to develop good tone, to get a lot of projection out of the instrument and also to really develop the dexterity needed. If you ever

want to be a jazz guitarist you still need those fingers, you need the chops. It's basically essential for creating a very flexible, versatile musician, which is the goal overall.

Hailey says she enjoys the music they play as an ensemble because "I always get a neat part." Rena agrees, "[The music is] usually pretty good in both [guitar and jazz guitar]." "I find that I like the songs," Bryce says of the guitar class music. "I enjoy playing by myself, just playing whatever, but if I was playing one of [our guitar class] songs by myself I wouldn't be able to do it because it's not that kind of music." Asked about the difference, Bryce explained, "You need the bass, you need the melody, you need the chords, you need all of those people playing the parts. . . . It changes the sound of the song completely." Bryce wasn't alone in this. Dale also referred to the group nature of the ensemble repertoire. "I like playing as a group," he told me, "because you have so many parts playing at once and when everyone is playing together and it sounds good. I like that."

Dale enjoys playing as an ensemble, but is less enthusiastic about some of the actual pieces. "Right now we're playing—I don't know how to explain it—we're playing an Irish song," Dale said, referring to "Irish Folk Melody." "I don't mind it. I would never listen to it on my own." Rick had an equally difficult time describing the classical repertoire played in C Slot Guitar and admits that it's not his first choice. "In regular guitar, it's mostly—I don't know how to put it—it's like Spanish weird music," Rick told me. "Not music that I would play, but that's okay." Both Rick and Dale prefer the music they play in jazz guitar. "Jazz is a

little bit easier for me because in jazz guitar I just play chords and I know a lot of chords,” Rick says, “but in regular guitar [Mr. Gardner] puts me a lot on notes and melody.” Like Rick, Dale’s preference for jazz music relates both to his enjoyment of the music itself and his feelings of competence playing it. “In jazz it’s basically a chorus, a verse and stuff like that so it’s easy to follow,” he says. “And then [in] the classical [music] there’s weird time signatures and stuff so it’s hard to get your part right away.” An enthusiastic soloist, Dale adds, “There’s not really solos in the classical stuff we play, it’s mostly [solos in] jazz.”

### **Arranging and Creating**

The guitar students have many opportunities to arrange and create music, starting with the music they play together as an ensemble. “Gardner will ask us, ‘What do you want to do with this?’” Rick explained. “It usually happens more in jazz guitar . . . he’ll ask, ‘Who wants to solo there?’ or we’ll change the music around so it works for us.” During one rehearsal, the class members altered “Lucy in the Sky With Diamonds” to include a solo section. The group didn’t perform the extended version, but Gardner feels that this experimentation is an important part of being a musician. “I honestly have a hard time playing a song back the exact same way,” he says. “That’s what an mp3 player will do for you . . . so I want a little more input from the performers. . . . There’s a little more risk involved but I think that [the students] should have some of their own say in it.”

Events like the Beatles performance at the Manitoba Museum also provide opportunities for the students to arrange music for themselves and for the small ensembles that they organize. Another opportunity occurs with Solo Night, an

end-of-school-year concert for which students compose or arrange music of their choice. On these occasions students have greater latitude to select repertoire and they draw upon a variety of resources including fake books, chord changes and tablature found on the Internet, their ears, and Mr. Gardner's guidance.

The in-class opportunities to create have opened up additional possibilities for students. As Dale gained experience creating and arranging he discovered a passion for soloing. "I just want to get better at improvising and stuff," he said. "I like solos. You get to do your own thing." Dale recently purchased a loop pedal that allows him to record and layer his own playing. He says the loop pedal has opened up new ways for him to create:

I'll compose my own songs. I'll make a bass line and I can loop a rhythm over it and then lead and stuff and have drum tracks on there, so I can make my own whole song. . . . A lot of times I'll be just playing around on the computer and then if I find, "Hey that sounds cool," I'll loop it and make parts over top of it. I'll find out what key I'm playing in and then I'll make a bass line that's really easy—because I can't play bass—so I'll just make something that's following the chords. And then I'll play scales over it to get a lead part and I'll just keep layering and layering . . . it sounds really cool. I was actually thinking of making a song beforehand and playing something like that for Solo Night.

### **Learning**

The student of C Slot Grade 11/12 Guitar line both flights of stairs in the disused stairwell behind the guitar room. Seated on the small landing between

them, Mr. Gardner plays along with the group. Some students glance at sheets of music covered with pencil markings; others have their music shut, or have no music at all. “Sometimes Mr. Gardner takes us to the [stairwell] to experience a different sound, so we can all hear better,” Rena later explains. “The sound is actually kind of decent,” says Hailey, “and if we really need to get something learned we sit in there and all practice as a group.”

They finish the *Couleur milonga* and Rena calls out, “Gardner, can you play where I come in the last time?” Rena watches closely as he slowly demonstrates the ornamented line. “Hammer-on with your third finger, and then pull off on the second string . . .” I notice that the most committed guitar students sit close by; farther away from Gardner, students are less intent. One twelfth-grader flicks a penny at another, who wallops him in the leg. “Okay guys, let’s go again from the beginning,” calls Gardner, his voice echoing in the live space. He begins to play and the other guitarists join in.

Students come to Mr. Gardner’s class with a range of knowledge, skills, and learning goals. Some are beginners. Others have played before, but the weakened middle school guitar programs provide a shaky foundation for young guitarists. Many arrive at the high school with poor playing technique and weak notational literacy. Gardner says he’s seen the impact of the decline on his program:

This is nowhere near what I had ability-wise. When I had the feeders going great, I was part of them, and you’d come in here, oh my goodness. You could actually do that other level. You could have Vivaldi and

everything going like mad and [students] were just like, “Oh my goodness this is amazing.” I spend all my time now fixing bad habits, re-teaching things.

Rena says when she first came to Brentford Collegiate Mr. Gardner “started with the basics” of guitar technique. “Just making sure we knew the stuff that we should have known from Grade 8.” Rena initially found the classical guitar technique taught by Mr. Gardner to be a challenge but she quickly gained confidence. “[O]nce I started I was like, ‘Hey, I can play this,’ [and] it wasn’t that hard anymore,” she said.

In addition to technical differences, only a handful of guitar students are able to read standard notation when they enter high school. Most students prefer using tablature or “tab”—a system of notation that indicates fingering rather than pitch—or playing by ear. Gardner spends time doing “reading recovery,” particularly with students in the ninth- and tenth-grade guitar classes. Yet in spite of his efforts many students find they can get along without traditional notation and never comfortably acquire the skill. By the time students reach grade 11, Gardner shifts his focus and allows students to learn using their preferred method. “He won’t give you tabs,” Hailey tells me, “He’ll give you notes . . . [but] he doesn’t get angry if you tab out your music.”

Rick and Dale play by ear and read tablature fluently, but neither read standard notation, though Rick admits “it would be a good skill to have.” Dale says that Gardner has tried to help him to work on reading but adds, “I’ve been doing [tab] since day one. [Gardner] knows I’m not going to change.” Despite

his resistance, Dale also admits that reading standard notation “would help me so much more.” He continues:

I would have learned more a lot sooner. . . . A lot of the kids that came from [the middle school where Mr. Gardner used to teach] knew what they were doing, and the ones from [my school] didn’t know at all, because [our teacher would] sit down and teach us power chords, he wouldn’t teach us notes. So when I came to high school I was pretty much screwed. All of us were. If I would’ve learned that a lot sooner I’d have learned scales a lot sooner and I’d be a lot better now.

Unlike most of her peers, Hailey took band in middle school and learned guitar for the first time when she got to Brentford. Although she didn’t have the same facility on guitar as some of her peers, she explains, “I could read music so that’s kind of the advantage I had over everyone else.” Now in her second year of guitar, Hailey says, “I can read, but tabbing is easier. When you’re learning something new it’s easier just to learn it as opposed to trying to read the music.”

Students also rely on their ears when learning music. They listen as Gardner plays different parts, and learn from peers who play the same part. “Me and [my cousin], usually we figure out the notes and then we end up playing it and [ask each other], ‘Oh, does that sound right?’” Rena explained. “Gardner will tell us if it sounds right or not and that’s pretty much how we do it.” Dale follows a similar process. He sometimes translates his music into tablature using a “cheat sheet” but says, “A lot of the time I’ll do it by ear and then I’ll get part of it and ask Gardner if it’s right and work on the next part.” Rick says he doesn’t need to



read music notation and that playing by ear “just gives you more ways to work it out on your own.

### **Accommodations**

Different ensemble parts appeal to different students and accommodate the various skill levels in the class. Students tend to specialize in one kind of part, tailored to the musician’s strengths, skill level, and interests. Rick, a self-described “chorder” explains:

There are different people who play different parts, so if there’s a group that plays melodies, [Mr. Gardner] gives them melodies and if they have trouble he helps them out. The bass player gets his own stuff but then usually chords are on [the sheet music] so I can play with [the chorders] and I can get help from the bass.

Hailey also considers of herself a chorder. “[It’s] my favorite thing to do,” she says. “I’m not the greatest at it but I really enjoy it. It’s fun guitar. ‘Cause I’m not a crazy soloing kind of person, so I can say I know all these chords and I can do that.”

When necessary, Gardner further accommodates students with different levels of skill by arranging easier and more difficult versions of the same part.

Bryce explains:

Playing certain songs, some are fast and some people can’t play it that fast. He splits it up and says, “This group play this part and the other group plays this part” so it sounds the same but different people are

playing so it's not as fast and not as hard for everyone. He challenges, but not over-challenges.

Mr. Gardner also accommodates the multitude of learning styles and strategies in the group by structuring class with a combination of group rehearsals and independent and small group practice time, shifting between the roles of "director" and "coach." As performances approach Gardner relies more heavily on direct instruction but suggests that during these times students learn the least. He prefers to provide students the opportunity to work at their own pace, to learn from each other, and to use his as a resource when necessary. "He kind of lets me learn on my own," Hailey explained, "[but he makes suggestions like] just try playing it at your own pace, try playing it in this position, you know?" "He's relaxed," Bryce agreed, "Some teachers are like, 'Do this, do this and do this.' [Gardner's] like, 'Here, try this and if it doesn't work we can change it around a little bit to whatever works better for you.'"

## **Performances**

### **The Spring Concert**

Bryce, Dale, Hailey, Rena, Rick, and the other members of the Grade 11/12 Jazz Guitar ensemble members sit quietly under the hot stage lights. The Grade 9 "Regular" Guitar and Grade 10 Jazz Guitar groups have performed, and now, on stage next to them, the concert band plays its final selection. The students are dressed in the requisite uniform of black pants and black Brentford Collegiate school sweaters, with several exceptions. Dale sports a black t-shirt and skinny maroon jeans, and Hailey, Rick, and another student wear white shirts.

In an effort to shorten the length of the concert, Gardner has decided not to have the Grade 10 or the Grade 11/12 “Regular” Guitar groups perform. “It’s fine,” he told me in the days leading up to the concert. “Most of them, a lot of them are in jazz [guitar] and the few who aren’t, these kids get a lot of opportunities to play and they’ll be doing Solo Night in a couple of weeks.” The students who spoke with me didn’t seem to be bothered by the news that they wouldn’t perform their “regular” guitar repertoire. “It’s another concert,” Dale told me. “We just played in Edmonton and jazz [guitar] is playing. It really doesn’t make a difference.” Rena agreed, “It’s nice to perform, like to play for people, and it doesn’t matter if we don’t play those songs. We’ve still got our jazz songs.”

I wondered how those who don’t play in the jazz group felt about missing the opportunity to perform. Cassie, a senior in the afternoon slot of Grade 11/12 Guitar shrugged when I asked her. “I’m still doing Solo Night so it’s not like this is the last time I have to play” she said. Sarah, a senior in another guitar class admitted, “It’s a little disappointing. We’ve done a lot to get these pieces sounding good and it’s too bad we don’t get to perform them. It’s our last time to perform as a whole group.” “I know some of the guitar students were disappointed they didn’t get to play in the spring concert,” Principal Turner later told me. “A couple of grade twelves commented on it. They sort of missed out on their final concert.”

Gardner sits on a high stool with his back to the audience and cradles an electric guitar. The Grade 11/12 Jazz Guitar students sit in three curved rows

around him. As the student emcees introduce them, the guitarists switch on their amps and Thomas tightens the high hat on his drum kit. Gardner surveys the group, gives a subtle nod, and they begin. Their first chart is a jazz-fusion piece called “Above It All.” The musicians’ playing is smooth and confident, and they receive warm applause. Their second selection is “Black Magic Woman,” and as the group begins to play, Dale, who has practiced the opening guitar solo for months, stands. He launches into the famous solo, imitating the bends, slides, and attitude of the original. As he finishes I am slightly disappointed by the soft applause he receives. Two more students take solos and they also receive gentle applause and—from somewhere in the back of the house—a soft “who!” Eric, Thomas, and Rob perform the final piece of the evening, an original, untitled piece that Eric composed for the three of them.

I recall Hailey’s description of concerts at Brentford Collegiate and her anticipation of Solo Night, the final guitar performance of the year. “Guitar concerts are very, ‘Hush, hush, listen, it’s beautiful,’” she explained, “But Solo Night is so fun, and you invite your friends. You’re like, ‘You *don’t* want to miss this.’”

### **Solo Night**

It’s standing room only in the Park Theatre, the hip, club-like venue where parents, siblings, teachers, and friends have gathered for the final performance of the year. On stage, Gardner checks the levels on a bass guitar. Though it’s well past the seven o’clock start time, many audience members are still arriving. In search of a place to sit or stand, they push past clusters of talkative students. Most

of the Brentford guitarists look cool in scruffy jeans and sneakers, but they are, on the whole, dressier than usual. Some of the boys wear collared shirts and a few girls wear summer dresses. As the house lights dim, the theatre erupts with cheers and applause as four male students take the stage. They casually strap on their guitars and adjust drums. Then, with a nod from the lead guitarist, the music starts.

“Oh my gosh. I love Solo Night!” Hailey had exclaimed over a coffee a few months earlier. “Do you know what Solo Night is? It’s where you get together either by yourself or you get a small group of people and you cover a song. It’s a cover band night.” When I asked Dale whether he could think of a “best” or “most memorable” day in guitar, he immediately mentioned Solo Night. “It’s really fun,” he said. “I get excited for that.”

Mr. Gardner organizes Solo Night as an opportunity for students to practice and perform music of their choice. All members of the guitar program are expected to perform in some capacity. Some musicians are eager to grab the spotlight, and others play a supporting role, backing up on guitar, vocals, or percussion. Some guitarists start thinking about what they might perform far in advance; months before Solo Night of her junior year, Hailey was already thinking about what she might play for her senior year. “I want to play [Led Zeppelin’s] ‘Over the Hills and Far Away’ for grade 12 Solo Night,” Hailey told me. “I think it would be the most epic thing ever ‘cause it’s such a good song. That’s my plan.” Others like Dale and Bryce have a few ideas in mind but wait until the last minute to decide.

The energy is high as Dale and Rena take the stage. Dale plays rhythmically and intently, knees bending in emphasis. Rena's singing is slightly off key, but as they finish everyone cheers loudly. Two students from another class perform "Hero of War," a powerful and politically charged anti-war song by the band Rise Against. The audience is silent as they sing, and I feel a chill at the intensity of their performance. The mood abruptly changes as Dale returns to the stage with Drew, an awkward and sweet-natured eleventh-grade student from the afternoon class, and the two perform the rap from *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* to screams of approval. Hailey performs "Under My Thumb" by the Rolling Stones. Among the musicians backing her up, Bryce proudly plays the xylophone part. A few days before, he had carefully marked the bars with tape to show himself where to play. Hailey had been worried about singing in public but sings well and leaves the stage smiling. Next, Jamie, a senior, takes the stage alone. "I wrote this song for my girlfriend," he says into the microphone, and begins playing a sweet ballad. "Go Jamie!" someone yells from the crowd.

A dozen guitar students perch atop a cabinet at the side of the stage where Mr. Gardner moves microphones and equipment and otherwise stays out of the way. No administrator or teacher has spoken yet this evening; this concert belongs to the students. From selecting and arranging the music to rehearsing, performing, and addressing the audience, the students have done this themselves. Gardner says that the event bonds the group members like no other experience:

It's very individualistic in that they have to do something on their own or in a small group, so they're vulnerable. Because they're so vulnerable and

in a situation outside their realm of comfort, and they succeed—I mean they all succeed so greatly at it—it’s like they’ve shared a common experience and they never ever forget that. So there’s now trust in each other and pride in each other. . . . They play for each other, they help each other, they give suggestions to each other. They’re supportive and informative. They’ll play for each other over and over and just praise what they’re doing and . . . I just sit back and watch it all happen. It’s good, there’s no doubt about it. It’s good.

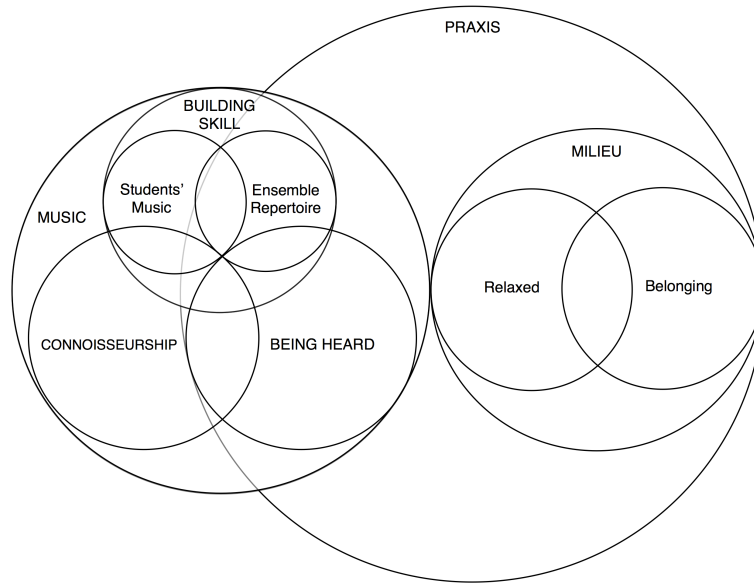
Toward the evening Mr. Gardner joins Rob, Dale, and two other boys on stage to perform Uncle Kracker’s “Follow Me.” At the chorus someone in the audience starts clapping and soon everyone is on their feet. As the concert cruises past the two-hour mark the students are still going strong. One of the twelfth-grade girls orders the audience members to remain standing and they break into Stevie Wonder’s “Superstition” on electric guitars. I feel the bass drum thumping in my chest and am struck by the contrast between this rollicking, messy, happy night and the more formal year-end concert that took place just two weeks ago.

At the end of the evening, representatives of the Music Parents’ Association thank Mr. Gardner for his efforts. A twelfth-grade girl who will graduate in a few days’ time speaks on behalf of the students as Gardner stands at the side of the stage. I notice several students tearing up as she thanks him and presents him with a guitar autographed by all of the graduating guitarists. One by one they hug him. Later, Gardner tells me he has several guitars like this.

## **Part II - Meaning**

The C Slot Grade 11/12 guitarists love music and play outside of school as much or more than they do in school. Guitar class is meaningful first and foremost because it enables the guitarists to develop skill that they can apply in other musical contexts—contexts that extend outside the boundary of the school praxis and into their lives outside of school (“Music” circle of Figure 2). As they work with ensemble repertoire and the music that they select or create for themselves, some students come to appreciate music more deeply, and some value the opportunity to be heard and to express themselves through their playing. The milieu of the class also helps to make guitar a meaningful experience. The relaxed and sociable environment of guitar class is enjoyable and provides students with choices about how and in what ways they wish to participate. Students feel a strong sense of belonging and a connection to Mr. Gardner, whom they see as a caring adult role model (*Figure 2*).





*Figure 2.* Themes of meaning within Brentford Collegiate C Slot Grade 11/12 Guitar Class.

### **Building Skill**

Guitar class is a place where students can acquire skills and hone their technique. During my observations the guitar students practiced challenging passages in their repertoire and sought Mr. Gardner for advice about fingering, playing position, and technical elements. Dale is one of several students who spends much of his free time practicing in the guitar room and who says he values the skills he gains there. “If I had a spare I’d be there in every spare,” says Dale. “To get better, [to] practice. I go there at lunch and I practice . . . with Rob and Rick at lunch a couple days a week.” Rick considers the class “almost like a spare.” This comment initially surprised me because Rick appeared to be one of the most devoted members of the class. He enjoyed chatting with his friends but also worked steadfastly on his music. Rick clarified, “Well, I wouldn’t say not doing any work. Of course there’s work in guitar ‘cause you’re always playing,

but I play in my free time every day, like three hours a day. I play a lot so it's just like practice to me.”

The skills acquired in class are particularly valuable because they enable students to play the music they love. “You want to play all your crazy awesome songs that you know,” Hailey told me, “but you can't play those things off the bat because you just suck when you start. That's definitely what I'm getting the most out of this guitar class.” Students routinely apply the skills they develop through class repertoire to music encountered outside of school. “Whenever I learn a part or get rhythm patterns down pretty good, like the chords, it's pretty self-rewarding,” Rick says. “Then I can play it at home and with some of my bands.” Dale agrees and notes that, while the music played in class isn't always his style, “I know playing the stuff I learn in class will make me a lot better than playing the stuff I used to play.”

Developing the ability to play “their” music is a powerful motivator. Students willingly practice at home, though not necessarily on the repertoire played at school. “I play a lot at home, as do a lot of people in my class,” Hailey says. “They don't necessarily play the guitar pieces but I know a lot of them work on their skills at home. . . . I do learn my guitar [class] songs [at home] but not very often.” Gardner says this self-motivation to play is a major difference between the guitar program and the struggling band program across the hall. “You walk into a band class that had no [quality teaching] the year before and what do you do?” Gardner asks. “The difference is, those band kids don't go home and play their instruments and download songs and say, ‘I'm going to play

that.’ My kids go and they get their tab or they get something and they play and they create.” Gardner smiles, “That’s why we can semesterize<sup>16</sup> guitar. Those kids aren’t losing chop time; they’re playing every night and all weekend anyway so they’re never losing anything. They’re still playing.”

### **Getting Better Feels Good**

The guitar students who spoke with me value the sense of personal growth they experience as they become more skillful. “I like improving,” Dale told me when I asked him what he got out of playing the guitar. “I play stuff that’s harder all the time; I won’t play an easier song. As soon as I learn a song, I’ll move on to harder one.” Rick agrees, and says that learning new music feels good. “Three hours of progress and you play a few songs right and you have them down pat and it makes you happy,” he explains. “Playing guitar when I have nothing else to do, that’s how I get three hours [of practice] in, but those three hours add up to how I feel.”

Like many of her peers, Rena enjoys music “that’s not ridiculously hard but [is] a challenge.” One of Rena’s favorite moments in guitar class came when the group was learning to play a piece called “Nota Bene.” “When I learned all the runs it was like, ‘Yes! I’ve got this!’” she recalled. “‘Cause that was one of the hardest songs that we’ve played that kept going and kept going and was consistently hard. Once I got it, it was like, ‘Yes!’ I was *so* happy.” Another high point for Rena happened just a week before we first spoke. “[Mr. Gardner]

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<sup>16</sup> “Semesterized” classes take place over the course of a single semester rather than over the course of an entire school year. Unlike most other classes, band is not semesterized at this school.

taught me the finger style that he can barely play to ‘Every Breath You Take’ and I got it in like two minutes,” she smiled, “and I’m like, ‘I’m a better player than I was.’”

Hailey says she feels an emotional charge “when you finally get that song, or you finally play that lick that you couldn’t get. You finally play it up to speed and right and you didn’t know you could do that.” While those moments of achievement can be thrilling, Hailey notes that improving as a guitarist is more often a journey than a point of arrival. “You don’t usually just *get* the part,” she says. “You work and work and work and work and as you realize you can play it you start playing it better and better and better. You never really accomplish, you’re just kind of progressing [with] your skills.”

The class members take pride in performing well together but are generally less concerned with their achievement as an ensemble than they are with their individual progress as musicians. The ensemble performances I heard weren’t perfect, but were good enough to satisfy the students, Mr. Gardner, and—judging by the comments I overheard following concerts—members of the audience. “Every time we play . . . we sound good,” says Dale. “Nobody is ever out of tune or anything, it sounds fine.” Rick says, “On stage, with the guitar group we have here, I feel like we’ve done an accomplishment and we’ve given people a good time.”

Part of this individual emphasis can be attributed to the guitar itself. As an instrument, the guitar enables students to create satisfying musical performances both soloistically and within a group context. As Hailey observed, “I think it’s

easier to [play] on your own in guitar as opposed to band where it's easier to have the group play with you. . . . With one [guitar] you can play so many things.” Because much of the music that students value can be played independently or with a small group of friends, students *can* succeed alone, regardless of the efforts of their peers. Mistakes within a guitar ensemble are also less jarring and are not as detrimental to the overall sound compared with concert bands and other ensembles. Rena comments that if some members of the class don't work as diligently to learn the class repertoire, “that's their own loss.”

Gardner approached school concerts with a similarly relaxed attitude. To the consternation of school administration, performance details were typically finalized at the eleventh hour and ensemble pieces sometimes came together only a few days prior to performance. I was initially surprised by Gardner's seemingly cavalier attitude about school concerts, however he explained that these ensemble performances aren't primarily what guitar is about. “Ideally I'd love to have a class where you didn't *have* to perform because they would learn more, and then that knowledge would carry out further in [students'] musical lives,” Gardner told me. “I think that would be more advocacy than playing a really good performance and then never really playing again. That doesn't sound like advocacy to me. That's *a* moment but it's not *many* moments.”

While the guitar students focus primarily on their individual progress, Hailey says she feels a sense of responsibility to the group and dislikes being too far behind. “Sometimes when I really can't get a song I'm really frustrated and discouraged,” she shared. “If I can't play it I definitely feel like I'm not

contributing as much as I could be and I feel like I'm . . . not bringing down the group but I feel like I'm not contributing and that does bother me." She grimaces, "When [Mr. Gardner's] like, 'Play Nota Bene,' I'm like, 'Oh no,' because it's a song that everybody has played. . . . I wasn't there in grade 10 when they played it so I'm a step behind everyone."

Bryce struggled to play some of the more difficult pieces and, even during dress rehearsals, he skimmed over or omitted challenging sections. Nevertheless, Bryce expressed a sense of pride in what he was able to play, and shared in the group's accomplishments. "It's cool how at the beginning of the year, we're like, 'We're going to learn this song'," says Bryce, "and it's like, 'Oh wow, it's a lot of notes to learn.' And at the end of the year we play it and it's really good. We can do it."

### **Appreciation for Music and Guitar**

When Dale was in the ninth grade he and a friend sat at the back of Mr. Gardner's guitar class and played their own songs all the time. "I never paid attention," Dale told me, laughing as he recalled his bad attitude. "I was still a badass." As he became more experienced on the guitar, however, Dale's tastes in music changed. He discovered a passion for soloing and improving and began to gravitate toward music that "takes a lot more skill than just playing the same open chords over and over again." Influenced by his father and the guitar class, Dale became more interested in rock, jazz, and blues music. "I have an appreciation for the guitar now, so I'll listen to bands that have good guitarists," Dale says.

“It’s not as much vocals and everything, I used to listen to all that screaming stuff and I didn’t care about the guitar. Now I listen to the guitar more than anything.”

Learning to play the guitar has changed the way some students listen to music. Like Dale, Hailey says that as a result of learning to play the guitar she now listens to guitar music with a deeper understanding of the technique and artistry involved in creating it. “If you don’t play guitar or if you aren’t really familiar with the instrument, it’s just a guitar you’re listening to,” Hailey tells me. “But when you can play guitar and you listen to them play that song, you’re like, ‘Oh, this is what he’s doing with his hands, these are the chords he’s playing, this is what position he’s playing in, probably.’” As a result of learning to play the guitar Hailey listens to music as an insider to the art, and is developing what Eisner refers to as “connoisseurship,” the ability to “notice in the field of their expertise what others may miss” (2002, p. 187).

While Dale still listens to “the heavy stuff” he says he’s surprised by the breadth of his current musical interests. “It’s really weird,” Dale reflected. “I can go from listening to metal and then I can listen to John Mayer and stuff like that. Wide horizons.” Rena agrees, “I listen to way more [music] than I used to now that I play guitar.”

### **Being Seen and Heard**

To many of the students who spoke with me, performances were most meaningful when they could be seen and heard as individuals. “I like performing when I have a solo,” Dale explained. “It’s fun . . . ‘cause I make it up; I don’t take a solo from another song or anything. [It’s] to show off I guess.” Hailey

agrees, “It’s the concerts and the tours where you get to show off what you’ve done; that’s what means a lot to me. Those are my moments.” Gardner believes that this desire to be recognized can be attributed to the personalities of those who gravitate toward guitar class. “[They’re] independent,” he explains. “They have that little edge. Not all of them, but I would say in general.” Gardner continues:

A band kid, a flute player, a clarinet player . . . I mean I might be stereotyping but they want to be a part of the big picture. They don’t necessarily want to be seen just them. And some of these [guitar] kids, they want to be seen *just* them. So those personalities are way more aggressive. . . . They’re athletic, they’re the mean girl, they’re popular, they’re whatever; it’s their persona. It’s aggressive, aggressive, aggressive behavior . . . yeah, this is a place for them. I don’t think they want to sit in band and have to be quiet and listen to the whole section, you know? I loved playing in band and, I mean, the feeling you get from a band performance with the sonorities and that whole thing, you won’t get that here. But what you get is on a different level. You get this bond in your soul because it’s not about volume. It’s about . . . just overcoming things maybe? I don’t know what it is. It’s different.

While events such as the Beatles performances at the Art Museum and the Concert Hall provide students with the opportunity to perform as soloists or in small ensembles, Solo Night is, as Hailey says, “the biggest guitar night of the year.” The annual event provides students with the opportunity to perform music they’ve chosen and arranged for themselves, and showcases their progress over



the school year in a much more visible way. “You get to pick whatever you want,” Bryce explained, “and the teacher kind of is there to help us, but [he] doesn’t really help us because we’ve learned so much we don’t need that much help anymore.”

Being heard and recognized for their skill is an important aspect of Solo Night for many students; some also value the opportunity to express themselves and to communicate through the music they play. This expressive dimension is “all the way at the top of the chart” of what Rick loves about music. “If you really love something that much, you want to express yourself and show others what you love about it, what your tastes are, your passion about it,” he says. Rena shared a similar perspective. “I like expressing myself through the music [because] it makes me feel lighter and it just makes me motivated to learn more,” she told me. “I’m not the most willing person to talk about how I feel so if I can let it out in a different way, that’s how I play guitar. I can connect to any piece of music and express myself through it.” Dale says that soloing offers him the greatest opportunity to express himself. “When I’m soloing I kind put how I feel into it,” Dale reflected. “It’s all feeling. A lot of it is in the way you play it, different bends and stuff. Some people just play [the music] note for note and it just sounds annoying. . . . I play more with feeling.”

Solo Night provides students with an opportunity to be heard, and generates a far more enthusiastic audience; whereas a few non-guitar students attended the spring concert, Solo Night was packed with friends and family. “Guitar concert is like, ‘Okay, we’ll see you play your song,’” Hailey told me,

“whereas Solo Night, ‘You guys *won’t* be disappointed.’ Hailey believes the music played at Solo Night makes all the difference:

This is a cool night. You see so many people playing so many different things but it’s still stuff everybody knows. Last year James and Anthony played “The Rain Song”—Anthony cannot sing Led Zeppelin by the way—but it was still really cool to hear one of my favorite songs being played by these two guys, playing their own versions of it. It’s cool to see how people interpret things.

Principal Thoringon shared a similar perspective, and noted that the concert’s informality also contributed to its appeal:

[At Solo Night] people are just sort of standing around talking and yakking. Performances were going on [and] people were sometimes listening, sometimes visiting. [It was] a very informal setting, whereas the [spring concert] was much more of a concert where you sit back and you listen. And you know, it also had a little bit more of a rock-and-roll kind of feel to it at the Solo Night, so people would stand up and clap or they would sing along, [and] that was okay. You don’t do that at [the spring concert]. . . . The venue was very casual, the evening was very casual, the kids were very well prepared and having a good time and [it was] a really positive thing. I tried to get my husband to come with me. I said, “It’s something I think you would actually enjoy.” It’s not going and listening to two hours of classical music, it’s going [to hear] popular songs.

## **Relaxed and Supportive Environment**

The Brentford Collegiate guitar room is relaxed, comfortable, and welcoming. It's a place where guitar students go to practice and to hang out. During lunch, students frequently gather around Gardner's desk, and surf the Internet, listen to music, jam, and talk. They talk about sports, television, classes, and parties, argue loudly, and poke fun at each other. They share plans for graduation and MySpace pages and amps they want to buy. They share french fries and Cokes.

The sociability of guitar classes at Brentford Collegiate stems, in part, from the guitar itself. The instrument features prominently in much of the music that these high school students value and is embraced socially by their peers. Members of the guitar class view the guitar as a "cool" instrument and feel comfortable playing in a variety of settings. Principal Turner observed that in the student culture of Brentford Collegiate, guitar is seen as a far cooler instrument and guitar a cooler class to take than band. "The social acceptability of showing up at a party with a guitar and strumming on a guitar and singing is there," she said. "It's not there for the trumpet player or the trombone player. Guitar is seen as a cooler thing to do [and] I think a lot of the kids develop a passion for it." "It's the most sociable instrument ever," Hailey agrees. "You're sitting around a campfire, you can pull out your guitar. Whereas, 'Well hang on guys, I have to take out my clarinet, put it together, warm up before I can play you a song.'" She laughs. "It's a really sociable thing and guitar really drew me to that."

The classroom environment is an important part of what makes the guitar class meaningful. There, students feel they can relax and enjoy themselves while still accomplishing something of value. “I look forward to guitar because it’s fun,” Rena told me. “It’s a good environment and I leave there feeling lighter in some way than when I came in, especially if it’s a bad day. I’ll leave there and I might actually be smiling.” “It’s fun,” agreed Bryce. “I’ve really enjoyed it. Good teacher, good skills, something fun to do.” For Bryce and others, guitar offers respite from the stresses of school. “It’s not just like being in school, ‘Oh I’ve got to do this and this, an exam here, and all that stuff,’” Bryce said. “It’s kind of a release, just relaxing [and] playing something.” Hailey shared a similar perspective. “Guitar is definitely more of a relaxed atmosphere and it’s, you know it’s funner. You can always tease your friends and push them around and Mr. Gardner doesn’t care that kids are having fun. Guitar definitely has more room for being yourself.”

The relaxed, sociable environment works for some students, particularly those who are self-motivated. Others may enjoy the environment but may also miss out on other meaningful experiences such as the sense of achievement that accompanies the development of skill. Dale, a former band member, says he prefers guitar over band class but sometimes misses the structure of the band. “I like that [our band teacher] was so strict on us,” he says. “It was better.” Though I was initially surprised by his assertion, I came to realize that Dale’s drive to improve as a guitarist outweighs his desire to socialize or to take it easy. “I like [the relaxed atmosphere] ‘cause obviously I am getting a better mark that way,”

Dale explained, “but I kind of wish it was a little more strict because then I would obviously get a lot better. . . . I would work a lot harder.” While Dale was the only student who raised this point with me, I wondered if others in the class might willingly sacrifice some of the relaxed atmosphere in exchange for “getting better.”

### **Student Choice**

Instruction in the C Slot Guitar class is highly differentiated, and students learn in numerous ways. Mr. Gardner assigns guitar parts based on each player’s strengths and modifies some parts to make them accessible to weaker players. “[I] simplify or modify their part so that they can succeed with the amount of commitment they’re going to put in,” Gardner explains. Students have a say in the kinds of parts they prefer to play and come to specialize in playing melodic, harmonic, chordal, or bass parts. Those who want to solo have that opportunity. Students also have many opportunities to choose their own music, to arrange their own parts, and to rehearse that music in groups they select for themselves.

Rena says that Mr. Gardner’s respect for their individuality and willingness to differentiate makes a big impact on the overall experience. “[Mr. Gardner] allows everyone to learn in their own way which is why we get along so well,” said Rena. “He’s not telling you, ‘You have to play like this.’ You can put your own style to it.” “Mr. Gardner gives us freedom,” Rick agreed, “so he lets us experiment with different parts and he’s not a stickler like, ‘You have to learn this or you’re kicked out.’” Gardner works to motivate the students in his class

and tries to help everyone succeed but, as Rick points out, students even have the freedom *not* to learn.

The students who spoke with me largely appreciated this ability to choose for themselves what, how, and how much they would learn. Rena's personal definition of "meaningful" reveals the extent to which she values this educational freedom. "[Meaningful] means it's something that I don't feel pressure to do in any way," she told me. "[It's] something that I can connect to and express myself through, and that I have something in common with." She continued, "It's my own free will; it's not something that someone's telling me I've got to do, it's something that I'm going to do whether someone wants me to or not." Asked whether guitar class fit her definition she replied, "Oh yeah."

### **Belonging**

One of the aspects Hailey finds most meaningful is "the belonging of being in a guitar group." "You get that sense of family from guitar that I've always kind of been drawn to," says Hailey. "Everyone is accepted in guitar. Billy Marsh [a quirky, socially awkward student] has a place in guitar. It is more of the family thing." I observed this sense of closeness among the guitar students—those in the C slot class and in other guitar classes—in their interactions with each other. Though they teased each other mercilessly, students demonstrated a relaxed comfort with each other. "The playing is nice, that's why we're there," Hailey said, "but I think more it's that everyone is there together, and everyone plays guitar. . . . Everyone has that common interest and it's kind of like a family feeling, you're all going out together. It's fun in that sense." Bryce,

the quietest member of the C Slot class, says “the people are a big part” of his experience of guitar. “They’re fun,” he says. “We all play together.”

The students who spoke with me shared that the closeness and familiarity they develop over time helps them to play better together. “I like playing with the people in my class because I know them personally,” Dale told me. “I like playing with new people too because you don’t know what they’re like, so that’s fun, but I’d rather play with people I know because you know what they can do.” Bryce agrees, “If you’re just a bunch of people who don’t know each other and don’t like each other, it is kind of hard to play,” he explained. “We all learn because we all play around each other and we know how each other plays so we can listen and change towards everyone else as a group.” Rick said he valued the opportunity to learn from his friends. “Most of my friends are in guitar, so it’s nice to hang out with them and actually play; it’s good to actually learn off one each other.”

Guitar attracts different students from a variety of peer groups. Asked what she thought of the social dynamics in the ensemble Rena answered, “I think if we were all very similar and we had lots in common it would make it completely different because we’d be the same people [and] it’d be boring. I think it’s how diverse our group is that makes it what it is.” Hailey says people’s differences make the class “kind of exciting” and adds that being in a guitar ensemble “brings everyone together.” Rick agrees and argues that playing as an ensemble provides diverse people with something in common and helps them to connect with each other. “Say you’re a loner and you don’t play guitar,” he

suggested. “You might not really associate with other people and know how they feel about music because maybe they don’t know how you would feel about music, [but] once you play as a group it just kind of all ties together.” He leaned forward. “Different parts are like different people. You add them all together and it makes a nice song. You have a whole bunch of people and it makes one . . . music community.”

“As soon as my kids experience their first Solo Night or their first festival tour or something like that they become part of a family,” Gardner says. “That’s probably a pretty strong word but they feel free to say what they want and they share their life with each other. They know their strengths, they know their weaknesses, and they work on those.” Gardner is proud of the closeness of his students. “They’re very tight,” he says, “But I haven’t had a group that wasn’t tight, I don’t think ever. Obviously I think maybe I foster it by showing an interest in what they’re doing [outside of class], but they feel comfortable. They express themselves.” He laughs and rolls his eyes. “[Of course] sometimes you don’t want to hear them ‘express themselves’ but they do!”

Gardner plays a central role in setting the tone of the guitar class and creating a sense of belonging and group cohesion. In addition to setting a relaxed pace and providing opportunities for students to work with and learn from each other, Gardner also demonstrates care and a willingness to discuss matters that extend well beyond the curriculum. Each of the students who spoke with me referred to conversations they’d had as a class or on a more individual basis. “He’s one of those teachers that you could really tell anything to and he would



give you feedback,” Rick says. “Not talking about guitar, but life in general.”

“He kind of bonds with people,” says Dale “He doesn’t just focus on guitar, guitar, guitar; he will talk to you about everything, on a personal level.” Bryce says, “He makes learning fun [because] he gets right in there and jokes around. He can act like a kid but he knows what to do and he teaches you.” Rena agrees, “Everyone knows he’s our teacher so we have to listen to him but he’ll connect with people on a level that’s beyond that and it’s not a bad thing at all. It’s kind of like having an uncle or an older brother. I think that’s probably why we all get along.”

Gardner is aware that many of his students view him differently from other teachers. “The teacher role is probably quite confused in here for some people,” he says. “I’ve had a couple of [students] say to me that they don’t see me as a teacher, they see me as an uncle. And that’s not bad, ‘cause I’ve got the patience of an uncle but the knowledge of a teacher.” Rick says that this personal connection is one reason Mr. Gardner is such a great teacher. “[Teachers] have to be understanding,” he says. “We’re not just teenagers just to learn. We have lives too. I think it’s good that teachers be part of students’ lives. You can tell [Gardner] anything. He’ll give you advice, full out honesty.” “He’s one of those teachers who will actually talk to you like a person,” says Rena. “And you don’t just learn what you’re there for, you learn life lessons and you can have discussions. I like that.”

## Future Plans

I interviewed Principal Turner about the Brentford Collegiate guitar program on the last day of the school year. “It goes from [grade] nine through twelve,” Turner explained. “In grade nine it’s just the acoustic guitar, starting in grade ten the kids can do jazz guitar—we call it jazz guitar, but really it’s rock,” she laughed, “so we have kids in the program who . . .” Principal Turner trailed off suddenly and looked at me. “I think they live and die for guitar actually,” she said. “They’re going to go on and be professional musicians. . . . Now whether it happens for them I don’t know, but they certainly have the dreams and intentions to go do that.”

Gardner confirmed that some guitar students planned to go on professionally; the students who spoke with me weren’t as sure about what lay ahead, but all planned to keep playing. Bryce says guitar is a big part of his life and plans to keep playing after graduation. “I like doing it, I’ve been doing it for a long time and I don’t want to stop,” he says. “I want to play guitar for the rest of my life. It’s something I don’t want to lose and something I am glad I learned.”

Rick isn’t certain whether he’ll play the guitar in a band or continue playing on his own after graduation. “It could be both,” he says. Although he’s unsure of the context, Rick says he’ll keep playing the guitar “forever.” “Unless I got my fingers chopped off, I’d find a way.” Dale, too, plans to continue playing the guitar after graduation, and is saving money for singing lessons. “It’s the only thing I’m really missing,” he says. He also has plans to start a new group. “I’m

getting an acoustic guitar too,” Dale tells me. “I want to start an acoustic band, that sort of thing. I listen to a lot of slow acoustic stuff nowadays.” Rena says, “I think I’m always going to play. . . . I’m probably not going to take lessons or a class, but I’ll pick songs that I like and get the tabs for them and the chords and I’ll learn them just to have fun.”

Hailey may need to move to a different school for her senior year and says she “wouldn’t be able to accept” not playing guitar. She has her eye on another high school in the city, one with a strong guitar program. “Either way,” says Hailey, “I would still play my guitar at home, I’d practice every day [and] I’d still try to get better.” Hailey says that guitar is “definitely something I want to do for my entire life.” “I want to try to get as good as I can before I get arthritis in my hands,” she tells me. “Don’t all crazy guitar players get arthritis? It’s something I think I’ll be doing my whole life.”

## Chapter 6

### SENIOR JAZZ BAND

#### **Part I - Context**

In the windowless band room, twenty eleventh- and twelfth-grade jazz students warm up before class. The saxophonists practice an assortment of licks at top speed; trombonists buzz glissandos on their mouthpieces; a trumpet player squeals ever higher as she reaches for an elusive top note; the drummer plays a funk pattern, loose and easy. Mr. Daley begins to clap offbeats and as the noise subsides he counts off. “One . . .” A saxophonist flips hastily to the first page of her chart. “Two . . .” The trombonists shift in their seats and move their slides. “One . . . two . . . a-one two three!” and the rhythm section launches into the first chart of the day.

The students of the Pearson Collegiate Senior Jazz Band are moving. They nod in time with the music and shimmy in their seats. Feet tap, fingers snap. As the saxophones launch into the head of the chart, Trevor, an eleventh-grade trombonist grins and stabs the air with a finger to show the accents. Other group members keep the beat with a bob of the knee or a tap of a heel against a chair leg. At the podium, Daley leans against a tall grey stool and listens. Dressed in a black hooded sweatshirt, faded jeans, and hiking boots, Daley projects a casual informality that is reflected in the rehearsal and in the room itself. Stacks of books and papers and assorted piles of music clutter the counters, shelves, and floor along the front of the room. Festival photos and dusty awards hang on either side of the white board, and above it, a meter stick hand painted

with the words “Daley Vulgarity Stick,” the use of which was never revealed to me. The board itself is cluttered with triads and 7th chords, which have remained for several weeks, gradually surrendering territory to subsequent lessons.

At the solo section, the rhythm section continues to play but no one steps forward to solo. “Somebody’s got to grab it,” Daley says, looking expectantly around the room. Whether hesitant to grab the limelight or uneasy about soloing, no one makes eye contact. Daley scat sings the end of the phrase, presumably as encouragement. A petite trumpet player shouts “Yeah!” in response, but still no one volunteers a solo. Exasperated, Daley yells to one of the alto saxophonists, “Play something!” The saxophonist produces an awkward series of pitches based loosely on the blues scale. His timing is off, and he looks uncomfortable as he tries in vain to resolve a stream of dissonant notes.

The back half of the chart is rough, peppered with incorrect pitches and chipped notes, but the students play with enthusiasm, and if the smiles and nodding heads I see are any indication, they’re having a good time. They take the coda and finish, hanging on the last pitch, one of the trumpets holding out a screaming high note before falling off of it. Everyone laughs and starts talking at once. “Whoa!!” “Oh wow, we need to practice that part at 67!” “What happened at the coda?” “Nice solo, there.” “How many times are we . . .” “Let’s try . . .” “Hey, what . . .” The threads of conversation tangle together amid numerous instrumental riffs and a lot of laughter. Daley, too, talks animatedly with the students in front of him. The noise level climbs and he claps his hands to regain focus. “Okay, okay everybody. All right.” The tumult gradually subsides.

“Okay,” Daley says. “We need to go back and work on that.” He leafs through several pages in his score before flipping it shut. “Right now though, take out *Tank*.”

### **There’s Messy and Then There’s Messy**

From the first moment I walked into a Senior Jazz Band rehearsal at Pearson I looked forward to learning more. In my initial notes about the group I jotted, “This seems like a happy band—messy but happy.” The students laughed, chatted, goaded each other playfully, and performed with gusto. Their music was enthusiastic, if a bit rough, but the students seemed invested in their own progress. I noticed several musicians making notes in their sheet music—one female saxophonist employed a highlighter pen to mark difficult passages and drew large stars in pencil with notes like “FFF!” and “Coda!!!!” The students freely commented on the performances of their peers and the ensemble as a whole. In the first rehearsal I heard, “Try using more air there. Your pitch is under,” and, from a saxophonist, “The saxes aren’t together. Can we do that again?” A few students in particular seemed to relish the role of diagnostician.

When Mr. Daley first introduced me to the jazz band members he said, “She’s here to watch us rehearse and to talk with some of you. She wants to know why the heck you’re taking Jazz Band.” In the second row, Trevor—a tall, lanky trombonist—pulled his horn close in a gesture that communicated both affection and protectiveness. In the initial survey I distributed, the students informed me that the group was important to them. They told me they valued being with friends, playing great music, having a great time together, and learning

more about how music works. Over the following weeks and months I learned about these aspects of participation in greater detail and discovered that, for members of this ensemble, meaningful participation is complicated.

### **Background of the Program**

With approximately 740 students in grades nine through twelve, Pearson Collegiate is a medium-sized Winnipeg high school. The school's principal, Mr. Thompson, informed me that of the students in attendance at Pearson, roughly 200 are involved in one or more of the school's music offerings. "I don't know what other high schools are like but there are so many things here," Trevor told me when we first sat down to talk one-on-one. "There's jazz band, concert band, concert choir, vocal jazz, and Technical Music Productions where you can learn to write music. There are all of these great options and I hadn't had the chance to experience them before." In fact, Pearson Collegiate offers three concert bands and three jazz bands, and has a nationally recognized guitar program. "It's an excellent music program, especially for the size of our school," said Sarah, a twelfth-grade trombonist. Principal Thompson agrees. "In the last few years we've had three full-time music teachers," he explained. "We're two-thirds the size of [the neighboring high schools] and they don't have as many music staff. I think that's indicative of how important the music program is at our building."

Students at Pearson are unable to participate in both guitar and band classes because of the way the two courses are timetabled. Choir and vocal jazz, however, are scheduled outside of the timetable and students such as Trevor, Sunil, and Sarah take multiple music courses each semester. Principal Thompson

notes that as much as students enjoy taking multiple music classes, the practice has recently been curtailed and may become even more restricted in the future. “We used to have kids taking so many extra credits and it was a lot of the music kids,” he says. “Now we’re telling them they have to choose because we don’t have enough staff [throughout the school]. . . . As much as we want to support the music program and want it to flourish we have to look at what our staffing is and what we can do.”

Mr. Daley is a twenty-year veteran teacher of public school music. He spent the first twelve years of his career as a middle school choir, band, and guitar teacher in another Winnipeg school division and began teaching at the high school level upon moving to Pearson Collegiate. Daley says he was a latecomer to jazz, first playing the bass guitar in a pickup jazz group in his tenth year of teaching. “It was an interesting challenge to say, ‘Okay, let me try this,’ and working with positions on the bass guitar,” Daley recalls. “I guess that’s when I really got to learn what jazz was about.” When called upon to teach jazz classes at Pearson eight years ago Daley remembers thinking, “This is going to be fun.”

Students are assigned to the bands and jazz bands according to grade rather than skill level. Unlike other courses that run for each day for one semester, the grade level concert bands and jazz bands meet for 70 minutes on alternating days throughout the entire school year. Students must be enrolled in concert band to take jazz, and those who don’t sign up for jazz are left with a spare period.



Jacquie, now an 11th-grade flutist in the concert band, took up the alto saxophone last year so she could play in the Grade 10 Jazz Band. “Everyone was talking about how much fun it is and how it was better than concert band and we played better music,” Jacquie told me. “I had band every other day so I thought I might as well take [jazz] too. You get an extra credit and everyone has fun.” Stephanie shared a similar perspective. “I took it because I needed the credit,” Susan reflected, “but then after that . . . it was like karate—the more you do it the more you’re actually learning something. So I thought, ‘Maybe I should keep it up and see what else I can do.’”

For Trevor, the opportunity to earn a school credit was immaterial. He had watched his elder sister go through the jazz program and always planned to follow her. “A concert band is nice,” he said, “but why [just] do concert when you can do jazz? Jazz is the cool thing to do. It’s so much fun, it’s upbeat. . . . [I want to] get as much music as I can.”

Twelfth-grader Sarah played guitar in middle school and switched to band in high school. “Guitar was convenient because we had a guitar at home and I wanted to learn it,” Sarah explained, “but by the end of grade 8 my brother was in band and I was really interested in how it sounded and what it was like. I picked trombone and I got a few summer lessons and started out in [band in] grade 9.” She signed up for jazz at the same time because, “It wasn’t an extra effort to be there—it was the same period, so why would I want a spare? I was interested enough in music and I just wanted to be in there. And I love jazz now.”

Conversely, Aaron played the trumpet in middle school but soon grew to dislike it and began playing the guitar on his own. When he entered high school Aaron grudgingly signed up for ninth-grade band, not knowing what was in store:

I had no idea that jazz band had a guitar player, so when we came in I was like, “Oh great I’m going to be doing trumpet twice a day, I don’t know how I’m gonna do this.” [The ninth-grade band teacher] was like, “Okay, who here can play guitar?” My ears perked, you know? I didn’t take up the guitar offer because I didn’t think I was good enough, but after playing the trumpet [in the first jazz class] I came up to him and said, “You know what? I want to try guitar,” and I’ve been there ever since.

### **The Band Room**

The cluttered band room where the students rehearse is plainly decorated, and shows little of the students who make music there. Students may leave their instruments in the room, but rarely do they leave other belongings. “We don’t have a very fantastic band room,” Trevor admits. “It’s a closet.” Even so, Trevor and many of his colleagues spend a good portion of their school day there. “There are a few spots, but our school is bursting at the seams, so you kind of try to get away as much as possible,” Trevor explains. “If you didn’t have a class and the band room is open, we’re in the band room having fun there.” Aaron, the ensemble’s guitarist tells me, “The thing with band is that it never changes, it’s that same room for four years in a row, and you develop a connection.” Trevor agrees, “We get attached to it, it’s very important to us. But if we had the cafeteria we would be just as attached to that. . . . It’s not the room so much, but

the fact that we're there so much." Not everyone spends extra time in the band room, however. Susan, a trumpeter, says she occasionally practices in the band room, but rarely chooses it as a place to spend free time. "I guess it depends how into music you are," she shrugs. "If you're really into music you would go there a lot."

Mr. Daley notes the importance of the band room as a place for students to hang out. "For a lot of [students], this place is comfort zone; this place is recess, this room specifically," he says. Daley continues:

The kids in jazz band are in here every day for the same period, a good number of them are involved in choir, so they also spend time in here as well. And certainly when there are spares, there are kids in here just about all the time. And a lot of the time it is not about practicing, sometimes it's about watching YouTube, sometimes it's about working out parts of the piano, sometimes just hanging out eating or relaxing together, studying.

So we tell them that in grade nine. If you're involved in the music program this will be one of the rooms that will be your escape zone. A lot of our kids would rather sit in here than in the cafeteria.

"Okay folks, let's hear a concert D minor scale in half notes," Daley calls out to the jazz band. Several students begin to work out the pitches on their instruments. "No playing!" he scolds, and points to his forehead. "Figure it out up here." After a few moments Daley claps his hands. "What am I going to ask you to do at the end?" he asks and the students answer in unison, "Dominant seventh." They begin to play, correcting numerous pitches by ear as they go. The

dominant seventh chord contains an assortment of unintended “color” notes. “For a second there it almost resolved into a major tonic chord,” Daley laughs. “Does anyone know what that’s called?” “A happy ending!” calls a trombonist. “Uh, nope,” Daley replies. “A happy ending is ‘shave and a haircut . . . two bits!’” The students look perplexed and Daley laughs. “You don’t know about that do you?” “We’re young,” Trevor grins. “We were born in ‘92!” adds a saxophonist. Daley shakes his head. “Oh man. I have jeans older than you guys.” “Those ones?” cracks Sarah, and everyone laughs. “Going from a minor and resolving to a major triad is called ‘Tierce de Picardy.’ It was used very prominently, especially in baroque times. Play it again and this time resolve with a Picardy third.” The scale is somewhat improved the second time through, and Daley moves on.

“What do you want to play?” Daley asks, and receives a flurry of suggestions: “Let’s play ‘Dudley!’” says a trumpeter. “What about ‘Steamsville?’” offers an alto saxophonist. “Oh, that’s a good one!” Sunil agrees. Jazz band rehearsals are typically relaxed and loosely structured. While Daley has a rough idea of what he wants to accomplish, he plays much of the rehearsals “by ear.” A tenor saxophonist suggests “It Don’t Mean a Thing” and Daley nods. “We haven’t played that one in a while,” he says. “Okay, take that out.” “Yeah!” Sarah cheers, and the musicians chat animatedly as they retrieve the piece from their folders.

Daley counts off and the members launch into “It Don’t Mean a Thing.” Sarah plays the well-known melody as a trombone solo, and is accompanied by

the rest of the band. As with other tunes, the group's playing is enthusiastic but unpolished. The trumpets struggle with a syncopated rhythm and Daley yells over the group, "C'mon trumpets, together!" They finish the chart and everyone groans. "Oh man!" says Trevor. "Mr. Daley, can we do that again?" Jacquie asks. They begin practicing the rough parts. "Hey, hey, practice at home!" Daley gently chides. "This is rehearsal time, not practice time." He leafs through the pages of his score and notices a trombonist emptying his slide. "Did I ever tell you about the time I had a tuba that wouldn't stop sloshing?" he asks, and the noise of practicing musicians quickly dies away.

"Did I ever tell you about the time . . ." is a familiar and welcomed refrain in Senior Jazz. Daley loves to tell stories and the group members look forward to these asides. During my time at Pearson Collegiate I learned from Daley just how far a bottle of valve oil can travel inside a tuba; that middle school trombonists should never be left alone with a hammer and a sticky slide; and that an unanswered "Shave and a Haircut" knock is cartoon character torture. "I like that about [Mr. Daley] because it is not always practice, practice, practice," Jacquie shared. "We can be like, 'We just saw this funny thing on YouTube' and we can watch it, or 'This one time I spilled fondue oil on my hand,' or 'I was building a roof and this happened.' . . . We have a lot of fun." Sunil agreed, "[Mr. Daley] has a good mixture of 'let's work' and 'let's joke around' and story time. He tells a *lot* of stories. I won't say it wastes time but it's definitely fun to hear a bunch of things that he has to tell us." Aaron shared a similar perspective. "Jazz is more

laid back and free form which is why I enjoy the class more [than band],” he explained. “It suits my personality.”

Mr. Daley finishes his story and turns his attention again to “It Don’t Mean a Thing.” “Okay ladies and gentlemen,” he says. “You know that this one isn’t nearly as challenging as “Mr. Dudley” or “Old School” but make sure you’re spending time at home with this too. Let’s go at eleven please.” Underneath Sarah’s solo the backgrounds are simple but peppered with wrong notes and inaccurate rhythms. Mr. Daley stops the group. “Okay, are there technical challenges here?” he asks. The musicians shake their heads no. “Are there range challenges?” he asks, and again the students reply “no.” “Then . . . what is it?” asks Daley, before answering himself, “The same thing it always is: counting and just being really precise. Let’s hear just the backgrounds from eleven.”

They play as inconsistently as before. Daley isolates a troublesome rhythm. “Just do measure 14,” he says. “It’s ‘and four AND.’” After multiple repetitions the group finally performs the rhythm accurately and Mr. Daley moves on. “Okay, let’s go at seventeen,” he says. “Can you make the articulation of the rests as precise as the articulation of the notes?” The group plays once more, and again the backgrounds are loose and imprecise. “Ugh!” Susan exclaims, and Sunil shakes his head, “Wow.” “Look guys,” says Daley, with obvious frustration. “There’s a couple of places in there that I asked you to look at before. You’re good musicians; you know when it’s not working so fix it. Okay, take out ‘Old School.’”

## Hopes and Expectations

Daley grew up in a family of semi-professional musicians, and he tries to impart a professional ethic to the students in his classes. “Professionals show up ready to do the job,” Daley said during one rehearsal. “If you’re not ready you don’t come back.” During rehearsals Daley most often focused on the enjoyment of playing, letting mistakes go in favor of playing the chart “top to bottom.” When working more intently he might run a particular rhythm or phrase until it improved, but was less apt to help students address the technical or conceptual issues underlying isolated mistakes. “It’s rare that I focus on the technical abilities or the instrument itself,” he told me. “A student will say, ‘How do I play this note?’ and I’ll say, ‘I’m not a clarinet player, I’m your music teacher. You’re the clarinet player, you take care of that.’ They get a considerably high level of responsibility.”

Guided by that ethic, Daley expects students to work independently and to come to class with their music learned. “He has this famous ‘We are all musicians’ speech, or ‘We are all colleagues,’” Trevor laughed. “He tells us all the time, ‘You’re not kids in a school, you’re musicians and you’re learning about music.’” “His method is that he teaches it and he expects you to know it already and he kind of expects you to pick it up by being around it,” explained Aaron. “He’ll give you help but you’ll have to ask for it. He expects you to do research at home and practice. I think it is very professional and it teaches you a lot. You can’t be a slacker forever.” Trevor had a similar perspective about Daley’s rehearsal style:

You're expected to be able to do it. If you miss an accidental, it's <smack>, "What are you doing that for? It's right there on the page, you should be playing it." I don't know if expectation is even the right word. It's "you're here, you can play the music, we know you can. If you make the mistake it's just that you're not focusing." . . . Most of the time it's really positive. It feels good that he regards you as someone who can do it, but other times, in the case where we had been at the same level for a couple weeks, he's, "Well what are you guys doing?" and it gets a little negative and it gets a little quiet in rehearsal.

Sarah reflected on Daley's expectations and arrived at a different conclusion. "I guess they're not high expectations," she mused. "They're high hopes and he really wants us to be there. He has a lot of faith in people even though he doesn't always show it."

Sarah's observation touches on a tension in the Senior Jazz Band. While students say that Mr. Daley has high expectations or at least "high hopes" for them, there are few consequences for students who come to class unprepared. Whether those participants are unwilling or unable to prepare their music independently, the difference is a prime source of frustration and friction among the class members. "Everyone gets along," Jacquie told me. "It's just frustrating when people don't do everything they should do to be ready for a class and when people think they're good and they aren't." Sarah agreed, "Most of us are really dedicated, we really enjoy what we do, so if you get someone in there maybe not



as interested—they're there for an easy credit—sometimes there's a little bit of tension.”

Twelfth-grade trumpet player Susan is one class member who might be accused of coming to class underprepared. Susan enjoys playing in Senior Jazz but admits, “I think I need to work harder.” Susan knows she ought to practice at home but says it never quite works out that way. “I’ll go home and be like, ‘I’m going to practice this’, and my trumpet will sit in my room and I’ll have forgotten to practice,” she says, “or I’ll play some other song that isn’t related.” In class, Susan sometimes feels the disapproval of her peers. “It’s not bad to have high standards, but it shouldn’t reach the point where you’re putting someone else down for it,” she says. “It doesn’t happen often but I’ll just hear it softly or whatever sometimes.” She notes, “Not everyone works at the same pace,” and suggests, “Instead of saying ‘Why don’t you have your part?’ maybe say something encouraging or help them learn it.”

The different degrees of independence and motivation shown by members of the Senior Jazz Band contribute to a sense of disunity and, paradoxically, to low expectations among the musicians. “I always take into consideration the people who are in it,” Sunil told me. He continued:

The people who are in it really love jazz band but at the same time I guess they don’t find it as important as other things because they aren’t going to go further into it. . . . They care about how we sound, but they don’t go into that, like, deeper artistic view of it. I take that into consideration. I

want our sound to be really really good, but you have to work with what you've got.

The Senior Jazz Band members play music in a variety of styles including swing, blues, funk, and rock. “We do standards [and] we do some weird songs you've never heard and no one else has heard of,” Aaron says. “We've done experimental, dissonant songs—we like it but the audience doesn't because they aren't musicians so they don't get it—and we've done a couple of popular songs. We were considering “Maxwell's Silver Hammer” but we never got around to it.” Trevor characterized the jazz repertoire as “diverse.” “We don't have one chart that's like another,” he says. Jacquie agrees, “I like [our music] a lot. We do play a variety of styles . . . it's never the same kind of song. We always have different things going on.”

Jacquie took me on a tour of the Senior Jazz folder. “‘Shanghigh' is fast and there's lots of notes to play in it, so it's difficult that way because there's a lot to learn,” she explained. “‘Tank' is just the same thing over and over, but there are lots of things going on outside of my part. . . . [T]he song sounds super cool. It's not that difficult for my part, so I like it.” Sunil showed me several other charts, including “a pop arrangement of ‘Wrapped Around My Finger' by Sting . . . a funk chart called ‘Old School' and a swing chart called ‘Kelly's Eyes.’” “We also did a full swing chart called ‘Steamsville,’” Sunil added. “I think we should do more swing charts but I guess that's Mr. Daley's call.”

The jazz repertoire selected by Daley ranges from medium to advanced difficulty. “Some [pieces] are really challenging but you can tell are very

satisfying,” Trevor says, “but also ones that in a pinch you can pull out and sound more difficult than they are, so if you need to [you can] pull something out quickly and brush it off quickly for performance.” Students were eager to play fast charts; the ballads selected by Mr. Daley were somewhat less popular. “I’m not a big fan of [slow pieces] because they’re kind of boring,” Susan explained. “They’re hard to tune and they never really sound as good as they should,” says Jacquie, “A ballad once in a while is okay [but] they’re boring. Jazz band is fast music. That’s what I think about.” “We are more of a one-dimensional group,” says Trevor. “We blend ourselves much better to the big loud fast upbeat things as opposed to the slowed down musical shapely songs.”

While the students were enthusiastic about playing advanced charts like “Old School,” “Mr. Dudley,” and “Steamsville,” many struggled to play the lines cleanly, even in performance. The ensemble returned from their much-anticipated overnight trip to perform at a music festival in Brandon, Manitoba with mixed reviews. “It went really well, actually,” Sunil reported. “For the most part. There were some iffy parts here and there but it went really well and we all enjoyed it.” Trevor had a similarly measured take on their performance:

We knew going into it we would do a good job. We knew that we were comfortable with most of our songs and we knew some of them weren’t quite what they should be. And then playing, it was more or less similar to what we were doing in rehearsal so it wasn’t a huge surprise. Listening to it as well, there were some things that we were like, “Oh, that actually

went really well,” and some we realized were trouble spots but didn’t realize it was that bad.

The Pearson Collegiate Senior Jazz Band performs at festival for “adjudication only.” The group works with a clinician following their performance and receives taped comments, but they do not receive a rating. “We do it for fun and to get the adjudication and to hear what someone else has to say other than Mr. Daley,” Jacquie told me, “so I don’t mind going to festival. It’s always fun to have a goal to work for [and] it’s good to hear what someone else has to say. We might pick up something that we hadn’t worked on before.” Trevor, on the other hand, wishes they could work toward an external evaluation at festival:

There’s been positive feedback about this, but there has been a lot of negative feedback as to the mentality of the music directors. Because now—and they’ve admitted to this—it’s less about the performance and the awards and more about the knowledge and where you can go and giving you a base to work with . . . [Mr. Daley] finds it a lot better to . . . have a big set list [and] a wide range of [pieces]. . . . It gives a larger perspective of different types of music but it also [detracts] from the performance-ready group.

### **Theory**

Mr. Daley claps his hands, “Okay folks, let’s get started.” He notates a B and a D on the white board and turns to the class. “Identify the interval and give me three different chords that those two notes could be a part of.” The students

frown and get to work on the problem. Moments later, Sarah's hand is in the air. "Sarah, are you giving me an answer?" Daley asks. "I don't want an answer. Turn to somebody in a different section than you are and compare your answers." The musicians murmur softly as they discuss the problem. A minute passes and Daley surveys the class. "Okay. Tell me one chord that B and D could be a part of. B minor? Okay, there's one. Sarah? G major, there's another one. D6? Okay. What about D minor 6?" As the class members call out their responses, Daley walks to the podium. "Okay, let's play a concert B minor scale in half notes," he says. The students groan loudly and begin to work out the pitches on their instruments. "Whoa, whoa," Daley admonishes. "Ladies and gentlemen. Stop. Why are you blowing into your instruments?" "To make sure it sounds right," answers Susan meekly. "What do you mean to make sure it sounds right? You *know* if it's right or not, do you not? Here we go."

Providing students with a solid foundation of musical knowledge is one of Daley's primary goals, and he spends as much time working with theoretical concepts as he does on the repertoire. For Daley, understanding how music works is central to becoming a competent musician. He routinely asks the group members to transpose, to play a variety of scales, to build and resolve dominant 7<sup>th</sup> chords, and to generate solos from chord progressions.

"Mr. Daley always opens the class with a theory challenge to help your theory brain get going," Aaron later explained. "He wants us to know our stuff [so] if we're faced with a musical challenge we'd be able to handle it." Sunil agrees, "[Mr. Daley] always has little challenges for us. He makes us think about

how music works . . . and how [the concepts] relate to what we're playing.” Trevor relates Daley's love of theory to his ethic of professionalism. “Mr. Daley wants to give you the knowledge and background and ability of a high-end musician,” he says. “That was made very evident actually about a month ago when he pulled out the theory entrance exam to the U of M Faculty of Music<sup>17</sup> and it was everything we'd done in class, that we had covered.” “He's said this before,” agreed Jacquie. “He wants us to be able to leave his class and if we wanted to be able to go to the Faculty of Music we would know what we're doing and what we're talking about and know theory and have played different types of music and stuff like that.”

Music theory has always come naturally to Daley, and he views theoretical understanding as central to musicianship. “I really have a problem with someone who is ‘making music’ and doesn't know what the hell is going on,” he says, shaking his head. “How can you be doing that? I can't believe that people even presume to think they're making music without having some idea of what's going on. It boggles my mind.” Daley aims to share his understanding of music with his students and to provide the students with the tools they need to function fully as musicians:

I do a lot of [home] renovation, and I know for a fact if I don't have the right tool I have a choice of making a mess of it with the wrong tool or taking the time . . . to go get the right tool [and] learn how to use that tool.

Then I can make a nice job of it. I like to use the theory because I think

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<sup>17</sup> “Faculty of Music” is equivalent to a college or school of music.

when the kids have something to fall back on . . . the theory where I can say, ‘This is how you build a soloistic idea,’ or ‘These are the tools you’re going to use to create the solo.’ It’s a lot easier for the kids to make sense of that, [to say], ‘I know where I am in this section, I know where I am in this line, I know where I am in this harmony.’ It just makes so much more sense to me.

### **Soloing**

“Remember, each of you has to have recorded a solo to this tune before exam week,” Daley announced in the final few minutes of class. His announcement elicited a variety of responses: “Oh my god, what?” “Oooh.” “Wait, what?” “I did that already.” Daley clapped his hands to regain the students’ focus. “Guys, some of you have already done it. That doesn’t mean you can’t go back and revisit it. Go and try some other ideas. That’s why I gave you the recording, so you can build a solo.” Daley uses GarageBand software to create accompaniment tracks that follow the changes of their ensemble pieces. “I’ve given you lots of strategies for dealing with it,” he reminded them. “What are the ways? What do you do?” “Whole notes?” suggests one student. “Okay,” Daley prompts, “Whole notes that belong to the . . . scale or the . . .” “Chord!” calls Susan. “Okay, what else? What’s another way?” “Take, like, one note from each chord?” asks Jacquie. Daley smiles. “Great. If you write out each chord you can literally draw a line connecting one note in each chord and you’ll have a good foundation for a solo. What else?” “Build on the tune?” asks the bari sax player. “Yes, exactly. Take the original melody and embellish it. One

more . . . “ Sarah calls out the final strategy, “Allusions!” “Yep,” Daley nods. “If you take a quote from another tune, that’s cool.” Sarah and several other musicians start to noodle, quoting various tunes. Daley brings the rehearsal to a close. “So please take time to work with this again. You can do them during class or during exam week but you want to take the time on your own where you can experiment all you want.”

Trevor likes the theoretic approach to soloing taken in Senior Jazz. “I use a lot of these techniques for soloing for creating notes and thinking,” he says. “I love the opportunities to solo and having some theory to back you up makes it easier.” Sunil, on the other hand, likes to solo but doesn’t follow Daley’s theoretical approach. “I kind of just feel my way through,” he says. “I kind of cheat. I don’t really think about the chords, I just kind of feel my way through and I practice my soloing a lot through trial and error, a lot through doing it and seeing what works and what doesn’t.” Aaron uses the chords as a guide, but takes a similarly intuitive approach to soloing. “Sometimes I’ll work off the melody, if it’s like a song, or if I run out of ideas I’ll do the melody,” he says. “I’m not very good at theory so I’ll just use my ears.”

Susan avoids soloing when she can. “You have to have confidence,” she tells me. “You can’t take solos if you’re not confident. I don’t take solos because they’re scary.” Jacquie finds soloing similarly intimidating and says it’s her least favorite aspect of Jazz Band. “We get marked on our solos and I’m not good at soloing,” she lamented. “I know how I want to make it sound but I can’t make it



happen.” Jacquie, a saxophonist, says her piano background helps her to grasp the theoretical concepts, but she doesn’t know what to do from there:

I’m not very creative and I can’t improvise really well. Some people just know what to do and I don’t. I guess it comes with practice. It’s difficult for me; it doesn’t come naturally. Some people can just stand up and play a solo and it sounds good. I know the notes and how long it goes for when the chords change, but it still doesn’t sound good. It doesn’t sound musical.

While Daley intends to empower the musicians with the skills and knowledge necessary to communicate through music, soloing leaves Jacquie feeling uncomfortable and powerless to improve. “I know a lot of people . . . think it’s a great opportunity,” she says. “[Soloing is] the only time I’m not an outgoing person. Usually I don’t have that big a deal making a fool of myself because I embarrass myself all of the time. . . . With jazz band, I just can’t do it. I just like playing the music.”

### **The Spring Concert**

In the Pearson Collegiate Spring Concert, Senior Jazz is last to perform. The students settle into chairs in the middle of the school gymnasium and adjust their stands. Dressed all in black, they wear matching black polo shirts. Mr. Daley is dressed in a black sweater, grey pants, and his hiking boots; keys and an ID card swing from a long lanyard in his pocket. Projected onto a screen behind them, the evening’s program is difficult to read in the brightly lit gymnasium.

The group will perform three charts this evening: “Shanghigh,” “Wrapped Around Your Finger,” and “Old School.”

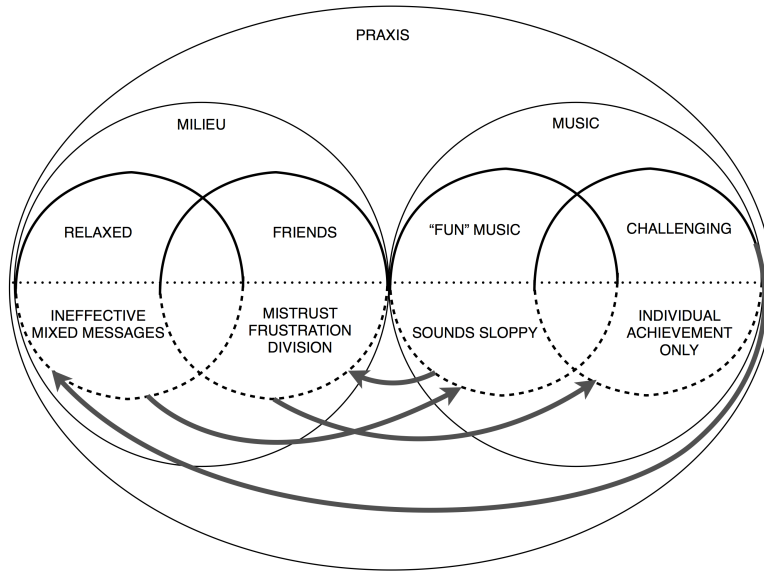
Daley counts off, “A-one two three hit it!” and the rhythm section launches into “Shanghigh.” Positioned in front of the group, Daley snaps his fingers along with the music and cues some of the shots. He also shows several dynamic changes, however his gestures have little effect and the tune stays at roughly the same dynamic throughout. “Shanghigh” is up tempo and catchy, but the group’s energy seems markedly low and, in a surprising contrast to their usual style of playing, the musicians move very little. Their second piece, a slower, cooler arrangement of Sting’s “Wrapped Around Your Finger” is equally bland. The musicians play, but continue to appear disengaged. Several girls sit with crossed legs and wear neutral expressions.

Their final chart, “Old School” remains as ragged as it was in rehearsal. Aaron delivers his prepared guitar solo in a flurry of notes and receives warm applause from the audience. Sunil stands and solos loudly, followed by Sarah. For all of Daley’s emphasis on crafting solos, both are weak and undeveloped. The following saxophone solo is similarly disappointing, consisting primarily of two alternating notes and delivered with hesitation. The Senior Jazz Band is far more subdued than the bopping, happy group that first played this tune several months ago. As they finish, the lead trumpet player sticks his last high note and I am relieved for him.

## **Part II – Meaning**

The Senior Jazz Band is meaningful to those who participate. Students said so in written survey responses and continued to emphasize this throughout our interviews. They described the same aspects that participants in the wind ensemble and the guitar class find meaningful: an enjoyable rehearsal process; friendships and connections with others; a sense of satisfaction and pride that comes from accomplishment; enjoyment from making music. In this ensemble, however, what the students found meaningful was never straightforward and statements of value rarely came without caveats.

The top half of Figure 6 illustrates what students in the jazz group perceived as meaningful, the bottom half shows how these benefits could be eroded, and the arrows show the interactions between various dimensions. Thus, while students enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere of jazz band, the relaxation could also contribute to ineffective rehearsals and convey mixed messages about Mr. Daley's expectations. Ineffective rehearsals in turn detracted from the meaningfulness of performing "fun" repertoire when the music sounded chronically sloppy (Figure 6).



*Figure 6.* Themes of meaning within Pearson Collegiate Senior Jazz Band.

When I asked members of the Pearson Collegiate Jazz Band what they valued about their participation I received one response with consistency: “It’s fun.” “I just like having music in my life,” Jacquie told me. “It’s a good break from my school day. Even though it’s work it’s still fun, and I just like making music. I don’t have any other reason, I don’t want to be a musician when I grow up, it’s just fun.” Susan agreed, “I just do it for fun I guess. I just like to play music.” “Trombone is my fun instrument,” Sunil said. “I don’t think I could every get tired of it.” When I asked Mr. Daley why he thought students participated, he echoed the same sentiment. “This is about fun,” he told me. “It’s play. We play music; we don’t work music, we play it.”

Their hedonistic declarations prompted some serious thinking. Was having fun a meaningful outcome? “But what’s fun about it?” I pressed, and here the answers diverged.

### **A Relaxed and Sociable Rehearsal Atmosphere**

The relaxed, sociable rehearsal atmosphere is a defining characteristic of the senior jazz band. Jazz serves as a break in the school day, a change of pace during which the members can laugh out loud, joke with friends, and have a great time making music together. Trevor said that jazz band helps him get through the day. “You come from Physics or English or something you’re doing a lot of work in and you get to the band room and you can relax and enjoy yourself and create music,” he explained. “I couldn’t get through a day without [it].” “High school wouldn’t be the same if I didn’t have jazz band,” Sunil told me. “It’s my play course, my fun course. It’s what I look forward to during the day. . . . I just love the environment of it, the people who take it.” “It’s a stress relief for me,” Sarah says. “It’s the middle of my day where I can just sit back and have some laughs. . . . It’s not work at all. It’s a free credit for me.”

In the loosely structured jazz band rehearsals, class discussions almost inevitably veered off topic and led to some very funny conversations. Students valued these interactions highly, and it was at these times that members of the class seemed most unified. “What I think *makes* our group is the humor, the jokes we make in class, how off topic we get during class,” Sunil told me. Jacquie and Susan agreed that humor helped bring them together as a class. “We can have a relationship, and we don’t just have to play music,” Jacquie said. “It’s entertaining to make jokes and not be serious all of the time.” “It’s a friendly group and we’re not just here to do hard stuff all the time,” Susan added. “[Mr. Daley] talks about other things in a way that makes it open up so everyone can

talk about whatever. It's a friendly kind of environment." Trevor believes that the lighthearted jazz band environment is "unique" and helps them to "bond together" as an ensemble. "I can't imagine other school ensembles being as loose and having a good time like that," Trevor smiled. "As far as musical performance I don't think we're too unique, but definitely the classroom setting."

Although the laid-back and sociable rehearsal atmosphere helps them to bond, the students are aware that they make less progress as a result. "[Mr. Daley is] just a little more carefree because music's a little more carefree," Sarah told me, "[and jazz band is] a place where you can get a feeling of enjoyment as well as learning . . . maybe a little less learning than usual." Other students echoed this assessment. "Jazz band is fun [and] people tend to not take it as seriously," Aaron told me, and Sunil agreed, "[Some class members] like the playing part of it but they don't take it as seriously to the point where they want to practice more."

Practicing is a contentious issue among jazz band members. "[I]f you're not coming to your rehearsal prepared it's kind of hard to keep that light feel," Trevor told me. "People [get] frustrated because we've been back to the same level for a couple weeks and it's like, 'We have a performance in a few weeks, we should be well on our way to having this polished.'" Sarah points to "easy credit people" who she says are unwilling to work and come to class unprepared, however more motivated students also receive the message that practicing isn't absolutely necessary. Jacquie, a conscientious student who works diligently in jazz band, says, "As long as we know our music and we're working hard, [Mr. Daley's] okay with that. [Class is] a little more laid back. I don't have to go

home and stress about practicing my sax.” “There’s an expectation that you practice,” Trevor says, “but to be perfectly honest everyone knows that there are people who don’t practice and get by.” Trevor believes that these lower expectations are part of the jazz band culture:

It’s not necessarily a high-end, high-expectation group, so the fact that it’s more laid back. . . . I know for a fact if Mr. Daley said he was going to have regular playing exams and be super strict . . . people would drop out and wouldn’t come back. They’re looking for a place where they can enjoy music, you know, create good music and enjoy what you’re playing, but at the same time have it so it’s not such a high expectation.

And yet, faced with demanding repertoire, students who were unwilling or unable to prepare their music in advance of rehearsals performed poorly and were subject to the frustration of their peers, and those who did prepare before class seldom had the opportunity to refine their playing further during class time. The relaxed atmosphere that students credited with forming bonds between them also strained those bonds and contributed to rehearsals that were anything *but* relaxed.

### **Friendship**

The social dynamics of Senior Jazz are complex and variable. Class interactions among student members could be lighthearted as students laughed and joked around together, jammed before or after class, and mixed easily with people in other sections of the band. Other times, when particular students or entire sections played poorly and Daley became frustrated, tensions rose and good will evaporated. I was unsurprised to learn that the students who spoke with me

had contrasting and at times conflicting views on the significance of friendships in their group.

Some members say that positive social connections help make participating in the jazz band a more meaningful experience. For Sunil, Trevor, and Sarah, this is particularly salient. The three trombonists are friends outside of school, and each felt that the jazz band was a close-knit ensemble. “We’re all really tight,” Sarah told me. “It’s a good community and people in the [jazz band] get really close, for sure.” Trevor agreed, “The people are fantastic. [They’re] by far my best friends in high school . . . especially the trombone section. We’re all really good friends and we go around and meet up with each other.” “It’s a friendly, happy environment,” Sunil said. “We have fun together and enjoy being together.”

Outside the band the members travel in a variety of social circles, but those who spoke with me say that jazz band provides common ground upon which to build these important connections. “I think [jazz band] gives [us] a topic to talk about,” Aaron reflected, “Like if you do something funny on an instrument people can go, ‘Ah ha ha, that’s awesome,’ or ‘That’s funny.’ . . . Everyone is there to learn music and it’s like, then we’re all a team.” Trevor agreed, “There’s lots of time that people allude to things that you’ve played a couple years ago or something really funny that you keep coming to, and everyone laughs. It’s communication. That’s what music is. You can communicate your emotions to other people and it’s a lot easier with friends.” Jacquie shared a similar sentiment, but her examples were somewhat less positive. “We can talk about [jazz] band,”



she said. “We can be like, ‘I don’t get this song,’ [or] we can be like, ‘Mr. Daley made me really angry this day,’ or ‘When we went to Chicago this happened.’ Band really bonds people because of everything you go through together.”

Participating in the jazz band provides members with common experiences that help them to connect, however this is not always enough. Aaron enjoys being among friendly people in Senior Jazz but says that as a guitarist he sometimes feels like an outsider to the band culture. “I’m a guitar kid in a band class,” he shared. “I’m into all of the stuff that the guitar kids are into so I can socialize with them [whereas] a lot of [band students] are musical beasts and they listen to concertos.” Guitar students at Pearson are “more stereotypical teenagers” according to Aaron, and they tend to enjoy a higher social status. “A lot of the cool kids took guitar ‘cause guitar’s cool,” said Aaron. “I’m not going to lie, it makes it a little difficult to socialize. I’m on good terms with a lot of the jazz band kids . . . but I’m definitely more comfortable around the guitar kids.”

Susan likes most of her peers but says she also feels disconnected from the group. “I’m not, like, in with everyone else,” she says. “I talk to people in my section, or if people talk to me I’ll talk back to them . . . but it’s not like I’d go out of my way to say, ‘How was your weekend?’ or something like that.” Susan calls herself an “observer” of the other group members and reflects, “I don’t have enough in common with them and I have low confidence, I suppose. That’s why I don’t really like soloing either. It’s hard to talk to someone when you don’t really know what to say.”

Social connections contribute to an atmosphere of psychological safety that makes it easier for some students to take risks. “Especially for solos if you make a mistake or whatever . . . you know that they wouldn’t look at you different,” Sunil explained. “They wouldn’t judge you, they would accept you and they would just say, ‘It’s okay.’ It just makes you feel more comfortable.”

Jacque shared a similar perspective. “I’m friends with a lot of the people in [jazz] band,” she said, “so that helps because if you screw up they’re not going to think you’re bad. We’re in the senior jazz band; we’ve been together for three years.” Trevor says, “It helps that you know people and are close to people. You know they’re not going to laugh at you or judge you if you make a mistake, and it also gives you a chance to joke around with people.” Sarah described an incident in which one jazz band trumpet player said she *did* judge people when they played poorly and assured me that the other band members “jumped on her” until she clarified her statement. “She [meant that] even if you do judge a person’s musicality based on their solo, that’s fine,” Sarah said. “She didn’t mean the kind of person you are. . . . Everybody has a different level of musicality and we’re going to support you.”

I found it telling that so many musicians, including some of the ensemble’s strongest performers, addressed issues of psychological safety and were attuned to the possibility of being judged. Their comments suggested an underlying insecurity and an awareness that performing poorly was a distinct possibility. Moreover, though these members said that connections with peers helped to create an environment where they felt safe to take risks, I observed

occasions when frustrations came to a head and Daley or other band members *did* respond negatively to their peers. Labels such as “easy credit people” also underscored the divisiveness that could arise between group members. Susan, in particular, described her experiences with peers who she felt “had the wrong kind of attitude” and who put her and other musicians down in subtle or not-so-subtle ways. I wondered whether other musicians felt similarly slighted.

Predictably, those members who enjoyed close friendships within the ensemble saw strong relationships as a more meaningful aspect of jazz band. When asked whether any aspect of his participation stood out as especially meaningful, Sunil replied, “It might be just having connection with the people in my band. If I were to have good friends that stay with me for the rest of my life it would probably be people like the people in our jazz band.” Trevor also rated friendship highly among the many aspects of jazz band that he finds meaningful. “I’d be comfortable in saying that’s the biggest thing I get out of it,” he said, “the friendships that you create with people in a music setting. . . . It’s great.” “The people in our jazz band are phenomenal people,” agreed Sarah. “They make it what it is, even the people who aren’t super into it. . . . It’s a tight group [because] we’ve been together for four years.”

For others, friendships were more peripheral. Susan says that friends are “important, but if I didn’t have friends it’s not like I’d quit jazz band.” Jacquie agrees, “It would suck if I didn’t have any friends [in jazz band] but I think I would probably do it anyway because it’s fun,” and Aaron concludes that at the

end of the day friendships are “nice, but . . . not necessary.” “I enjoy it and [friends] make it much better,” Aaron smiles, “but I’m there to play music.”

### **The Music**

Members of the jazz band enjoy the swing, funk, blues, and other pieces they play. “In concert band you don’t play funk and stuff like that,” Jacquie explained. “The music [played in jazz band] is more fun.” Susan hadn’t listened to jazz before joining the group and says that playing “kind of got me into it.” Sunil agrees, “High school is when I started to get into jazz and into classical and all that stuff. When I started opening my mind, I guess.”

Jacquie says she always liked jazz but finds the music much more meaningful now that she is making the music herself. “I always think it’s more fun to play than to listen,” she says. “When you go to [band] festivals and you’re listening to the other schools, they might be doing a really good job but you’d have more fun [if you were] playing it.” Sarah says the process of making music is more important to her than the music itself. “If I think about all the different styles of jazz we’ve played, it doesn’t matter at all,” she says. “It’s about making the music to me.”

For some, playing jazz is especially enjoyable with peers. “When you play an instrument by yourself it’s okay,” explained Susan, “[but when] you’re working with someone else and it’s all in time and it’s really cool [it’s] just a nice experience. For some reason it’s way better.” “When you listen to recorded music it’s a lot more done, polished and it sounds perfect,” Sarah agreed. “In a band when something sounds really good it feels even better than listening to

perfect music because it's you doing it with a bunch of your friends. Amazing! It makes you want to move . . . it's much better." "There's something to be said about working really hard with people on something," Trevor concurred. "Just the fact that you can make music and create really nice sounding music . . . with people that you know really well is really cool."

Playing in the ensemble has not only heightened students' enjoyment of jazz, but has also led to greater appreciation for jazz as an art form, and for the skill and artistry of professional musicians. "Before, in grade 8 when I listened to music there's not as much you can like about it because you don't know that much about it," Sarah told me. "You can like how awesome everything sounds together, you can like if it's happy or sad or what the lyrics are and that kind of stuff, but you can't understand how awesome that guitar part is or how amazing that drummer is." Now, Sarah says, "I know how much work it takes to get that. There are a lot of things, lots and lots of details. As soon as you start thinking about all the different things in it, it's like wow. It blows you away." Susan, too, finds that playing music helps her to appreciate music in a different way:

Music is cool to listen to, right? Everyone likes it, but when you get to know everything about it then it's so much better. . . . When I listen to music now, I appreciate it more than I used to. When you go see someone play you're like, 'Wow, what they're doing is really crazy,' and stuff. It's even more crazy now you know how hard it is to work up to that kind of thing.

While students enjoy playing jazz, the results are not always as polished as they would like, and the unfinished sound can detract from their positive experience. “I really love getting a really high quality sound out of it so sometimes it’s frustrating when it’s not coming together as quickly as it should,” Trevor admitted. He especially dislikes those times when the music “isn’t polished going into a concert and you’re still worried about a couple pitches as opposed to really making it musical.” “Sounding good has a lot to do with how you feel,” Sunil told me, “because if you don’t sound good, you probably won’t feel good.” Aaron agreed, “If you play sucky no one’s going to be happy.” Aaron says his favorite part of jazz band is “the moment when we play that song perfectly and everyone’s like, ‘Yeah!’” but asked when that happened last he replied, “Good question. I can’t remember.”

“There are times I’m thinking ‘what am I doing here?’” Trevor admitted in our last conversation together. He continued:

We’ve talked about how there are people who don’t take their music home and learn it and it’s so frustrating sometimes, especially when I’m tired. I’m like, “What are you doing? You’re here to make music!” I think I would go much more insane if I wasn’t in [the] Project Z [community choir]. . . . Once you get a feeling of close to professional, [jazz band is] . . . well, high school.

### **Challenge and Achievement**

The senior jazz musicians enjoy making music together, but don’t entirely trust each other to function as a cohesive team and don’t always feel confident

that they'll be able to make music of high quality. Whereas group achievement is uncertain, *individual* growth and achievement are attainable and meaningful. Regardless of their level of motivation to practice and to achieve as an ensemble, everyone who spoke with me described the satisfaction they derived when presented with evidence of their own progress as musicians. The students faced challenges and derived a sense of achievement stemming from three main sources: the repertoire, Mr. Daley's music theory tasks, and the necessity to create and perform solos.

### **Playing Challenging Music; Getting Better**

The members of the senior jazz band play challenging repertoire. Several of the pieces they performed in the semester I observed were rated "difficult" and struck me as overly challenging for the band and their relaxed rehearsal style. Nevertheless, the members indicated they enjoyed tackling the difficult repertoire. "I like the process of practicing," Sunil told me. "I like practicing and then learning things and then getting that little boost of confidence when I finally get a little passage down. I keep going and keep going [and] it's like an addiction." "Maybe that's why I like music," Sunil reflected. "That want for that feeling of success, that feeling when I show people what I can do." He pointed to "Mr. Dudley," a piece that he found particularly challenging. "Once I finally got that down," he said, "you get that feeling of being able to do anything."

Susan readily admits that she doesn't often practice her trumpet. "I just do it for fun," she told me, "I just like to play music." When she does practice, however, Susan feels a sense of satisfaction at her improved performance of class

repertoire. “When you sit there and you work at it and you’re able to play it right . . . it makes you feel better that you actually worked at something,” she says. “You can go [to class] and everyone hears it and they’re like, ‘That’s really good, good for you.’” Having been a target of frustration for not coming to class prepared, Susan is attuned to the reactions of her peers and Mr. Daley, and judges her success according to their approval. Jacquie feels a similar sense of accountability to the other group members. “When my music is hard and I go home and learn it and go back to class and play it, it’s a good feeling,” she says, “‘cause you’re like, ‘Yeah, I know my part’ and you’re not afraid to play it and it feels good.” Jacquie says that class repertoire helps give her a sense of her progress over time. “I generally look at it from the beginning of a school year to the end,” Jacquie says. “I’m like, ‘Wow, when I picked up this piece of music it scared me and . . . now I can play through the whole song.’ It’s like, ‘Wow, I did it!’”

Sarah, on the other hand, expressed increasing frustration at the slow rate of progress and what she perceived were modest performance challenges. “When I get challenged I like it [but] to be honest it doesn’t happen very often,” she told me. “Your band is only as strong as your weakest members. . . . If you’re not the weakest member then it’s taking it really slow for you.” Sarah endeavored to create her own challenges by helping others, but I noticed that her help often betrayed an underlying irritation and sense of superiority. Daley and fellow jazz band musicians who spoke with me indicated that Sarah’s help was unwelcome, but Sarah felt she was contributing. “It’s a really good feeling when you can help



other people have as good of a time as you,” she told me. “And it’s even better when the atmosphere is like ours and it’s not insulting and personal to tell someone they’re doing something wrong.”

While members agreed that challenging repertoire is valuable when it leads to a sense of achievement and personal growth, Jacquie noted that overly difficult repertoire can impede other meaningful aspects of jazz band, including the fun of making music. “Sometimes it is nice to not have to work as hard at something, just to have it come to you,” she admitted. “Working hard at something and being good at it is really rewarding, but easiness, it give you more time to play because you can just pick it up and play it right away. So having a mix would be good.” Aaron prefers simpler pieces because “I don’t have to play this F minor seven flat five kind of stuff. It’s kind of like I can relax more. I don’t have to be on guard when I’m playing these impossible chord shapes, you get what I’m saying?” Though he enjoys the challenge, straightforward pieces are “more fun to play” because they enable the group to relax and enjoy themselves. “Everyone knows the songs and just having fun,” says Aaron. “It’s less of the intellectual F minor 7 stuff and all that theory and more just enjoying making music.”

### **Music Theory and Soloing**

Daley thinks about music theoretically. He devotes a significant portion of each class to challenges such as playing scales in various modes, transposing, and working with chord changes, and he asks students solve these problems mentally rather than aurally. “We do a considerable amount of discussion,” Daley

says, “to the point occasionally where its like, ‘Can we play now?’” During class the Senior Jazz Band students groaned loudly each time Mr. Daley issued them a new theory challenge, however those who spoke with me said they valued the knowledge gained through theory practice and felt a sense of pride in their abilities. “You look at a jazz chart and your teacher doesn’t tell you what flats and sharps to play in what measures in the solo section and that’s a huge confidence builder that you can do it yourself,” Sarah explained. “I’ve improved so much since the beginning of the year,” agreed Jacquie. “At the beginning [Mr. Daley] would say, ‘Figure out an A dominant seven chord’ and I had no idea what he was talking about, and now I’m like, ‘Give me a second.’” Susan agreed, “I guess when you keep doing it you get better at it . . . I know it way more than I used to.”

Daley aims to provide students with the ability to put their knowledge to practical use when generating solos and in other areas of their musical lives. Sunil, a composer, says, “As theory focused as [class] is, I really like it. It helps me to think fast . . . [and] it gives us a better understanding of how compositions are formulated.” “The musical knowledge you gain from jazz band is definitely huge,” Trevor agrees. “Whether or not I do it as a career I know I’ll be doing music for a long time, so having a bigger knowledge and deeper understanding of music is really big for me.” Aaron says his theory skills are still developing, but he “highly value[s]” what he is learning. “It gives me more to work with,” he says, “so I can name chord shapes and play chords . . . it gives me a background, a base to work upon.”

Students also say a theoretical understanding of music helps them to appreciate music. “I think it’s very smart because it gives a much deeper understanding of the music if you know the theory behind it, as opposed to all practical,” says Trevor. “It opened my understanding of the complexity of [music],” agrees Sunil. “It’s way more complex than I thought it was. . . . I guess [Mr. Daley] just opened my doors to it and introduced me to all of that stuff.” Sarah says that understanding music theory helps her to listen more deeply and to understand what went into a skilled performance. “As opposed to listening to [music] and just knowing it sounds really good, [we] can know how challenging it really was for those people to make it sound that amazing,” she says. “[We can appreciate] that it’s something really involved and something to, like, worship or something like that.”

As students touted the benefits of music theory, I wondered whether they really believed their own claims or were imitating the values of their teacher. The students’ theory skills were shaky at best, particularly given the amount of time spent practicing in class. Theory may have been a source of achievement, but was also clearly a source of uncertainty and frustration. Trevor acknowledges that not everyone in the group appreciates theory in the same way. “I think that there is a group of us that do and others that get frustrated by it and don’t quite grasp the idea of it,” he says. Sarah argues that “easy credit people”—those students who she perceives enroll in jazz for the credit—don’t value theory as highly. “They want to be there to play,” she says. “They want to know music in the sense of how it sounds, not how it works.” Sunil says theory is “not that hard” for him, but

acknowledges, “A lot of people *hate* theory because it’s like math; it’s boring. I guess they just expect to play more instead of write more in [jazz] band.”

Jacque appreciates the knowledge she has gained, but admits, “I would rather not do theory.” She shrugs, “I understand why we do it—so we can understand how to do music better and do solos—but I don’t like theory and it’s kind of boring and kind of confusing.” Aaron agrees, “I’m not a big fan of theory. It’s a lot to absorb and I’m not very good at it, but when it’s jazz and it’s required, I’ll bash up the skills.” Susan says, “I don’t like [theory]” but maintains, “I really like that we do it. I feel it really does help you to understand everything more, even though it’s kind of difficult.” “It’s like math,” she says, echoing Sunil’s analogy. “When you don’t get it it’s really hard but when you do get it it’s awesome. You’re like, ‘Hey, this is fun.’” Susan glanced down at the table and looked sheepishly at me. “I think I need to put more effort into that too.”

### **Soloing**

One of Daley’s primary theoretical goals is to help students create solos that follow the changes of a given piece. Generating these solos is a formidable challenge for most class members, and those who are successful feel a sense of accomplishment and achievement.

Aaron looks forward to each opportunity to solo. He works diligently to create something impressive that follows the chords; once satisfied, he rarely alters it. “[At the concerts] people give me a good reception and everyone’s like, ‘Oh, that looks so challenging,’” Aaron told me. “I guess that since I’ve been playing guitar for so long . . . I’m aware of the progress that I’ve made but not

how much progress I've made." Trumpeter Susan doesn't like to solo, but she says she feels a sense of accomplishment when she does. "I guess there's the confidence factor," she explains. "Every time you force yourself to do a solo you get a bit better and you're getting that comfort. Even though you hate it, it helps you to grow."

Trevor says that Mr. Daley has shifted his focus away from performances and ratings in recent years and placed more emphasis on theoretical knowledge and creativity. "It's all about the solos and expanding your knowledge with chord progressions and letting loose," Trevor said. Asked whether he liked the emphasis on soloing Trevor was ambivalent:

It's a little tough to be forced—to kind of force the creativity—but sometimes you have to do that if no one prepares. If you don't go home and look at the chord progression and see what notes fit and that sort of thing . . . we've only had five years of experience. Miles Davis can just step up [and solo]; we can't. It takes some preparation where we're at right now, and if you don't do the preparation how can you expect to solo effectively? . . . When we're prepared it's fantastic [but] when you're not prepared it's a roadblock. It's taking the preparation that you should be doing outside of class at your own pace and doing it [in class] at a tempo where it's not very productive.

### **Self-Expression and Communication**

Several students who spoke with me said they value the expressive potential of music. "That's my favorite [part]" Aaron told me. "When I get to

play my music I get to express myself. That's why I listen to metal." Aaron and his peers view soloing as a potential avenue for musical expression, but don't always feel they're able to improvise solos that follow the chord changes. Susan wants to express herself through music but unlike Aaron she is a reluctant soloist. "I'm still working on it, obviously," Susan says. "I can't really express myself through music right now. If I'm playing off [another musical idea] it's not so hard but I can't really make up a solo and pour my heart and soul into it." She says that her limited skills hold her back. "As of now I'm not really a musical artist because I'm not really that skilled, but it's something I'd like to go toward."

Sarah is a more proficient trombonist but feels hampered within the jazz band. "Communication and expression is . . . it's probably more what a professional band is shooting for, to get their message across," she explains. "You need to be musical before you can express something with music. Sarah sighed, her frustration rising to the surface. "Yeah, we're not quite there I suppose. . . . We don't really concentrate on it in the band, so I don't know. It's just not really there, so while I would express myself it wouldn't really matter." Instead, Sarah says she focuses on the fun. "I don't need to express myself," she says. "I just need to enjoy it, which I do no matter what."

Students in the jazz band enjoy numerous aspects of their participation, and value many different experiences. These experiences relate primarily to the relaxed and sociable rehearsal atmosphere, the music they play, challenges and achievements, and, for Aaron at least, the ability to communicate through music. Students also noted problems that detracted from the quality of their experiences.

For members of the Pearson Collegiate Senior Jazz Band, meaningful participation is indeed complicated.

## Chapter 7

### CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS

Cross-case analysis affords an opportunity to re-examine the data across the cases and to identify themes present among them. It involves stepping back from the local and particular to examine the cases more broadly, seeking what Richardson calls “similar contours of experience” (1997, p. 19) among them. Viewing students’ perceptions of meaning through a wide-angle lens may help to inform thinking about meaningfulness in other school instrumental ensembles.

In the preceding three chapters I presented single case analyses of three different high school ensembles and diagrams indicating what students found most meaningful related to the music and the social milieu of each ensemble (Figures 3-5). Countryman (2008) employed a similar analytic strategy, examining students’ perceptions of meaning related first to social and communal aspects and then to “specifically musical aspects” of their participation (p. 134). Like Countryman, I found the division of social milieu and music useful in facilitating a discussion of meaning in each case, but ultimately artificial. Music, milieu, and the meanings related to them were interconnected.



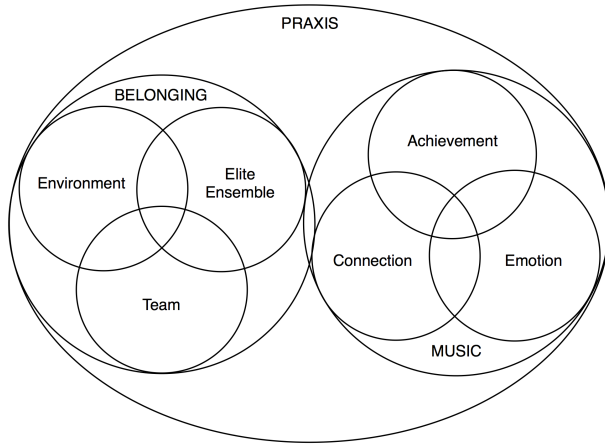


Figure 3. Wind ensemble themes as presented in Chapter 4.

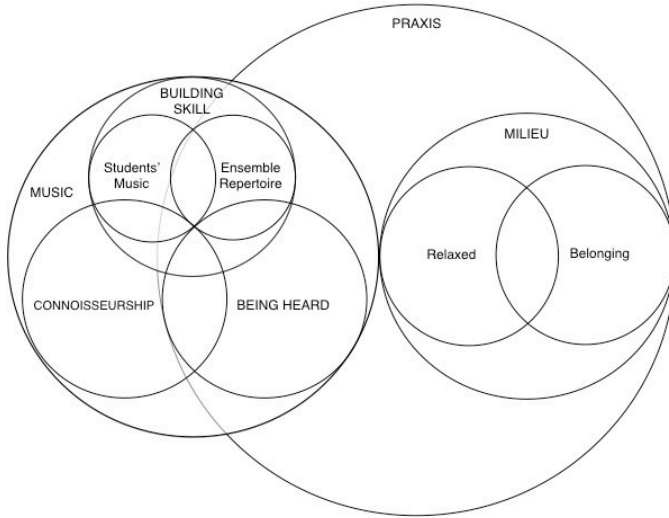


Figure 4. Guitar class themes as presented in Chapter 5.

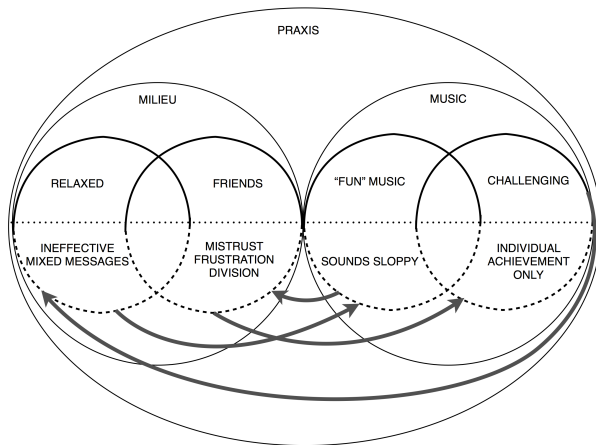


Figure 5. Jazz band themes as presented in Chapter 6.

Looking across the three within-case diagrams, themes of relationship, achievement, and the importance of the environment became apparent. In re-examining the three cases side-by-side in their entirety however, other important themes surfaced. In this chapter I will present these overarching themes, examine how they operate in each case, and relate them to existing literature.

In 1980, Hylton investigated what high school choir members perceived as most meaningful about the choral experience and identified six dimensions of meaning: achievement, spiritualistic, musical-artistic, psychological, communicative, and integrative. Informed by Hylton's work, other researchers conducted similar studies with other populations, including middle school choral students (Wayman, 2005), high school band students (Mills, 1988) and secondary school choirs (Sugden, 2005), and arrived at similar findings. A cross-case analysis of the three cases examined here also revealed dimensions of meaning closely related to those identified by Hylton.

In this study, students found meaning related to achievement, relationships, identity, expression and communication, and music. Only one participant, wind ensemble tubist Nancy, described an explicitly spiritualistic dimension of her participation. Highly active in her church and her Christian dance company, Nancy said she played music and danced to glorify God. When I asked other participants whether they perceived a spiritual dimension to their participation a few replied ambivalently and most said they did not. This dimension was absent from the findings of other studies as well (e.g. Adderley, et al., 2003; Mills, 1988; Mudrick, 1997). It seems reasonable to infer that a

spiritual dimension of music would be more prevalent among students who are spiritual in other areas of their lives, or who participate in ensembles where spirituality is addressed. Students not in these contexts may not associate the word “spiritual” with their musical experiences, but may describe their experiences in similar terms.

The dimensions of meaning identified here are a point of departure rather than of arrival. While these dimensions were present in each case, they looked and operated very differently. The aspects of participation that students in this study found meaningful were shaped by the contexts in which they occurred—by the people, places, and practices distinct to each ensemble. In Chapter 2, I presented a model, derived from my own thinking and from the literature, that situated potential dimensions of meaning within the context of each ensemble (Figure 6). This model guided my thinking as I examined the relationships between the contextual elements of each ensemble and the dimensions of meaning perceived therein. Following the cross-case analysis in this chapter I will present a new model in Chapter 8 based on the findings of this study and derived from the cross-case analysis.

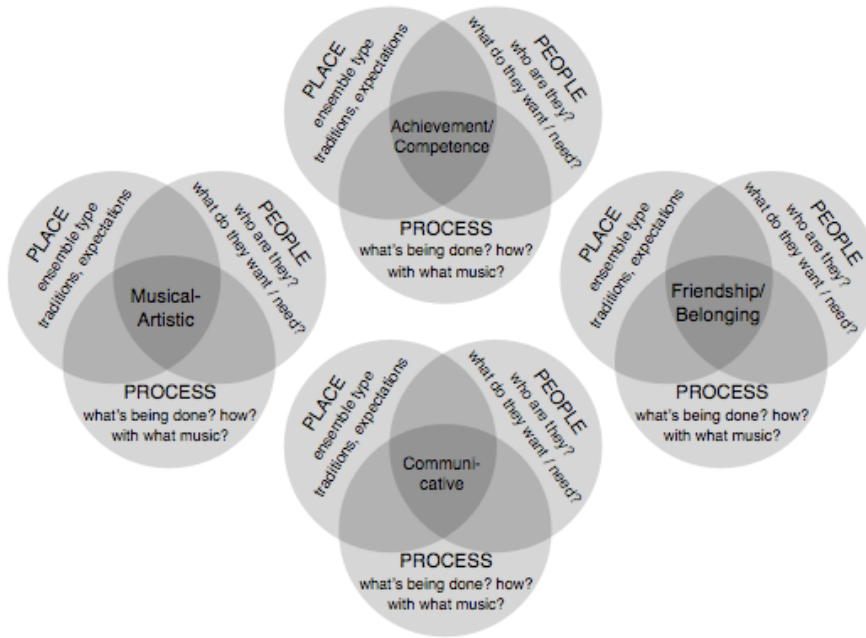


Figure 6: Situated themes, as presented in Chapter 2.

### Achievement

It seems self-evident that students should value achievement in their school music ensembles. Achievement, “a thing done successfully, typically by effort, courage, or skill” (Oxford, 2010) is, after all, the successful outcome of striving toward goals and meeting challenges. Thomas (1992) identified achievement as an important focus of motivation research in music education. Researchers have investigated students’ attributions of failure and success, their self-concepts of their ability to achieve, their motivations to achieve and the effects of factors such as grades and pedagogical strategies on those motivations, and explored various other facets of the relationship between motivation and achievement.

In his 1980 study of student perceptions of meaningfulness, Hylton defined achievement as follows:

Achievement—Statements with high loadings on this factor were reflective of a need on the part of the subjects to, as one student in the prepilot stated, “try, succeed, and get better.” Gratification gained through music is a byproduct of achievement per se rather than competition. The self-esteem which results from musical accomplishment contributes to an individual’s state of well-being resulting in feelings of accomplishment, success, and pride. (1980, p. 129)

Utilizing his *Choral Meaning Survey*, Hylton found that choir students rated achievement-related factors highest among the dimensions of meaning he identified. Achievement also rated highly in Sugden’s (2005) study of secondary school choral participants. Sugden identified three facets of achievement meaningful to participants: vocational direction, personal achievement, and musical achievement.

Students in the current study found achievement meaningful as well. Musicians spoke with pride about mastering difficult repertoire, developing skill as instrumentalists, and garnering positive feedback from peers, their teachers, adjudicators, and other valued people. While Hylton excluded competition as a source of achievement I make no such distinction. Competition played a central role in many of the achievements that the wind ensemble participants found meaningful.

Not every “thing” that students did successfully held value as a meaningful achievement however. The guitar students, for example, performed well at the school’s spring concert yet their success had little impact, particularly

when compared to Solo Night. For the participants in this study achievement was context-specific, shaped by the particular goals and processes of individuals and of each ensemble. The *kinds* of achievements that students valued and the *ways* in which achievement took place were distinct to each group and sometimes to individuals.

### **Individual Achievement**

Students in each ensemble pursued a sense of individual achievement. Each student who spoke with me wanted to experience success in their ensemble, and all wanted to see evidence of their own progress. Individual achievement played a different role in each ensemble, however, and students in each group emphasized individual achievement to a different degree.

In the wind ensemble, a group that focused on performing at a high level, each wind ensemble member's first achievement was simply being invited to participate. This invitation indicated that they had attained the requisite standard of musicianship and that Mrs. Cohen felt they would contribute to the group's success. Once in the ensemble, students achieved as individuals by meeting the technical and artistic demands of the repertoire.

The wind ensemble students who spoke with me rarely talked about their individual musical achievements, however. When they did, their stories of personal triumph took place in rehearsals and performances rather than at home or in the practice room. Nancy, for example, recalled "finally" mastering her solo in *Armenian Dances* as one of the high points of the year. "The whole band heard it," she said. "They recognized it." Wind ensemble students found their

individual achievements most meaningful when they took place within the context of the group.

The guitar class was more individually oriented than the wind ensemble, and members focused first on their personal musical growth and achievement. Unlike the wind ensemble students, whose musical development strengthened the group as a whole, the guitar students improved primarily for themselves. Their growth enabled them to play a wider repertoire of songs that they enjoyed and to produce more satisfying music. While the wind ensemble students practiced at home and in the practice rooms in order to better contribute to the ensemble, the guitar students practiced in class—alone, in small groups, and as an ensemble—in order to take their skills home with them where they continued to practice and play. Rick, for example, said that learning something new on the guitar was “pretty self-rewarding” because he could then “play it at home and with some of my bands.”

Gardner supported this individual emphasis, downplaying the importance of group performance and emphasizing each student’s individual skill development. He differentiated his instruction and the class repertoire so that students could be successful with varying degrees of motivation and varying interests. As Bryce told me, “[Gardner’s] like, ‘Here, try this and if it doesn’t work we can change it around a little bit to whatever works better for you.’” Cohen, on the other hand, expected those students selected to participate in wind ensemble to perform at a high level. She celebrated their individual successes

publicly and in private but placed the most emphasis on teamwork and achieving as a group; overall the students' comments reflected this value.

The guitar class members also differed from their wind ensemble peers in that they had greater opportunities to showcase their individual growth in a variety of performance settings. Dale discovered a passion for soloing while in guitar class, and loved to stand up and be heard. He played in numerous small guitar groups, soloed in the jazz guitar ensemble, and performed several times at Solo Night. Bryce preferred to play within the security of the large ensemble, but Hailey, Rick, and Rena also liked the opportunity to show what they could do. As Hailey explained, "You play something that you've worked on—you personally—and it really shows off what you've learned, as opposed to playing with a big group where you're kind of just part of the sound."

The jazz band members, like their peers in guitar and wind ensemble, derived a sense of accomplishment from their own musical progress. Sunil, for example, said he liked being involved in music because he craved "that feeling of success" he got from mastering challenging class repertoire. Aaron agreed, and said he enjoyed performing well. "You feel a sense of accomplishment," he said. "You're like hey, I just played that perfectly. I'm capable of this."

Soloing is an important part of the jazz idiom, and Daley emphasized this aspect in the senior jazz band. Trevor, Sunil, Sarah, and Aaron enjoyed soloing and felt a sense of individual achievement when they soloed well, especially in concert. Like many of the guitar students, these jazz band members enjoyed being heard and recognized for their skill and musicality. Aaron enjoyed when



members of an audience responded well to a solo he created, and Trevor recalled the winter concert when he and Sunil “traded fours” as a highlight of the year. “We were tearing it up,” Trevor reminisced. “We loved playing that, just unleashing into it everything we had and challenging each other, stealing some of his ideas . . . battling back and forth.” As in other areas of jazz band, other students struggled to solo proficiently and derived little or no sense of achievement from it.

Individual achievement was particularly meaningful when students in each ensemble faced challenges that they cared about overcoming and that stretched their abilities. Guitarist Rena, for example, felt a tremendous sense of achievement when she finally mastered her part in “Nota Bene,” a difficult part that had stymied her for months. In the wind ensemble, these moments often resulted from performances, as Nancy observed. “Once you finally get it and finally do your performance,” she said, “it’s like, ‘Oh, that felt *so* good!” Hailey recognized moments of individual triumph in guitar but said that, for her, achievement was usually a more gradual process. “You never really accomplish,” she observed, “you’re just kind of progressing [with] your skills.” In the jazz band, Jacquie shared a similar perspective. She sometimes struggled to play the difficult music but could see her progress more clearly in retrospect. “When I started in grade ten, I didn’t know how to play the sax,” she reflected. “To go from then to where I am now, it’s just, ‘Wow.’ It’s really cool.”

## **Group Achievement**

While the wind ensemble members valued their progress as individuals, they described their achievements in terms of “we” far more often than “I.” Exclamations of “We got it!” and “We did it!” surfaced again and again in interviews. Jia believed that group achievements had “a larger impact” than individual victories because they were shared and could be celebrated together. Eileen agreed, “There are so many different personal experiences and personal goals that you could have in music and if you share them with other people you can all talk about it and rejoice after.” Mrs. Cohen actively promoted this focus on collaboration and group success. “Who cares what brand of clothes you’re wearing, what your dad does for a living?” she asked. “Together we can do this and apart we can’t. That’s kind of amazing.”

Sharon didn’t emphasize group achievement as many of her peers did, however. She enjoyed being part of the successful ensemble, but found her own development as a clarinetist far more meaningful than the success of the group. One of the few wind ensemble members to take private lessons, Sharon wanted to play in a professional orchestra as an adult but worried she wouldn’t be able to make a living at it. Like the guitar students, Sharon focused on her own individual growth and enjoyed playing clarinet repertoire on her own at home. She enjoyed playing for its own sake and spent hours in the practice room working not for the group but primarily for herself.

Most of the guitar students found group achievement more meaningful when they performed in small groups as opposed to a large ensemble. When

working in a small-group context, students had the opportunity to form their own groups, to select and arrange their own music, and to direct their own progress. Each group member had more responsibility and, importantly, was able to make a more noticeable contribution to the performance. As Hailey observed, “Playing with a big group . . . you’re kind of just part of the sound.” The small-group configuration was also more authentic to the kind of music that the guitar students most enjoyed playing. Large guitar ensembles are found most often in educational contexts, while small groups of guitarists are ubiquitous in popular, folk, country, and other music that students enjoyed.

Unlike most of his peers, Bryce valued the security of the ensemble setting and drew his sense of achievement from the group. Shy and lacking in confidence, Bryce preferred to work independently in class and to contribute his small part to the ensemble. He took pride in the guitar ensemble as a whole, and had no desire to stand out either individually or in a small group. For Bryce, being “part of the sound” *was* meaningful.

The jazz band students who spoke with me shared their wind ensemble colleagues’ desire to perform well as an ensemble, but unlike the wind ensemble the jazz band was composed of members with varying degrees of motivation and dedication. In the guitar class, unmotivated students had little impact on the success of the group, but in the jazz band unmotivated members made a more noticeable difference. As a result, those jazz musicians who wished to perform at a high level lacked confidence that they would be able to succeed as an ensemble, while those who wished simply to relax and have a good time making music were

hindered by interpersonal tensions within the ensemble. In that uncertain environment, students focused primarily on that which they could control: their achievement as individuals.

### **“Safe” Risk Enhances Achievement**

Some of most potent achievements for those who spoke with me were those associated with a degree of risk. Wind ensemble students placed a high premium on their group’s reputation and felt they put that reputation on the line each time they performed repertoire that stretched them. For example, together they made the difficult decision to perform *Sevens*, a grade six piece that would be adjudicated by the composer. The members deliberated for some time before finally deciding to “go for it,” and the resulting performance was an experience they continued to relive months later. Wind ensemble students also experienced increased risk as they performed solos or other exposed passages of music. Eileen recalled the joy she felt as her section performed a difficult soli at MusicFest. The first and fourth horn players, in particular, had struggled to play smoothly in the extremes of their registers and Eileen called their successful performance “crazy.”

Guitar class members had no similar concerns about their ensemble’s reputation, and during large ensemble performances they experienced safety in numbers. For the guitarists, risk was heightened when they could be heard as individuals and when they performed for people they cared about. Solo Night was particularly powerful because the performers selected and prepared their own pieces, took the stage in front of family and friends, and performed by themselves. Gardner observed, “Because they’re so vulnerable and in a situation outside their

realm of comfort, and they succeed—I mean they all succeed so greatly at it—it’s like they’ve shared a common experience and they never ever forget that.”

Members of the guitar class chose the amount of risk they were willing to take on. Students who wanted to solo had the opportunity to do so, and when they divided themselves into small ensembles they typically arranged the music to suit themselves. Together, the members worked out who would sing lead, who could play a particular solo, and who preferred to play or sing backup. As a result, the members stretched themselves at their own pace and grew increasingly confident as they gained more experience. For the majority of the guitarists risk, like achievement, was more associated with small group and individual playing than with the group as a whole.

In the jazz band, members were less willing to take risks and to make themselves vulnerable, particularly when soloing. As Jacquie told me, “Usually I don’t have that big a deal making a fool of myself . . . With jazz band, I just can’t do it.” Jacquie assumed that she *would* make a fool of herself by attempting to solo, and indicated that potentially being embarrassed within the context of jazz band was too uncomfortable. Some jazz students felt comfortable taking risks, but others doubted their ability to succeed. Having experienced occasions when they or their peers took risks and were individually or collectively unsuccessful, these students were neither confident in themselves nor certain that their teacher would provide the support and specific guidance they required. At the year-end concert, stiff postures, neutral expressions, and conservative solos told the story of

ensemble members for whom performance was a source of discomfort rather than achievement.

In each of these cases, risk led to meaningful achievements when the musicians had confidence in their abilities and felt that they had the skills necessary to succeed. The guitarists benefited from the ability to choose what risks they were willing to accept and to gradually extend themselves as they became more confident. In each of the three cases, ensemble members were also more willing to take risks when they trusted their teacher and were confident that they had the guidance they needed, and when they felt well supported by their fellow musicians. This trust and support varied substantially between the three groups. The wind ensemble and guitar class each featured a supportive community that made risk taking “safe,” whereas conflict in the jazz band contributed to an environment where many—even the more confident students—hesitated to risk failing and thus had fewer opportunities to succeed.

### **Relationships**

Humans are social beings and adolescents especially so. In his research on human psychosocial development, Erikson (1964) notes that adolescents’ most significant relationships are with their peers. For high school students, music ensemble participation may be especially fertile ground for meaningful experiences because of the social and interpersonal nature of group music making.

Farrell’s (1972) investigation of adult recreative choir members’ perceptions of meaningful participation likewise revealed social and communal aspects (which she called “integrative”) to be important sources of meaningful

experience. Of 67 statements representing eight factors of meaning only two items—both integrative factors—were “consensus statements” for participants: “To enjoy the fellowship the group” and “To join with others in a common effort” (p. 75). Subsequent studies of ensemble members’ perceptions of meaningful participation found social dimensions to be important (Adderley, et al., 2003; Arasi, 2006; Countryman, 2008; Dillon, 2001, 2007; Hylton, 1980; Mills, 1988; Piekarz, 2006; Sugden, 2005; Wayman, 2005). Dillon (2001) found that social meaning both attracted and sustained students’ involvement in group music making, while Countryman (2008) concluded that “Self-making, community-making and music making are inextricably woven aspects of the high school music experience for many former students.”

The relationships formed and strengthened through participation were important to the musicians studied here. Musicians valued the connections they shared with their peers and teacher, and experienced camaraderie and a sense of belonging within the ensemble community. Sociable interactions during and outside of rehearsals helped to strengthen the relationships of participants, as did the common ground created by shared goals and experiences. The teachers helped to facilitate relationships within each group in the ways that they structured the environment, and by modeling caring and concern for the students as musicians and people.

### **Socializing Together**

The three ensembles were structured very differently and encouraged different ways of interacting during and outside of rehearsals. The ways that

students interacted together, formally and informally, shaped the kinds of relationships that formed therein.

Guitar classes were highly sociable, particularly during semi-structured periods of individual and small-group work. Participants relished the freedom to sit where and with whom they chose, and appreciated being able to talk and joke with peers as they worked. As Hailey noted, “You can always tease your friends and push them around and Mr. Gardner doesn’t care that kids are having fun.” Rick argued that the social aspect of the guitar class was central to the overall experience. “I think if it was a different teacher and [Gardner] only wanted us to play music,” he said, “it would almost feel like a jail I think. Not a lot of people would like that.”

The loose class structure facilitated a considerable amount of time spent off task, but it also encouraged peer collaboration. Most guitarists moved easily into different groupings and asked for or offered help as part of the flow of conversation. Bryce, the most reserved individual, rarely socialized or collaborated with his peers, but others developed relationships as they worked with one another.

During full-class rehearsals, those guitar students not called upon to play continued to chat quietly with their peers. Gardner was usually amenable to these side conversations as long as students didn’t interfere with those playing and were prepared to shift their focus when required. Whereas the wind ensemble and jazz band members spent almost all of their time in a full-class rehearsal format, the guitarists rehearsed this way only a portion of the time, and Gardner tried to work



efficiently. He kept the rehearsals light and relaxed but purposeful, and members infrequently socialized as a whole group during these times.

These individual and small-group interactions echoed the kinds of music-making that the guitarists found most meaningful. They spent much of their time connecting socially in small, flexible groupings and preferred to make music that way as well. The wind ensemble and jazz students, on the other hand, socialized almost exclusively as a large group during rehearsals, and developed a greater sense of cohesion as an ensemble.

As in the guitar class, wind ensemble group rehearsals were funny and lighthearted yet focused. Unlike the guitar class however, side conversations between students were discouraged; those that took place were infrequent and covert. When the ensemble members joked around together, as they often did, the interactions were usually between the students and Mrs. Cohen rather than between each other. Cohen mediated the group's social interactions and decided when it was time to get back on track. Students who spoke with me were satisfied with this more structured rehearsal process. As Nancy attested, "I really enjoy getting down to work and getting things done but I also like having a little bit of humor thrown in there."

Wind ensemble students didn't work together in smaller, collaborative groups nearly as often as the guitarists did. They rehearsed together in sections on occasion, during rehearsals or in student-led sectionals outside of class time, but based on what I observed and what students said in conversations with me they didn't turn to one another for help on a regular basis. One exception to this

was the percussion section. Tasked with covering a multitude of percussion parts, the percussionists laughed together, threw mallets to one another, helped each other out, and formed a strong sense of themselves as a team. Most group members, however, built friendships outside of rehearsal time.

In the jazz band, social time was woven into the fabric of most rehearsals. Like the guitarists, the jazz band members saw the fun they had together as an important part of the ensemble culture and felt that socializing helped to strengthen their relationships. “I think it *makes* our group,” Sunil attested. Indeed, the most cohesive moments I observed at Pearson Collegiate occurred when Daley and the students joked and chatted with one another during class time. “We can have a relationship,” Jacquie said, “and we don’t just have to play music.”

While the members enjoyed these sociable interactions, they also received mixed messages from Daley about how and when to interact. Daley often asked students to focus on a particular task and not talk with one another, but was inconsistent with enforcing this expectation. He often reprimanded students with “Don’t talk!” but the effect of this admonishment rarely lasted long. On other occasions, Daley himself would lose focus and lapse into side conversations with group of students or tell lengthy stories to the class.

Group interactions could be very funny and even rowdy, as members—Daley included—laughed and talked over one another, but the copious time spent off task also impacted the quality of their music making. Members seemed to be aware that the socializing negatively affected their progress. Sunil’s remark, “I

don't think it is too bad that we get off topic; if we do get off topic, it is usually not for a bad reason," was particularly telling.

When the group played poorly during rehearsals some students focused their frustrations on musically weak members of the class. Daley, too, criticized students for coming to class unprepared but was unwilling or unable to see his own role in prioritizing social interactions over helping students to succeed. While socializing contributed to an enjoyable environment, it also weakened the group and strained interpersonal connections when it came time to work (thereby encouraging the members to spend more time socializing and less time on-task).

In each of the three cases studied here, social interactions outside of rehearsals played a significant part in students' experiences as well. Each music room served as a social hub where students could spend time together between classes, at lunch, and after school. These informal interactions helped to strengthen individual relationships between ensemble members and bolstered a sense of community.

In all three cases, teachers welcomed students into the rehearsal room to socialize during free time. This was particularly apparent in the case of the wind ensemble, where the band room featured a lounge area for students and was very much a "student-owned" place. Supported by Cohen and school administration, students decorated the room, left notes and drew pictures, and otherwise marked the room as their own. Students were able to socialize in the lounge area even while music classes were in progress, as long as they kept their voices low.

Neither the jazz band nor the guitar classroom was physically marked by the students who took classes there—”There’s no lava lamps here,” Daley told me dryly when I enquired— yet students in each group congregated there to socialize and be with friends. Like the wind ensemble members, the guitarists went to their music room to relax and talk, to complete homework, to practice, surf the Internet and listen to music, and occasionally to sleep. Jazz band students, too, spent time socializing in the music room or in adjacent practice rooms over lunch and during spares. The room was a particular draw for students who took multiple music classes and who were enthusiastic about the music program as a whole; as Susan noted, the more “into” the music program you were, the more likely it was that you’d spend time there.

Susan’s point is well taken. Those who spent the most time in their music room were cultural insiders and felt at home within the community there. Those on the fringes of the ensemble or of the music program in general may have felt less comfortable and had fewer opportunities to connect with other ensemble members. The sense of community in the Maple Grove band program was particularly strong and although everyone who spoke with me agreed that the band room community was friendly and welcoming, new members and those on the periphery may experience trepidation about gaining entry. Eileen was initially “intimidated” by the close-knit community and said it took time for her to meet people and feel comfortable there, and tenth-grader Sharon struggled to find the confidence to connect with her peers. When in the band room Sharon spent most of her time practicing on the hard chairs of the formal rehearsal area. Cohen’s

observation that she needed to help Sharon get “off the hard chairs and onto the couches” demonstrated her awareness of the psychological divide between formal and informal spaces in the band room and her understanding that social connection, not just technical proficiency, was necessary in order for Sharon to partake in all that wind ensemble offered.

### **Common Ground**

Students came to each music ensemble from a variety of backgrounds and peer groups. Members of the guitar class, in particular, came together from disparate social and academic groups in the school, and in conversations with me, highlighted their differences as a key characteristic of their group. Jazz band members also came together from different peer groups in the school, though they seldom referred to these differences. Wind ensemble members tended to be academic high-achievers and took many of the same classes together, but came from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Many participants were immigrants to Canada, and several members spoke very limited English. Cohen commented, “[This] is something . . . they can participate in and be part of a group and be accepted and be admired immediately and not feel awkward and uncomfortable.” In each ensemble, shared experiences and goals provided students with “common ground” that helped relax social boundaries and served as a foundation upon which to build and strengthen relationships among the members.

Jazz band participant Aaron was the first to share with me the idea of common ground. Aaron admitted that he was generally more comfortable around

guitar students at Pearson because he felt he had more in common with them. However, playing with other jazz band students provided “a topic to talk about.” “When you’re using your instruments everyone really talks to each other,” Aaron explained, “There’s no cliques when you’re playing your instruments.” Trevor and Jacquie both agreed that playing in jazz band together helped them to connect. While Trevor referred to music the members played as a group and jokes they shared, Jacquie said that members could commiserate with one another when they struggled with repertoire or were frustrated with Mr. Daley.

Wind ensemble members were selected for “fit” in the group and so had much in common from the start. As Huan explained, “Everyone really cares about music and with invitations everyone relatively has the skills.” Members also shared a strong work ethic and a sense of responsibility to the group. Unlike jazz band where members had very different levels of skill and commitment, wind ensemble members came to the ensemble with a common mindset and the skills to be successful. The wind ensemble musicians believed these shared values created a far better ensemble experience because everyone was “on the same page.” “[T]hey really want to do well [and] they all pull their weight,” Jia said of her peers.

In the guitar class, members didn’t necessarily share common values or levels of commitment, but everyone shared a common desire to learn the guitar and this communal project provided members ample opportunities to connect. As Hailey observed, “The playing is nice—that’s why we’re there—but I think more it’s that everyone is there together, and everyone plays guitar.” Members helped

each other with their technique, shared music, and worked together on songs. The shared task of learning the guitar facilitated connections between members who might not otherwise have interacted.

Like the guitarists, the wind ensemble members found common ground in the goals they wanted to achieve. At the beginning of the year the musicians discussed their ensemble goals for the year and decided that one main objective was to receive a gold medal rating at MusicFest in Ottawa. They often referred to this goal during rehearsals, for example by estimating their progress in relation to medal standings (“That was a bronze,” for example, or “We’re at about a silver.”) The shared sense of striving together toward a goal united the group members, who referred to themselves as a strong team.

Members of the jazz band had a range of different goals and priorities. These differences exacerbated tensions between the musicians and provided less common ground upon which to build connections. Sarah articulated this toward the end of the school year when she said “I’m looking forward to [graduation], I’m getting more and more frustrated with my band. . . . Some people want to keep getting more and more intense and some people don’t.” The students who wanted to get “more intense” were not more disciplined, nor were those who wanted to play easier music and have fun necessarily undisciplined or lazy. The group members simply had different opinions about how to have a good experience in jazz band. Daley failed to offer students a convincing vision of what they might achieve together, and so the students weighed the costs and

benefits of their effort and the likelihood of their success and arrived at different, conflicting strategies for deriving meaning from their ensemble experience.

### **Community**

The sociable time students spent both relaxing and working together, and the common experiences and goals they shared helped to form a sense of community, “a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals” (Oxford, 2010). This sense of community was particularly strong in the wind ensemble, where members had much in common and worked closely together as a team. I watched the wind ensemble members interact over several months and found them to be remarkably close-knit, so I was surprised when Eileen and Jia told me that friendships didn’t factor highly into their wind ensemble experiences. Both musicians went on to explain that their friendships (which they indeed valued highly) would still exist outside of wind ensemble, but the group and the sense of community they enjoyed was unique and transitory.

Others seemed to share this perspective—as the end of year approached and the wind ensemble members prepared to say goodbye to the departing seniors, no one else seemed particularly concerned that they would lose touch with their friends. The loss of their group on the other hand—that unique blend of personalities and musical talents that made up their ensemble—was devastating to many members. Cohen shared the story of one boy in the eleventh grade, in tears on the last day of rehearsal, who told her, “I don’t know what to do now.” Somewhat perplexed, Cohen told him, “You get to do this again next year,” and



he replied, “But it’ll be different; those people won’t be there.” Huan, a senior, told me shortly before the end of the school year that he’d miss “the community” most of all, and Ken, winner of the wind ensemble’s Spirit and Commitment Award said he wasn’t sure whether he would try to find a band to play in after graduation. “I don’t think there would be the same community involved,” he said. “I think that’s the most important thing: the people that you’re with, the teamwork and the relationships that you’re building. My dad says that’s the meaning of life, the relationships.”

The guitarists didn’t share a strongly defined collective identity as wind ensemble students did, but they too valued the sense of community and fellowship that came with being part of the guitar class. Hailey characterized the guitar class as a “family” where everyone had a place. Bryce, who might be described as a “fringe dweller” (Stickford, 2003), on the margins of the group, valued his place in the group and took pride in belonging there. While the guitarists came from a variety of peer groups, the class provided common ground and facilitated a sense of community while still respecting students’ differences. “Different parts are like different people,” Rick told me. “You add them altogether and it makes a nice song. You have a whole bunch of people and it makes one . . . music community.”

While trombonists Trevor, Sunil, and Sarah felt a strong sense of belonging within the jazz band, others felt disconnected and at times even isolated. For some, community seemed beside the point. Jacquie said she would

take jazz even if she had no friends in the group, and Aaron agreed that friendships were “nice but . . . not necessary.”

### **Teacher Caring**

Noddings (2002) defines education as “a constellation of encounters, both planned and unplanned, that promote growth through the acquisition of knowledge, skills, understanding and appreciation” (p. 283). She believes that educators have an ethical responsibility to support students in these encounters in a caring way. Noddings also believes educators should be ethical role models. “To support her students as ones-caring,” Noddings writes, “[the teacher] must show them herself as one-caring” (1984, p. 178). In this study, teachers cared for their students and supported their personal, social, and musical growth in a variety of ways.

Cohen and Gardner each helped to create learning environments where positive relationships could thrive by modeling caring and concern for their students as people. Cohen got to know her students well, and considered what each student needed to thrive. Her concern for Sharon’s social well-being is just one example. Cohen found time to attend to each member of the wind ensemble, checking in at the beginning or end of class, or following up on an important event that had occurred in someone’s life. When Lian was injured in gym class Cohen expressed her sympathy but also encouraged the ensemble members to rally behind her, saying, “Tomorrow everybody go to the cafeteria and buy her a popsicle.” To those not in the group this might seem a flippant remark, but in the close-knit ensemble students took her seriously.

Growing up, Cohen had a series of music teachers who made a difference in her life. “One thing after another,” Cohen said, “it was just teachers taking the time to really make me feel special.” As a teacher, Cohen strives to pass on to her own students a sense of being special. At the end of the school year, for example, she wrote personalized limericks for each of the graduating seniors. Eileen shook her head as she shared this with me. “I couldn’t believe it!” she said. “There are so many band kids and she just has a little insider with all of them and she spent the time to write it out.”

Gardner modeled caring and an interest in his students as well. Like Cohen he got to know them well as musicians and as people. He talked hockey with them, listened to music they brought into class, and followed what was going on in their lives in and outside of school. Students who mistrusted other teachers in the school felt comfortable opening up to Gardner, who provided a “second, adult opinion” on topics as varied as guitar amps and graduation dresses. “I’ll go in there on my spare and I’ll talk to them about anything, pretty much,” Dale said. Some of Hailey’s favorite guitar classes were those following guitar concerts because, as she said, “We usually just sit around in guitar class and we discuss the most random things . . . just having life discussion class. We talk about things that you should have classes for that you don’t.” Students respected Gardner as a teacher, but also thought of him as a kind of uncle or older friend who would listen and take them seriously. “We’re not just teenagers just to learn,” Rick stressed. “We have lives too. I think it’s good that teachers be part of students’ lives.”

Daley cared about his students primarily as musicians and was most energized by the students who performed well. Based on my observations and interviews, Daley did not appear to be as closely connected to students' lives as Cohen and Gardner. He found those students who struggled challenging, and sometimes became frustrated with those who showed little sign of improvement. He worked to help those students but admitted:

I get to a point to where I don't know what I can do to ensure that last person or the last two or three people are going to get it. . . . I'm always struggling with that, trying to figure out how to get those last few. But the ones who actually start to grasp it, you can hear the difference, you can hear the difference within a day. . . . I don't know. It's a tough one.

Noddings (1984) observes that students want to attain competence in their "own world of experience" (p. 178). She suggests that the teacher as the one-caring has two major tasks: "To stretch the student's world by presenting an effective selection of that world with which she is in contact, and to work cooperatively with the student in his struggle toward competence in that world" (p. 178). Daley cared for his students by stretching their worlds through challenging and enjoyable repertoire, and toward the ability to use the language of music to express themselves. He was less effective in helping all students to become competent, and didn't know how best to help those students who struggled.

## Identity

Identity formation is an important project of adolescence. Erikson characterized the developmental stage experienced during adolescence as “Identity versus Role Confusion,” during which adolescents are chiefly interested in exploring who they are and who they might become (1964). Erikson believed that for adolescents’ identities to be viable, they had to establish both a sense of individual distinctness from peers and family and a sense of unity and belonging within a social group. Montessori (1976), too, saw adolescence characterized by the construction of a social self.

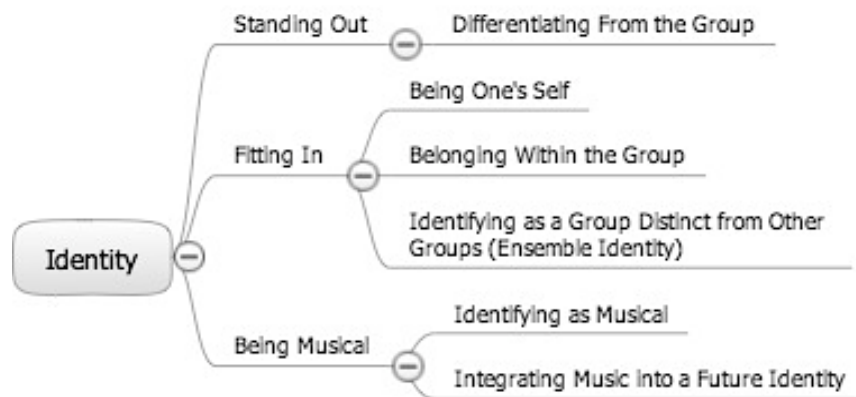
Music can be a powerful facilitator of identity, both individually and within groups. Bowman (2002) writes, “Musical meanings and values are fundamentally intersubjective affairs and musics play important roles in creating and sustaining both individual and collective identity” (p. 59). Music, he says, is performative, “a ritual enactment—or better yet, achievement—of identity” (p. 59). Stublely (1998) agrees, and argues that learning to perform music “is ultimately a matter of learning to experience the self as an identity in the making.” (p. 101). She characterizes music making as a “playful space” wherein the self is open to the possibilities of other selves “similar and different, yet always connected” (p. 101). Small (1998) further contends, “To affirm and celebrate our relationships through musicking, especially in the company with like-feeling people, is to explore and celebrate our sense of who we are, to make us feel more fully ourselves” (p. 142).

In studies concerning perceptions of meaningful participation, various researchers have examined the connections between music and self- and group perceptions. Hylton (1980) identified a psychological dimension of participation as meaningful to student choir participants. Statements in the psychological factor category indicated “that choral experience is meaningful in that it helps to make one aware of his or her identity or, as a subject in the pre-pilot stated, ‘To find out who I am.’” (p. 129). Farrell (1972) and Sugden (2005) also identified a psychological dimension of participation, however Farrell defined it as “personal experience, emotional effect, satisfaction of needs” (p. 41) while Sugden associated the psychological dimension with “development of the self” including “opportunities for self-discovery, relaxation, and development of self-discipline” (p. 110). Mills (1988) identified group identity, which he defined as “being involved in the school and school activities, representing the school, feeling group pride, and competing as a group” as an important theme in his investigation of the meaning of high school band participation (p. 142).

One further study indicated the importance of identity to student ensemble participants. Countryman (2008) interviewed former school music participants to determine how they experienced music. She concluded:

The experience of musicking within high school music programs is experience in authoring the self. That self is multiple, socially constructed, always in formation, never static. Our ongoing, improvised responses to our collective experiences are how we figure out who we are. (p. 223).

Participants in these and other studies indicate that within various music ensembles who they are—individually and as a group—matters. In this study I highlight the meaning students found related to identity, both their sense of individuality and distinctness, as well as their sense of affiliation and belonging within the group (*Figure 11*).



*Figure 11.* Students’ perceptions of meaning related to identity.

### **Standing Out**

For some, ensemble participation provided students with opportunities to stand out and be recognized as distinct from their peers and family members. In particular, the guitar ensemble offered students numerous opportunities to differentiate themselves from the group.

The guitar students seemed to be particularly sensitized to difference, and highlighted it in interviews. They traveled in different social circles at school, were involved in different activities, had varying levels of success in academics, liked different music, and were markedly different, they said, from the band students across the hall. These differences were important to the guitar students. They liked being musically independent and valued their individuality.

“Everyone’s different in the guitar class and everyone contributes their own little bit,” Hailey told me.

Guitar students enjoyed playing as an ensemble but several indicated that they felt invisible in the large-group format and sought opportunities to be recognized. Dale, for example, relished the opportunity to solo in part because it enabled him to stand out. Gardner was aware that the guitar students often wanted to be recognized and heard, and he provided students with numerous opportunities to select music for themselves—not from a list of pre-approved “quality” repertoire, but music that they listened to outside of class and felt strongly about. Solo Night, in particular, afforded students an opportunity to be seen and heard. Their selections were widely varied and often deeply personal, and through them the students communicated to friends and family an aspect of who they were.

Wind ensemble members also had opportunities to differentiate themselves from the group. During wind ensemble performances Cohen highlighted notable contributions of individual musicians and sections as she introduced each piece, and asked these performers to stand at the conclusion of each selection. The group members recognized and celebrated each other’s contributions more privately during rehearsals and following performances. Despite these opportunities, most wind ensemble members, particularly those in lower chair positions, did not have the same opportunities to differentiate themselves from the group as their guitar class peers. Wind ensemble members participating in other program offerings such as jazz band and vocal jazz may



have addressed the need for individual recognition more directly in those contexts, but in general the wind ensemble musicians appreciated their similarities and received far more recognition as a group.

Jazz band members also valued opportunities to be heard and to differentiate themselves from the ensemble. This opportunity was one of the primary reasons Aaron chose to take jazz band rather than guitar. “When I’m playing the guitar [in Jazz Band], I have my own individual part and someone can actually say they heard me playing,” he said, “instead of saying, ‘Oh, you plucked very well with the others.’” Daley required each member of the group to generate their own solos, and he encouraged students to take at least one solo during school concerts. As noted earlier, this was not a good experience for all students and actually may have prompted some to question their identities as competent musicians.

### **Fitting In**

In the social world of high school, many adolescents feel pressure to “fit in” with their peers. Each music environment was, at its best, a place where students felt they could relax and be themselves. This was the case for Maple Grove Collegiate students, who felt the band room was a safe and welcoming place to be. Cohen worked hard to facilitate that and saw the changes in her students year after year. “It’s almost like a personality change when they step through that door,” she said. “It’s like, ‘This is home,’ for the really hard core kids especially.” She pointed to smart, talented, popular Ken, a central figure in the wind ensemble whom Eileen characterized as an “epic band person.” Cohen

noted, “In speaking with other teachers, they would be sort of annoyed, ‘Oh, he’s goofing off again and oh my gosh why can’t he just get serious?’ so he would get sort of cynical in other areas of the school.” In the band room, Cohen said, “[Ken] would just say, ‘I’m going to be myself.’”

Sharon hadn’t yet reached the point where she could open up and be herself in the band room, and she seemed most comfortable when playing her clarinet. Cohen often thought about what she could do to help. “I think I just need to get her to hang in the band room so people can see the real her and she has a place to go to be the real her,” she said. Though Sharon didn’t yet feel that she could relax and socialize in the band room, her decision to attend Maple Grove Collegiate demonstrated that Sharon was working to shape her identity. At her previous school Sharon had socialized with peers who pressured her to experiment with drugs, so she and her parents decided to leave the area. At Maple Grove she found a place among a different peer group who behaved very differently from the peers at her previous school. “I’m getting more serious with music and stuff,” Sharon said, “so it’s keeping me away from it.”

Guitar class was likewise a place where students could relax and be themselves. Those who talked with me emphasized repeatedly their differences as a strength of the group. As Rena said, “I think if we were all very similar and we had lots in common it would make it completely different because we’d be the same people [and] it’d be boring. I think it’s how diverse our group is that makes it what it is.” In guitar, students joked and teased each other but felt accepted for who they were and what they brought to the group. Hailey said that she preferred

guitar to band because, “Guitar definitely has more room for being yourself.”

Like Cohen, Gardner worked to create an environment where students felt comfortable being themselves. He showed an interest in students’ lives outside of the class and encouraged them to take an interest in each other. As a result of participating in guitar class, Gardner said, “. . . they feel free to say what they want and they share their life with each other . . . they become part of a family.”

Guitar students talked about one aspect of “being themselves” that students in the other ensembles did not. Several guitarists said that who they were came through in their sound and in the way they played guitar. “We all play in a different way and we all experience [music] in a different way,” Rena explained. The guitarists liked playing together because they were familiar with each other’s unique style and sound. “I know that people play differently,” Bryce explained, “I can tell somebody that I’ve never played with before and it sounds different than I’m used to and I wouldn’t be able to play as well with this person that I just met as I would with people that I’ve been playing with for years.” Dale agreed, “I’d rather play with people I know, because you know what they can do, you know what would better suit them.”

Both the wind ensemble and guitar class featured a strong sense of community where people were accepting of differences and where students could be themselves with little threat of rejection. Members respected one another for what they brought to the group, though in different ways. Unfortunately, the jazz band didn’t have a similar foundation of respect, and students’ self-concepts were subject to greater risk. Some jazz band members were confident of their own

abilities and comfortable in the band environment, but many others were unable to relax and be themselves. Susan, for example, felt that she wasn't "in" with the other group members and was judged negatively, and I noticed other students who were targets of underlying frustration as well. Sarah, who usually displayed confidence verging on arrogance, told me "we're unafraid to be ourselves in [jazz band]," but even she admitted she felt uncomfortable among various cliques in the band program. "You know how teenage girls can be," she said. "They're insecure, they need their best pals for reassurance." Though she didn't explicitly say so, Sarah's bravado showed cracks. "It's high school and people aren't as trusting and so you don't get super close to anybody unless you want to be," she said. For some, the jazz band may not have been a place where they felt they *could* connect in more than a superficial way.

### **Social Identity**

Social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Participants developed social identities related to their participation, some to a greater degree than others.

While wind ensemble members didn't tend to stand out as individuals in performance, they drew a strong sense of identity from being part of the Maple Grove Collegiate Wind Ensemble. Members enjoyed being identified with a highly regarded musical ensemble with a longstanding tradition of excellence, and were proud of the attention and accolades the group received. Nancy spoke of "the feeling of being one of the best" and Huan said it was "really cool" to belong to one of Canada's top wind ensembles. At festivals, groups from other schools

would go out of their way to hear the wind ensemble play, which provided members with a small taste of celebrity and a big sense of identity. “You hear about everyone flocking to the MGC performance,” Eileen said, “That’s a cool feeling.”

The guitar class members had a far more relaxed and fluid sense of themselves and who they were collectively, and referred to themselves as a “community” and a “family” more often than an ensemble. Gardner emphasized individual and small group work, and the students rehearsed and performed in many different configurations throughout the school year. Those who spoke with me said they felt a strong sense of affiliation with the class and the guitar program in general, but didn’t see themselves primarily as members of a large ensemble.

The fluidity of their social identities was apparent as I talked with students about their experiences in guitar class. They often shifted to stories about jazz guitar and then back, making little distinction between the two classes. The kinds of music and parts played differed somewhat, but it was all just “guitar.” Likewise, it was not uncommon to hear students working on their jazz guitar pieces during loosely structured class time.

As a community of learners rather than an ensemble per se, the guitarists may have been more accepting of each others’ differences and more open to the various strengths, weaknesses, and levels of motivation of their peers. Neither their success nor their identities were tightly bound to the performances of the other class members. This created a very different social dynamic than existed in the wind ensemble and the jazz band.

Members of the senior jazz band had a sense of themselves as a fun group of people rather than a strong ensemble. As Trevor pointed out, “As far as musical performance I don’t think we’re too unique, but definitely the classroom setting.” Asked if their band was known for anything Sunil laughed, “Being loud.” Members enjoyed playing music together, joking around, and having a good time together, but didn’t identify themselves as a musically cohesive ensemble like the wind ensemble or a community of learners like the guitar class.

### **Being Musical**

Music was a significant part of the identities of most of the students who spoke with me. As Countryman (2008) observed, “The school music world is only one of a number of worlds in which a student simultaneously participates” (p. 223). Students in this study derived their musical identities from a wide variety of sources, constructed not just in the present but also over the course of students’ lives. Consistent with Erikson’s (1964) view that adolescents take into account the past, present, and plausible future as they form identities, the students in this study considered who they were in the moment, who they might become, and how music might fit into their future lives.

Jazz saxophonist Jacquie drew a large part of her musical identity from her family heritage. A Mennonite, Jacquie belonged to a musical family and fondly remembered singing with her family as a child. Although she participated in school music “for fun,” she said it connected her to her family and her cultural identity.

In the guitar class, Rick identified strongly as a musician. “Music can make up who a person is,” he told me. “If you love what you’re doing, even if you’re not good at it, it still makes up who you are.” Like many of his peers, Rick derived his sense of musicianship both from the music he listened to and from playing the guitar. Bryce drew a strong parallel between the music he loved— heavy metal in particular—and his identity. Listening to metal helped Bryce to reveal a side of him that he typically kept to himself. “[It’s] not having to be shy anymore,” he explained. Dale’s musical identity changed considerably during his time in the guitar class. He used to identify strongly with metal but now considers himself far more and eclectic. Rena and Hailey also said that music was an important part of who they were.

Jazz guitarist Aaron’s musical identity was particularly important to him. “Music in general, that gives me my identity,” he said. “Everyone knows me as the music lover, and I’m proud of that.” Like Bryce, Aaron was a metal fanatic and drew much of his identity from his knowledge of and appreciation for heavy metal music. For Trevor, Sunil, and Sarah, music was a significant part of their present identities but also a projection of their future selves. Trevor, a junior at the time of this study, was strongly considering a career in music, Sunil, also a junior, wanted to study composition, and Sarah had just been accepted to study music education at a local university.

Daley played a role in helping the jazz students to see “musician” as viable future role for themselves. “It’s no secret that he wants a fair number of people in our band to go into music,” Trevor explained. “He’s always talking

about it. He's always looking at what you would be doing at the University, what would you be doing in a real life setting if you were playing this . . . [and] relating it that way." By treating the jazz band students as musicians—not *becoming*-musicians or *student*-musicians but simply musicians—and by regularly suggesting avenues they might pursue, Daley offered a vision of their future selves that was, for some, compelling.

Wind ensemble was only one part of the Maple Grove students' musical lives, but the recognition they received as members contributed to their sense of themselves as talented musicians. Of the musicians who spoke with me, all but Jia had considered going into music as a career. Ken planned to pursue a major league baseball career but also considered music education as a path, and Nancy planned to teach band. Both Huan and Eileen had considered going into music but their parents had discouraged them because they feared poor job prospects. Sharon, who wanted to play in an orchestra, harbored the same doubts. Like others who found music participation meaningful, the wind ensemble musicians sought ways to integrate their current musical identities into future versions of themselves. With few satisfying options available or at least obvious to them in the amateur realm and a high degree of risk involved in the professional realm, the musicians recognized that they may face challenges in continuing to foster their musical identities once beyond high school.

None of the guitarists with whom I spoke planned to play professionally, but neither did anyone doubt that they would continue to play the guitar well after high school. Rick and Hailey were each certain they'd be playing guitar for the



rest of their lives and the other guitarists were similarly confident. Unlike many of the jazz band and wind ensemble students, the guitarists were *already* playing in various contexts outside of the classroom, and identified as musical people independent of their school groups. They saw themselves as lifelong amateurs and felt no need to pursue music professionally in order to keep it in their lives.

### **Expression and Communication**

“Making and making special,” Dissanayake writes of the arts, “are inseparable from the innate human impulse to share feelings and from the need and ability to express ourselves in relationship with others” (2004, p. 72). Indeed, Dissanayake believes that the arts evolved from the basic human need to connect with others and to share experience. Merriam (1964), an anthropologist, identified “emotional expression” and “communication” among the ten functions of music common to all human cultures (pp. 219-227). Music therapists take advantage of the expressive potential of music in working with clients.

Psychologist Gaston (1968), who helped develop music therapy in the United States, identified music as both a means of communication and a source of aesthetic expression (pp. 21-27). Music is both a potent and ubiquitous medium through which to convey one’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences.

In prior studies of musical meaningfulness, researchers found that participants valued the opportunities to communicate and express themselves through music (e.g. Countryman, 2008; Dillon, 2001; Farrell, 1972; Hylton, 1980; Sugden, 2005). Hylton (1980) defined the communicative dimension of meaningful participation as one “which involved reaching out to others . . . the

expression of feelings and ideas to an audience” (p. 129). Some participants in this study described communicating to an audience through music, but others talked about the importance of expressing themselves, whether or not an audience or even another listener was present. They appreciated the ability to simply express their thoughts and feelings—to send what they felt and knew out of themselves and into the world, regardless of whether or not anyone heard them.

Eisner (2002) writes that the arts, including music, “invite children to pay attention to the environment’s expressive features and to the products of their imagination and to craft a material so that it expresses or evokes an emotional or feelingful response to it” (p. 23). For some participants, musical expression was more an emotional response to the world around them and to the beating of their own hearts rather than an attempt to communicate with someone else. In describing what they found meaningful students often used “expression” and “communication” interchangeably. As the two dimensions are so closely related conceptually and in students’ remarks, I discuss them together in this following section.

The wind ensemble musicians were attuned to this element of musicality in wind repertoire and spent time in rehearsals working on musical expression. The members played emotively together during rehearsals and performances, and I witnessed some moments of musical expression that I found especially moving. Of the musicians who spoke with me, however, only Nancy talked explicitly about expression in any great detail. “I think that music is about expressing yourself and expressing emotion,” she said.

The wind ensemble musicians talked more often about connection—with each other, with the music, and with an audience—and about communication. Huan referred to the importance of communicating an idea contained in the music. “If you enjoy it you can communicate what the music is supposed to,” he told me. Nancy, on the other hand, thought of communication as a means of sharing herself and her feelings with an audience. “[Music] can be interpreted in many different ways, depending on how you feel the music or how you see the music,” she said. “I play it the way that I think it should be interpreted. . . . It’s putting my own thoughts and my own emotions to the music . . . adding them to it.” Ken explained that, for him, a meaningful musical experience facilitated “connection,” whether communing with others or expressing one’s self.

Eileen referred indirectly to musical expression as an embodied phenomenon that she had to move to feel. “If . . . you’re going to play music . . . you have to become in the music,” she told me. Like Eileen, Ken described an embodied element to music, which prompted him to move and could give him goosebumps. Sharon and Nancy, who each said that finally playing a difficult part right *felt* “so good,” may simply have been referring to achievement, but Sharon’s reference to playing a series of difficult runs in particular suggests the possibility of an embodied, expressive aspect of their musical performances.

Jazz band students Sunil and Trevor also talked about expressing themselves through their instruments in an embodied way. Sunil said he loved playing the trombone because, “It’s a lot more physical. I guess like when you’re frustrated I just release it into my trombone because—I guess my parents are deaf

by now—I play really really really loud. It makes me feel good.” Trevor had a similar perception of playing the trombone. “I love the tone it produces . . . [and] I love playing it too,” he said. “The slide, it just seems to be a more natural and connected thing as opposed to keys. It’s literally using your arms and adjusting the length of the slide. It just kind of feels more natural.”

Though the guitar students didn’t talk about expression as an embodied phenomenon, they did find many opportunities to express themselves and to communicate to others through their instruments. For Rick these aspects were particularly meaningful. He talked extensively about expressing himself through music, and about the importance of showing others “what you love about it, what your tastes are, your passion about it.” Rena, too, found expression a meaningful aspect of playing the guitar. “I like expressing myself through the music,” she said. “I’m not the most willing person to talk about how I feel so if I can let it out in a different way, that’s how I play guitar.” Dale expressed his ideas and feelings most through soloing. “It’s all feeling,” he said. He played for hours at home and was particularly proud of the loop pedal he had recently purchased that enabled him to create complex musical arrangements over which he could solo. Bryce expressed himself through music as well—he preferred heavy metal, but he also played music on his acoustic guitar. Unlike the wind ensemble students who expressed themselves within the context of wind ensemble music, the guitarists found an expressive outlet in the guitar itself and the music they played, regardless of whether they happened to be in class.

Some jazz band members talked about communication and expression through music, though not necessarily in jazz band. Aaron loved being able to express himself on his guitar and said that expression was his favorite aspect of music. “It’s a great way to express my emotions,” he said. “It’s a great escape from reality when you need it without the negative effects of drugs; it’s a great way to express your problems and convey emotions. It’s meaningful because it’s such an important part of my mental health.” As a composer of piano music Sunil expressed himself through music. “I like to perform my own pieces because it’s like a chance to express,” he said. “Music’s expression and I just want to spread it.” When I asked him whether he found expression a meaningful part of jazz band, however, he answered, “Not so much.”

Other members of the jazz band similarly valued expression but didn’t feel they were *able* to express themselves in jazz band. Susan wanted to express herself but didn’t feel she had the ability. “I can’t really make up a solo and pour my heart and soul into it,” she said. “I’m not really a musical artist because I’m not really that skilled, but it’s something I’d like to go toward.” Jacquie shared Susan’s belief that she was unable to communicate through music, saying, “I don’t have that thing in my brain.” Sarah perceived the group itself to be an impediment to communication. Communication, she argued, happens when musicians work together to deliver a message through their playing. “You need to be musical before you can express something with music,” she said, “...we’re not quite there.”

Despite the emphasis on soloing and creativity, and despite the students' desire to do so, most jazz band members didn't find expression or communication to be meaningful aspects of their experience. The lack of group cohesion and musicality got in Sarah's way and may have been an impediment for others. Participants may also have felt inhibited in a potentially judgmental environment, which was not conducive to the risk and trust that good communication requires.

### **Music**

A "musical" dimension of meaning is difficult to capture, particularly if one believes, as Bowman (2000, 2002, 2004, 2005c, 2009), Small (1998), and others have argued, that music is far more than organized sound. Mills (1988) tackled the problem by defining "musical growth" broadly as "all types of musical outcomes of band participation: musical understanding and responsiveness, acquiring and displaying musical skill, preparing for future musical activity, enjoying making music, pleasing others through performance, and being expressive or creative" (p. 142). Hylton (1980) and Wayman (2005) focused on students' attainment of musical knowledge. Wayman identified an "academic" dimension of meaning that "referred to the academic aspects of music class such as reading music, learning about composers, and musical styles" (p. 84) while Hylton (1980) defined a musical-artistic dimension as concerning "the drawing in of musical knowledge. Choral participation is viewed as meaningful insofar as it affords opportunities for musical growth and development" (p. 129).

## **Musical Knowledge**

Taking Hylton's definition as a jumping off point for this discussion, students in each case valued the musical knowledge they gained as participants, but valued different kinds of musical knowledge for a variety of purposes. Elliott (1995) identified two ways of knowing music: verbally, which includes reading and which requires no direct contact with music, and procedurally, which involves engaging in music through making or listening to it. What Elliott calls formal knowledge—including theoretical and historical information about music—is most often acquired verbally, though it can also be acquired procedurally. Other kinds of knowledge include informal, impressionistic, and supervisory knowledge, and these, Elliott argues, can only be acquired through procedural ways of learning.

The guitar students took great pride in knowing how to play the guitar. This procedural knowledge was what they wanted most for themselves and they valued evidence of their continued musical growth. They had opportunities to develop this know-how at school with the assistance of their peers and the guidance of Gardner, and they continued acquiring this knowledge on their own at home and in other places outside of school. Neither Cohen nor Daley focused on teaching the technical skills of how students should play the various instruments the way that Gardner did; students in the jazz band and wind ensemble were expected to come to class prepared with that knowledge and technical ability. Instead, Cohen worked with students to polish musical repertoire and Daley focused on transmitting theoretical knowledge and working on repertoire.

In the wind ensemble, students valued their a priori musical expertise as well as their developing expertise. They were able to sight read repertoire proficiently, took care of the basics of notes, rhythms and articulations on their own, and quickly reached a very high level of musicality. The wind ensemble students came to know, through repeated high-level performances, about the skills and artistry required to perform at a high level. They valued not only their formal knowledge about music making, but also the impressionistic knowledge (Elliott, 1995) that enabled them to make sound judgments about their collective playing. When students called to each other “that was a silver” after rehearsing a particular piece, they exercised their impressionistic knowledge and used it to guide their progress.

As the musicians participated in their respective groups, they gained experience that shaped their music listening as well. Exposure to various kinds of music encountered in class led students to listen to other kinds of music that they came to enjoy. Sunil, for example, said that participating in high school jazz helped him open his mind to other kinds of music, and in the guitar class Dale discovered “wide horizons” of music he had never considered before. As the students gained expertise as music makers, their procedural knowledge came to inform the act of listening, and some students described listening to music very differently as a result. Sarah said that her newfound theoretical knowledge drew her attention to the details that she had never paid attention to before. “You can tell the difference between a musician listening to music and a non-musician listening to music,” Sarah said. “I’m now a musician listening to music and I now



see the difference.” She elaborated, “If you don’t know a lot of music then all you can really like about it is how it sounds. Once you learn what’s going on . . . it just makes that song so much better.” In the guitar class, Hailey shared a similar perspective. “If you don’t play guitar or if you aren’t really familiar with the instrument, it’s just a guitar you’re listening to,” Hailey said, “but when you can play guitar . . . you’re like, ‘Oh, this is what he’s doing with his hands, these are the chords he’s playing, this is what position he’s playing in, probably.’”

### **Music as Product and Process**

Although I took Hylton’s definition of a musical-artistic dimension of meaning as the jumping off point for this part of the discussion, his knowledge-focused dimension captured only a sliver of the ways that students found music meaningful. Students valued the knowledge gained from studying music, certainly, but they also valued music itself—the sounds of the music they created as well as the processes and social engagements involved in creating them. For participants in this study, music became meaningful as it served a variety of functions and facilitated a range of experiences.

In the wind ensemble, repertoire presented worthy challenges, facilitated social connections, provided opportunities for expression and gave rise to some emotionally intense moments. Together, these aspects contributed to the meaningfulness of the music. *Sevens* was an important piece that year because, while music was fun to play and “sounded cool,” *Sevens* also represented a difficult and risky challenge that members had conquered together. Pieces also became meaningful as the members connected emotionally with the sounds and

with each other. Ken described “goosebump moments” when performing gave him chills. For Ken, these moments were powerful not only because of the sounds they created, but also because of his connections with the other musicians and his knowledge of the efforts undertaken to reach that moment.

The guitar students found classroom repertoire meaningful for very different reasons. Some guitarists liked their ensemble pieces more than others, but everyone who spoke with me agreed that the repertoire Gardner selected helped them to improve as musicians and developed important skills that they could apply to music of their choice. Just as importantly, the guitar students had multiple opportunities to choose music for themselves, and to prepare music they loved alone or with a group of friends.

The wind ensemble and guitar class participants demonstrate two very different orientations to repertoire. Wind ensemble repertoire provided students with an end point toward which to strive while the guitar class repertoire provided students with a process through which they could improve. This is not to say that the guitarists didn’t enjoy performing—they did—nor to suggest that wind ensemble members were so focused on performance as to ignore the process of improving and the enjoyment of making music together. The students and their teachers approached ensemble repertoire in ways that aligned with the goals of their respective groups.

The jazz band members found music meaningful in ways that were more complicated. They enjoyed playing energetic, challenging repertoire for the sense of achievement and growth it provided, but also wanted to relax and enjoy making

music together. They enjoyed the connections that music facilitated, but when members struggled to perform these same connections were undermined. Daley emphasized the process of learning jazz over the value of performance, however the students also wanted to sound good and were frustrated when their performances were less than polished. Like their wind ensemble colleagues, jazz band members found music meaningful for reasons related to achievement, connection, and expression, but were often stymied by ineffective rehearsal practices and interpersonal tensions. For those whose goals were misaligned with Denby's pedagogical choices, playing enjoyable repertoire was not enough to foster meaningful experiences.

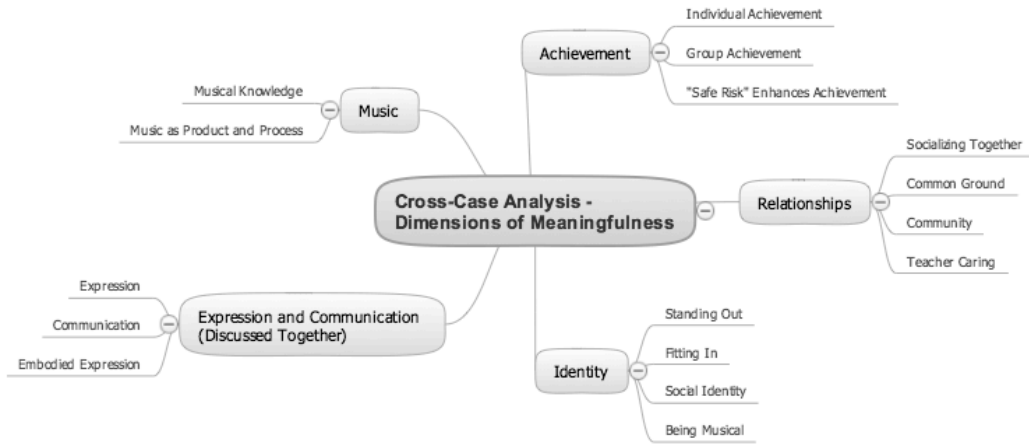
Earlier in this section I described how the procedural knowledge gained as a result of participating in school music changed the way some students listened to music. Interestingly, the ability to listen more deeply and to appreciate music in different ways did not seem to make students more inclined to listen during free time to the kinds of music they played as a group.

Members of the wind ensemble loved the music they played in class, but seldom listened to it for pleasure. Few students had much wind literature on their mp3 players, but several showed me their jazz collections and Eileen shared that she "started listening to and appreciating jazz" because of her participation in jazz and vocal jazz classes. The wind ensemble repertoire facilitated highly meaningful experiences, but the meaningfulness of the music seemed inextricably connected to the experiences involved in preparing and performing it. Outside the context of the ensemble, the repertoire itself was less valuable.

Guitar students didn't listen to their ensemble repertoire or other classical guitar pieces outside of school, but came to value high-quality guitar playing in many other genres. The guitarists who spoke with me developed a deeper love of guitar music for having played it. "I have an appreciation for the guitar now," Dale informed me, "so I'll listen to bands that have good guitarists."

Of all the music students who participated in this study, only the jazz band members listened during free time to the kind of music they played in class. Guided tours of each musician's mp3 player turned up a variety of jazz charts, both classic and contemporary. Members said they developed a greater appreciation for jazz having played it. "When you get to know everything about [music] then it's so much better," Susan explained.

This cross-case analysis has examined dimensions of participation that students found meaningful across cases, as illustrated in *Figure 7*, and investigated the variegated ways that these dimensions operate for participants in each group. In the following chapter I will briefly summarize the study, and present a recapitulation of themes and expand upon key ideas. I will then look at the role of context in shaping what students perceive as meaningful, and identify conditions in which meaningful experiences are more likely to occur. Finally, I will examine the educational and human implications of meaningful music education and suggest possible best practices.



*Figure 7:* Dimensions of meaning explored in the cross-case analysis (clockwise from top)

## Chapter 8

### DISCUSSION AND REFLECTION

#### **Summary of the Study**

This study explored what students in three high school instrumental groups perceived as most meaningful about their participation and how the context of each group shaped those perceptions. Utilizing a qualitative multiple case study design, I conducted the study in three high school ensembles in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Primary participants were high school student ensemble members who indicated that their participation was meaningful to them, and secondary participants included their ensemble teachers and school principals. Over a six month period (January to June, 2009) I observed rehearsals, attended concerts, recorded field notes, and conducted interviews with participants.

I assembled the data into a case study record. Interviews and portions of rehearsal and concert recordings were transcribed into written format and coded using HyperResearch and MindMap software. I then analyzed the data in two ways, first examining the contextual dimensions of each ensemble, and then examining expressions of value. I used “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) to illustrate the people, place, and processes that made each ensemble a unique setting, and then discussed the themes of meaning situated within each context.

Research questions for this study focused on what students perceived as meaningful about their participation and the extent to which context shaped their experiences. Three questions guided this investigation:

1. What experiences or aspects of ensemble participation are most meaningful to students?
2. To what extent does context play a role in meaningful engagement?
3. Do the perceptions and experiences of ensemble participants suggest underlying principles of meaning and value within instrumental ensembles?

### **Recapitulation**

Meaning was complex and variegated for the high school student musicians in this study. In answer to the first research question, “What experiences or aspects of ensemble participation are most meaningful to students?” I present a distillation of the most salient findings presented in Chapter 7, and expand upon key ideas.

Participants in each group valued achievement, particularly when it related to goals that they held for themselves or for the group. Students universally valued their own growth, which became apparent to them gradually over time, in a “breakthrough” moment or a culminating performance, and in retrospect. Students also found performing well a meaningful experience when they were invested in the results. Thus, rated festivals presented opportunities for highly meaningful performance for wind ensemble students, whereas Solo Night—where students chose repertoire they loved and performed alone or in self-directed groups for their family and friends—was an especially potent source of meaningful performance experiences for guitar students.

The jazz students struggled to produce quality performances and some jazz band members were therefore reluctant to invest emotionally in the results. Participants described performing as “fun” but few described performance as a source of deeper, more significant meaningful experiences. For students in each of the groups, meaningful performances required an investment of emotional energy.

Most students also derived substantial meaning from the relationships they formed and fostered within each ensemble. As with other dimensions of meaning, students valued relationship in ways that were complex and variegated. Group music making provided students with common ground that facilitated connections with one another and created a sense of community where most felt they belonged. In the wind ensemble, many students perceived the closeness and community of their ensemble as more meaningful than the individual friendships they enjoyed there. Neither the guitar nor the jazz students made similar statements, although they also valued the communities of their respective groups.

Themes of achievement and relationship were interconnected in the three cases. The jazz band members, for example, valued the fun they had together as a group, but social interactions at times detracted from their progress and diminished opportunities for meaningful achievement. Most wind ensemble students said that the close relationships of the “team” members made their achievements much more meaningful, while the majority of guitarists especially valued performing music they loved with and for their friends.



In each case, one student participant was less connected to his or her peers and viewed achievement somewhat differently. Sharon, a clarinetist in the wind ensemble, Bryce, in the guitar class, and Susan, a trumpeter in the jazz band, each dwelt on the fringes of their respective ensembles. They enjoyed participating but perceived the experience as meaningful in different ways. While other wind ensemble students emphasized the group, Sharon played primarily for herself and valued the experience and skill development she gained. Bryce enjoyed playing the guitar, but was reluctant to work in class or to perform in small groups to the extent that his peers did and therefore made slow progress. Because he was able to contribute, though in a limited way, Bryce felt most successful playing within the large ensemble and he took pride in the group's achievements. Susan liked to play jazz but put little effort into preparing her music outside of class and was a target of frustration for some of her peers. Susan didn't feel a particular connection to the other members of the jazz band and saw herself as an observer rather than a participant in group social interactions, but she valued playing jazz with other musicians and learning more about music.

While achievement and relationship emerged strongly in each case, other significant dimensions of meaning were important as well. In each group, participants encountered opportunities to explore who they were as individuals and as members of a group, and to consider possible future identities related to music. A few participants explicitly discussed their identities related to music and group participation. For most, identity was implicit in comments about being heard, standing out, and also about fitting in and being part of something.

Some participants valued opportunities to distinguish themselves as individuals and enjoyed being heard, either by performing solos or by playing in smaller groups. In the guitar class, students were also able to distinguish themselves through the music they chose for themselves—music that they listened to outside of class and with which they identified. However, participants valued these opportunities to distinguish themselves only when they felt confident that they would receive support. Those who felt unable to solo well, or who worried about being judged negatively preferred *not* to stand out. Supportive relationships and a sense of community were crucial for students to derive meaning from being heard.

Other participants drew a sense of identity from belonging to the group, and enjoying being part of a larger “whole.” This was especially true for members of the wind ensemble, where members took tremendous pride in being invited to participate and in the legacy of their ensemble. Guitarist Bryce and jazz trumpeter Susan both valued their identities as group members and preferred to fit into the whole rather than to stand out. Many students authored a sense of self both by standing out as individuals and by fitting into the group.

Expression and communication were strongly present for some participants in this study but not a salient part of the experience for others. Wind ensemble repertoire offered an expressive outlet for students, some of whom felt able to express their own thoughts and feelings through the music, and others who said they expressed ideas and emotion inherent in the music itself. Wind ensemble members talked often about “connecting” through music—to each

other, to an audience, to the music itself, or for one student, to the divine. Though no one used the word, I suggest that these connections shared through music among members and with an audience were at their best a form of communion—a profound connection in which words were unnecessary. In the guitar class, students talked about the guitar itself as an expressive outlet rather than focusing on the repertoire they played or the ensembles in which they performed. With the exception of guitarist Aaron, the jazz band students didn't perceive musical expression or communication through music to be important parts of their experience. Whereas the guitar students could express themselves alone, jazz required the cooperation of the group, technical skill and theoretical know-how, and a sense of psychological safety that were not always present.

Music was meaningful to participants in multiple, variegated ways as well. Students valued the musical knowledge they gained as a result of participation, including formal knowledge and technical and artistic expertise. Most brought this knowledge to other areas of their musical lives, including their musical listening; some students came to enjoy a broader range of music, and some listened differently as a result of formal and procedural knowledge gained as musical insiders. Students also perceived as meaningful the opportunity to make music they enjoyed. Though the class repertoire itself was meaningful within the ensemble, participants didn't necessarily listen to it outside of class, supporting the notion that music performance is about more than the sounds created.

Students in this study experienced music as both product and process: something found meaningful and a conduit through which to access other

dimensions of meaning. For various participants music offered challenge and facilitated achievement, brought people together and helped to nurture relationships, fostered a sense both of uniqueness and affiliation necessary for an integrated self-identity, and provided a conduit for self-expression and communication. Asked how the music itself fit into his experience, wind ensemble percussionist Ken articulated the notion that music is multidimensional, and meaningful in many variegated ways. “I think it gives us a channel to explore all those different things,” he said, “to make those friendships, to have a sense of accomplishment, to work for something . . . Yeah, I think if nothing else it gives us that avenue to do all these different things. And I think . . .” And here Ken struggled to articulate his thought, “I think the *music* is important, but I can’t really say why exactly.” For some students at least, music may be meaningful in ways that are ineffable.

I have taken the perspective of meaning as multidimensional and examined the various dimensions of what students perceive as meaningful about their participation. The above recapitulation distills these multiple dimensions and shows that for each student, meaning is complex and variable. While this study has benefited from the examination of meaning as a multidimensional construct, students experienced meaning far more holistically, a finding echoed by Countryman (2008) and Sugden (2005). Achievement helped to reinforce identity, which influenced relationships and the ways that people communicated and expressed themselves and so on. The most meaningful experiences and aspects of participation described by students consisted of multiple dimensions.

As guitarist Rick said, “[It’s] just basically what you love about music and how it makes you feel and the people around you that makes it all come together.”

Juxtaposition of the two year-end guitar performances illustrates this idea. At the spring guitar concert, students performed successfully but were not emotionally invested in the results. They didn’t feel they would be heard as individuals—which was important to many of these students—and they enjoyed the music but didn’t feel strongly about it. Some of their peers attended but were not, according to those who spoke with me, especially enthusiastic about the performance either. The performers enjoyed the concert but it was not particularly meaningful. On the other hand Solo Night, a deeply meaningful experience for guitar students who spoke with me, touched upon all of the aforementioned dimensions: it enabled students to achieve something they cared about, in an environment in which they felt supported and among important people, and it enabled them to express themselves and to share music that communicated something about themselves. Solo Night “[made] it all come together” not simply by facilitating a sense of achievement, relationships and so on, but by providing access to these multiple dimensions in *specific* ways that were meaningful to those participants. In the wind ensemble, Ken described a similarly powerful performance experience where close relationships, collective striving and numerous other facets came together through the music to create an experience that brought Cohen to tears and gave him goose bumps.

The case of the jazz band, conversely, demonstrates how overemphasizing one or more dimensions of meaning without attending to other dimensions that

participants value has the potential to diminish the experience. The jazz band members spent considerable time socializing with one another. This strengthened relationships, at least initially, but it also impacted the group's progress to the extent that achievement suffered, as did students' opportunities to express themselves musically and, for some, to identify as capable musicians and band members. One might easily imagine an ensemble that overemphasized achievement to the point that interpersonal relationships or the opportunity for self-expression suffered.

These findings align with the findings of other studies examining participant perceptions of meaning, including the foundational studies of Farrell (1972) and Hylton (1980). Across these investigations, students indicated that they valued variations of these same attributes: achievement and being successful, social and community aspects, the ability to communicate through music, the opportunity to learn more about themselves and who they are, and the chance to learn about and make music. As in other studies, students in the current study perceived multiple dimensions of meaning to be salient parts of their experience.

Students in some studies also valued spiritual aspects of their participation. One potential difficulty with spirituality as a category or dimension of meaning is that it's often not clearly defined, interpreted in different ways by different people, and often connected to religion, though not necessarily so. Only one student in this study, Nancy, specifically mentioned spirituality as an important dimension of the meaningfulness of wind ensemble. That said, some students made substantial emotional investments in their music making,

particularly during performances. Although they didn't interpret their experiences in spiritual terms, those who experienced ecstatic pleasure as a result may have experienced meaning that others would call spiritual.

### **Meanings in Context**

At first glance, the influence of context on meaningful engagement may seem minimal. Dimensions of meaning (the categories of meaning identified by researchers) identified in this and numerous other studies of ensemble participation have related to achievement, relationships, identity, communication, spirituality, and music and have been fairly consistent across different contexts and among different populations. In some respects the categories I discussed in the previous section are nothing new. However, the findings of this study suggest that, to answer my second research question, context plays a substantial role in both the kinds of meanings most salient to participants and in the ways that dimensions of meaning operate for them. As I will illustrate in the following section, context and meaning are inextricably bound.

The dimensions of meaning that participants perceive as *most* salient have differed between studies as well as within those studies that examined meaning among similar populations. For example, Farrell (1972) examined the meanings that adult singers perceived in various kinds of recreational choral ensembles and generated profiles of singer "types." She found a significant association between choral group affiliation and singer type, suggesting that different types of ensembles either attract singers with similar priorities or promote certain meanings for their members. Mills (1988) reached a similar conclusion. He

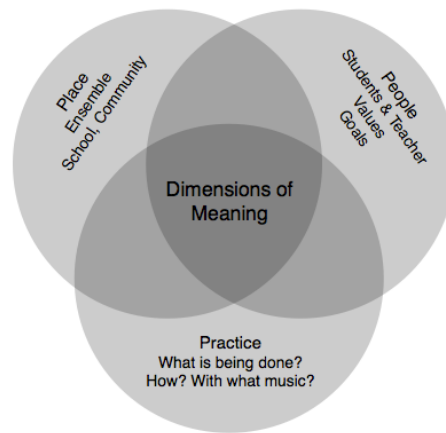
investigated students' perceptions of the meaning of participation in various bands engaged in marching band and non-marching band activities and likewise found that members of different bands emphasized different dimensions of meaning.

Looking across studies that examined meaning within types of music groups but not within individual settings, Hylton (1980) found that achievement was the most meaningful aspect of participation for high school choir members, whereas Sugden (2005), who used Hylton's *Choral Meaning Survey* with junior high school and high school choir members, found the musical-artistic factor to be strongest. Participants in Seago's (1993) study of Baptist church choir members, on the other hand, valued each of the dimensions identified by Hylton (1980) but rated spirituality as the strongest motivation to participate. Motivation and meaning are closely related, and Seago's findings support the notion that what participants derive from an ensemble experience is at least partially shaped by context.

Profiling the various dimensions of meaning that participants perceive as meaningful is not as straightforward as it might initially appear. Though the findings of the aforementioned studies support the notion that different musical groups reinforce different dimensions of meanings for participants, few studies have examined the diversity of these dimensions within each setting. Though common to the three groups studied here, the dimensions of meaning that participants valued most looked and operated very differently within each ensemble, as detailed in Chapters 4-6 and summarized in Chapter 7. *How* students defined achievement, the *ways* that they related to one another, the *kinds*



of music they perceived as most compelling and the reasons why—these and other details were distinct to each ensemble and were shaped not only by the type of group but also by its specific practices and the intentions of its members as well as the teacher (*Figure 13*).



*Figure 13.* Dimensions of meaning situated within contextual elements of place, people, and practice.

In Chapter 2 I identified praxial philosophy as a potentially useful theoretical framework because it takes into account the situatedness and variability of musical meanings. As the study progressed praxial philosophy became more useful than other lenses I considered. To briefly review, in proposing a praxial philosophy of music education, Alperson (1991) suggested that music should be understood “in terms of the variety of meaning and values evidenced in actual practice in particular cultures” (p. 233). Regelski (1996) builds upon this praxial philosophy, stating that that a musical praxis is “a doing” guided by phronesis (practical wisdom) to achieve “right results” for particular situations (p. 24). “Music’s ‘goods,’” Regelski argues, “must be concerned with specific questions involved the situatedness of music-making and use” (p. 25).

He continues, “Situatenedness takes into specific consideration as a part of musical understanding and valuing the specific human context and purposes for which music is produced. Situatedness, then, governs the ‘goods’ sought as the ‘right results’” (p. 26).

Over the course of this study I examined the praxis of each ensemble and talked with participants about how they experienced that praxis. The “right results” studied here are those aspects and experiences perceived as meaningful by the student participants. These “right results” emerged from a praxis influenced by various stakeholders, most immediately the teacher and students but also by school and district administration, parents, and community members, and by special interest groups, government, and other interested members of society (*Figure 14*). Contextual factors outside the classroom thus have the potential to shape what students perceive as meaningful by influencing the praxis of the group.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Though not originally in my thinking, this model turned out to closely resemble Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979).

	People Situated Within Place	Musical Praxis (Guitar, Jazz, Wind Ensemble . . . )	“Right Results”
Societal	Society, Culture	The established practices of the ensemble or music type, outside of and within “school”	Of jazz?
	Citizenry, government, organizations such as NAfME		Of school jazz?
Communal	Community, School	Past ensemble practices (tradition), educational outcomes	Of our school's jazz band?
	School and district administration, parents, other stakeholders		
Local	Music Classroom	Rehearsal procedures, music played, kinds of performances, opportunities for social engagements	Of this year's class/ensemble? For me? For us?
	Students, teacher		

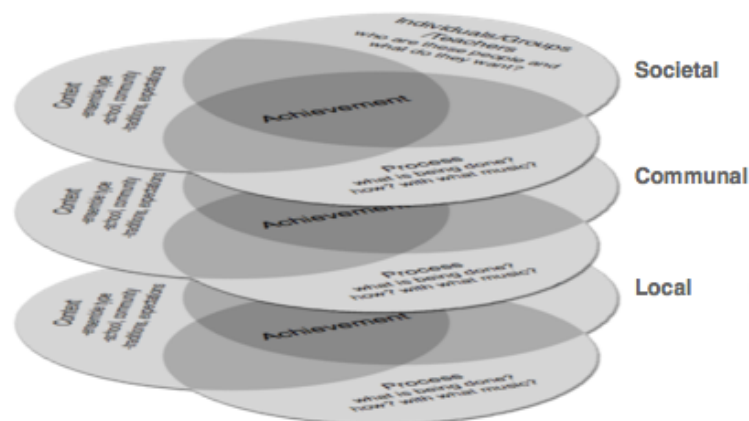
Figure 14. “Right results” as influenced by people, place, and praxis at local, communal, and societal levels.

The praxis of the wind ensemble, for example, was strongly influenced by tradition—by a school “legacy” built over forty years that positioned their group at the pinnacle of Canadian high school wind bands. The legacy was important to members of the community—particularly those who had themselves been members of the MGC band program—and to the school community. The administration devoted considerable resources to keeping the program strong and vibrant and looked for tangible results they could point to within the school community. Although Principal Kjernisted, a musician himself, valued outcomes far beyond festival ratings, the ensemble’s awards did serve as a convenient measure by which to demonstrate the success of the program and the school. A past student member of the wind ensemble, Cohen felt the weight of responsibility to maintain the program’s legacy, even as she worked to keep the students’ goals and best interests at the forefront. The students, hand-picked to

participate in the ensemble, were also keenly aware of the wind ensemble tradition, took pride in being identified with it, and worked to preserve it.

The wind ensemble praxis was also shaped by the conventions of “wind ensemble” held at the societal level. The group performed high-quality, conventional wind ensemble repertoire, both established standards and new compositions. They rehearsed together in a traditional large-ensemble format with Cohen “directing” the rehearsal. Performances, too, were shaped by the conventions of wind ensembles and of school music in general.

The aspects of their participation that wind ensemble members found meaningful—what they held up as markers of their achievement, the kinds of relationships they formed, the ways they identified themselves and communicated with others and so on—were situated not only within a particular context, but within multiple, nested contexts. Notions of “right results” held by stakeholders within the classroom and school, community, and broader society subtly and not-so-subtly shaped how the group operated and what students valued (*Figure 15*).



*Figure 15.* A dimension of meaning (achievement) contextually situated and shaped by local, communal, and societal conceptions of “right results.”

The praxis of the guitar class was strongly influenced by the social and cultural contexts of the students and their teacher. Guitar is ubiquitous in popular music, which is highly valued by many teenagers and played a central role in the lives of students such as Rick, Dale, and Hailey. As Rick said, “Music *is* my life.” Students were highly motivated to acquire the skills needed to play their favorite popular music, and this level of intrinsic motivation shaped the ensemble’s practices in ways that otherwise wouldn’t have been possible.

The guitar class praxis was shaped by other factors. Guitar programs remain relatively uncommon in North American public schools and the model of how a guitar program “should” look is far less concrete than that of jazz band or wind ensemble. Gardner said that when he was first hired to teach guitar in the school division, “I had no clue at all of a guitar program. I’d never heard of one, I’d never seen one, and all of a sudden there I was, in charge of one.” Gardner, who had taken band in school, drew elements of the class practice from other school ensemble models, but also established a new model that fit the needs of his students. School concerts, where the guitarists performed alongside the school’s band members, aligned with a more traditional model but Gardner also established a new model—Solo Night—that better aligned with the popular practices of guitar and students’ interests. This new model became highly meaningful not only to students but also to members of the school community, including parents, friends, and school administration. As Principal Turner told her husband, “It’s something I think you would actually enjoy.”

The jazz band had no strong reputation to maintain or any particular expectations of the principal or school community to respond to. The praxis of the jazz band was most strongly shaped by Daley's conception of the practices of professional jazz musicians. Daley treated the jazz band students as practicing musicians and expected them to work independently. Where the "typical" school jazz band might work toward polished performances and pursue a high rating at festival, Daley instead focused the ensemble praxis on transmitting formal knowledge and helping students to become flexible, independent, and creative musicians. Under the right circumstances this approach might have worked very well and offered an ensemble experience that was both highly beneficial and meaningful. Where the approach broke down, I surmise, is that Daley employed a professional praxis without taking into account the needs, motivations, and abilities of the students. He had, as Sarah phrased it, "high hopes" that the students would operate more as professionals and learn their parts outside of class time, but assumed that all students were intrinsically motivated and had the skills necessary to do so.

To summarize, the praxis of each group was influenced by contextual elements of place, people, practices and expected "right results" at the local, communal, and societal levels. Each praxis emphasized certain dimensions of meaning more strongly than others, and shaped the ways those dimensions functioned for students. But, as detailed in previous chapters, not everyone in each group found the same aspects of participation meaningful, and individuals interpreted various dimensions of meaning differently. I have examined the

situatedness of meaning by examining the praxis of each group; another way to view this phenomenon is through the lens of place philosophy, which focuses on particular contexts within frames of time and experience.

In place philosophy, the concept of “place” refers to a particular space in time, made meaningful by the actions and interactions of people within it. “Places *become* places,” Stauffer (2012) contends, “in the lived experiences and interpretations of people who act and interact within them, and through the human meanings that are associated with them” (p. 436). Informed by place philosophy, an examination of the experiences that people perceive as meaningful situates those experiences within particular spaces, at particular times, as lived and interpreted by specific people.

The musicians in this study experienced their groups within a series of overlapping places. These places were constantly made and remade by the actions and interactions of participants, yet stabilized by iterative practices (Cresswell, 2004) that made up the groups’ praxes. As participants composed their ensembles through iterative practices, the ensembles in turn came to “compose” the musicians, constraining their performances to a repertoire of actions appropriate to each place (Stauffer, 2012, p. 438).

As the range of available actions was constrained, so too was the range of potential meanings. In each group, participants played certain pieces of music and not others, rehearsed in certain ways and not others, socialized at certain times and not others, and thus constructed meaning in similar ways and derived meaning from similar experiences.

Similar, but not the same. Music groups may be socially constructed, but they are individually experienced and understood. Each participant viewed his or her group from a unique position, through the lens of his or her own experiences. What each person perceived as meaningful was likewise distinct. For most participants who spoke with me, these differences were relatively minor. For some participants, especially those who felt most “out of place,” the differences were more substantial.

Bryce, Susan, and Sharon dwelt on the fringes of their respective ensembles and from their vantage points experienced participation differently. Sharon placed far more emphasis on her individual growth as a musician than on the group’s success and Susan and Bryce, who also dwelt on the fringes, perceived making music as part of a group to be more meaningful than other aspects of participation emphasized by their peers. Stauffer cautions that those who don’t conform in ways expected of a particular place may face resistance or discrimination. Did Bryce, Susan, and Sharon dwell on the fringes of their respective groups because they didn’t perform within their groups in expected ways, or did their shyness and reluctance to engage socially lead them to participate in different ways (and thus derive different meanings from the groups) than they otherwise might have? This question requires further study.

### **Toward Principles of Meaning**

When I undertook this study I wondered whether students’ perspectives about meaningful participation might offer insights that could help to shape meaningful experiences for other high school students. The third research



question guiding this study concerns whether participants' perceptions and experiences suggested underlying principles of meaning and value in high school music groups. In the course of this investigation I learned that meaning is situated, variable, and highly complex. Principles of meaning and value are difficult to pin down. The findings of this study, however, suggest two important *conditions* in which meaningful experiences are more likely to occur. These two conditions point to underlying principles and may fuel further investigation.

First, *group music participation is more likely to be meaningful when students are able to achieve in ways that are important to them.* While this may seem obvious, two important ideas are embedded in the statement. For meaning to occur students first need to be *able* to achieve, meaning that they need the skills, knowledge, opportunities, and support necessary to be successful. Again this might seem self-evident, and yet not all jazz band students had the skills and knowledge they needed to play challenging repertoire and to solo effectively, and not all received sufficient support to progress toward those goals. Support from a teacher is important and, as the guitar students demonstrated, peers can also provide a strong support system for learning.

For students to achieve *in ways that are important to them*, it's also necessary for educators to understand what constitutes achievement for students in a particular learning context. As individuals, students may perceive achievement as meaningful when it pertains to goals they have for themselves, as in the case of guitar students who learned to play and perform music they loved. Students may also come to identify with goals held by important others, such as a

music teacher or their peers. Some jazz band students came to value music theory and perceived it as a meaningful source of achievement, while in the wind ensemble new members came to identify with the goals of the other ensemble members and the legacy of the group.

Achievement may also come to be defined by the group, either through praxis (“this is what we do”) or as a specific goal that group members have for their ensemble. Achievement for the wind ensemble students, for example, was a very different thing than achievement for the guitarists. Were the guitarists registered to compete at a high-level festival, or the wind ensemble students asked to prepare their own pieces in small groups, the experience of each group would change substantially and, depending on whether or not the new objectives became important to students, the experience could become more or less meaningful and would certainly be meaningful in different ways.

As demonstrated in the three cases, providing students with choice—in repertoire, in performance goals, in ways to rehearse—may increase the likelihood that students will achieve in ways meaningful to them. Opportunities for choice, too, were variegated in each group studied here, and were not always direct. The guitarists chose their own performance groupings and arranged music for themselves, and both the guitar and wind ensemble students had regular opportunities to select repertoire and make performance decisions. The jazz students had fewer direct opportunities to make significant musical and procedural choices, but made creative choices in designing solos for themselves.

Most importantly, in order to achieve in ways that are not simply pleasant or superficially “fun” but truly *meaningful to them*, students must be emotionally invested. They need to truly care about the results of their efforts and be willing to risk disappointment. In this study, students who committed their emotional energy to meeting their goals found their accomplishments satisfying. When students doubted their ability to succeed in ways that they valued, they hedged their emotional investment in the outcome. They described their participation as “fun” but did not indicate that they found it satisfying, sustaining, or meaningful.

Achievement statements included in Hylton’s (1980) *Choral Meaning Survey* include, “To work together to achieve a goal,” “To contribute to a group effort,” and “To have the excitement and thrill of presenting concerts” (pp. 69-70). These statements represent a particular conception of achievement that may not hold true for all participants, or characterize achievement in all contexts. The three cases studied here demonstrate the need to question assumptions that achievement looks a particular way, looks how we expect it to look, or looks the same way for everyone. Being responsive to student feedback and open to alternative possibilities can help students to achieve in ways that are meaningful to them.

Second, group music participation is more likely to be meaningful when it takes place in an environment that is safe, supportive, and that facilitates connections among its members. Group music making is, by definition, a social engagement. Bowman observes, “As a fundamentally social creature, the human animal finds in musical experiences numerous and diverse means of creating,

sharing, and communicating meanings” (2002, p. 58). Even when working independently, musicians and the music they make are socially embedded. In the more individualistic guitar class, participants worked together, learned from each other, and performed together in various groupings. Making music in a group context, large or small, was, in these cases, most effective when students felt safe, supported, and connected to their peers.

When students felt psychologically safe they were able to push themselves as musicians and grew as a result. The wind ensemble musicians were willing to tackle more difficult music and the guitarists challenged themselves to learn new skills and to perform in situations where they would be exposed. Students who felt able to undertake challenges that involved some risk also perceived the resulting achievements to be more meaningful. As percussionist Ken said, “It’s that sense of, ‘Yeah, we went for it [and] we did it!’” Those who did not feel psychologically safe in their ensemble environments were less able to engage fully as musicians, and less able to access various dimension of meaning as a result.

Risks in group music making are not only musical. Particularly for adolescents in school settings, simply being one’s self constitutes a risk. Students performed and learned better in safe, supportive, and connected ensemble environments. They found their groups most meaningful when they served as places in school where they could be themselves and as communities in which they felt they belonged.

## **Meaning and Music Education**

I began this investigation by examining existing arguments within the field of music education regarding what was meaningful *for* music students, and suggested that we examine more closely what is meaningful *to* students. This study contributes to that project by examining meaningful participation from the perspectives of high school music students. It provides a nuanced description of the dimensions of meaning experienced by participants within and across the three groups.

In the following section I will consider four implications of this study. I will first consider the place of meaning in education and how this study might inform our thinking. Second, I will discuss the role of teachers in facilitating meaningful experiences. Third, I will consider the implications of language we use to talk about school music and meaning. Finally, I will discuss the implications of this study for praxis and will pose questions for consideration.

### **The Place(s) of Meaning in Education**

At the core, what students perceived as meaningful had to do with fundamental human concerns: feeling a sense of competence and personal agency, finding a place and connecting with others, discovering and expressing one's uniqueness, finding common ground and experiencing communion with others or with a higher power. These issues are of key importance to adolescents and are central to human experience. Through their participation in music groups, students engaged in experiences fundamental not just to their education as musicians, but to their education as whole beings.

The primary finding of this study is: that which is meaningful *to* students *is* meaningful for them. Meaningful experience is not incidental, however. It requires time, commitment, and emotional investment. “One swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day” Aristotle famously contended (*Nicomachean Ethics*, i, 7) or as Durant summarized, “We are what we repeatedly do” (1926, p. 98). Engaging regularly in musical experiences that address these fundamental human concerns—achievement, relationships, identity, expression and communication—may form habits of mind and behavior that will continue into the future, regardless of whether or not graduates continue to participate in group music-making. “What endures?” is an important question in education. This study points to these important facets of human life.

Other researchers have explored these ideas. Arasi (2006) studied the influence of school choral participation on the adult lives of former participants who did not go into music professionally. She found that multiple aspects endured, including social benefits and a sense of pride and achievement at having belonged to “something great” (p. 192). Arasi cautions us not to dismiss the significance of those feelings regardless of whether or not they are recaptured in future music making.

School music experiences have the potential to be meaningful, both to students and for the project of education. In order to be effective, however, music experiences need to resonate with the particular students engaged therein. Not just any achievement will do, nor will any means of expression satisfy. There is no formula for matching the praxis of the group to the needs of the students at a

particular place and time. Each has an effect on the other; each can shape and be shaped by the other. Creating meaningful experiences is at best a negotiation between numerous interests, possible practices, and *potential* “right results.”

### **Teacher Influence**

Graue and Walsh (1998) observe, “One difficulty that people who work with children have when they begin to study children is that they focus on the adults’ actions toward children; what was intended to be a study of children becomes an evaluation of adults’ interactions with children” (p. xvii). The purpose of this study was to investigate students and their meanings, and I have deliberately focused on the students in this analysis. That said, teachers play a key role in helping to facilitate meaningful experiences and I will briefly address their influences here.

Dillon (1999) refers to teachers as “builders” of music learning contexts. He notes, “Teachers actively interpret a curriculum, create the psychological environment and structure and interpret the physical environment so that it is designed to facilitate learning.” Teachers have tremendous power to influence the ways that students engage with music and each other, and to shape what they may come to perceive as meaningful about their participation. This power should not be taken lightly.

Seago (1993) came to a similar conclusion regarding how choir teachers shape learning contexts to facilitate student engagement. She found that, concurrent with achievement, participants were motivated by opportunities for social engagement, skill development, performance challenges and a positive

psychological environment. Like Seago, I suggest that by creating an environment where achievement occurs in a positive, productive learning environment and in which students can engage socially in and/or outside of rehearsals, teachers “build” learning contexts where meaningful experiences are more likely to occur.

Teachers may also influence what students perceive as meaningful through the values they explicitly and tacitly communicate and the vision they have for the group. When Dale joined the guitar class, for example, he had little interest in learning classical technique or in the repertoire played as a class. Over time, however, Dale came to resonate with values advanced by Gardner and shared by other group members. He valued the technique he learned in class and came to enjoy a much broader range of music.

Some jazz band members had a similar experience with theory. Though few students initially cared for the theory challenges presented in class, Daley persisted. In time, some students came to value theory for what it contributed to their engagements with music and for the feelings of achievement that solving theory problems could bring.

Daley was aware of his potential to influence students’ goals and values, but was perhaps not aware that his influence could be misused. “I like to think I’m fairly passionate about what we’re doing when we’re making music,” he explained. “Some [students] see it means a lot to me so they say, ‘This should mean a lot to me as well.’” He paused and added, “Other [students] don’t get that.” Daley’s observation is problematic; not all students will resonate with the



values of their teachers or their peers, nor should they be expected to. Meaning, as participants have demonstrated, is contextually situated but individual and teachers should be conscious of their influence and careful to provide room for alternate perspectives.

### **Language and Meaning**

I initially titled this investigation “Student Perceptions of Meaning in Instrumental Ensembles” and set out to determine what ensemble members found most meaningful about their participation. In the process of conducting this study I have become more conscious of my language and its implications. Two phrases in particular have become increasingly problematic, and I have minimized their use in this chapter.

First, I have become more sensitized to the question, “What do students find meaningful?” The word “find” suggests that students are passive recipients of meaningful experience—that they happen upon meaning—rather than active makers and interpreters of meaning. No experience can be meaningful to someone unless they perceive it as such. Teachers can shape praxis in order to create conditions conducive to meaning, but perception is in the hands and the minds of individual students. Kraus (2003) reached a similar conclusion in his study of flow experiences in a university wind ensemble. He found that while certain conditions might make flow experiences more likely, flow was ultimately dependent on the mindset of individuals.

I have also moved away from the term “ensemble members.” The most obvious problem with referring to the participants in this study as “ensemble

members” is that not all students saw themselves that way. For example, the guitar students identified strongly with the C slot class and even more strongly with the guitar program as a whole, but they rehearsed in many different groupings and performed with students in their own class and in other classes. Guitar, for these students, was less defined and far more fluid than either the jazz band or wind ensemble. The word “ensemble” implies a certain kind of structure, one that does not accurately reflect the experiences of all participants.

A second problem with referring to participants in this study as “ensemble members” is that it places focus on the ensemble rather than on individuals and their experiences. Conceptually, ensemble members are parts of a whole. Being part of a whole can be highly positive, as numerous students indicated. Some students much preferred to be part of a whole and didn’t *want* to stand out. However, this was not the only way of being. Referring to students as ensemble members is therefore somewhat antithetical to the spirit of this study. The student participants were individual musicians with nuanced ways of understanding and individual preferences even within the same context.

The use of “ensemble members” to refer to students is emblematic of a larger concern. As practitioners and scholars we often conceptualize ensembles as single entities (e. g. “my senior choir,” “the Maple Grove wind ensemble”) belonging to categories (e. g. “band,” “high school guitar,” “mariachi”). There is nothing inherently wrong with thinking this way; classification is efficient and often necessary. In doing so however, it’s important to recognize that we lose sight of detail that may be critical to making sound and ethical decisions.

Thinking in categories, all bands, all choirs, all drum circles begin to look the same; we lose sight of the tremendous variegation of each group. In thinking of ensembles as single entities and students as ensemble members—as spokes in the wheel—we risk losing sight of the individuals who compose each group, and the distinctness of their experiences. In both cases, we may make decisions based on incomplete information and inaccurate assumptions. To be effective, we need to be able to shift our focus between these three perspectives: the category, the particular group, and individual students.

### **Suggestions for Practice**

Kratus (2007) argued that educators should find ways to make education “potent and irresistible” to students, and suggested possible alternatives to band, choir, and orchestra (p. 46). I agree that school music offerings have not, thus far, reflected the diversity of musics in our culture or the kinds of music of interest to many adolescents. Tailoring course offerings to the needs and interests of the students in a given school and community may increase the likelihood that students will enroll and that they will invest emotionally in their success. Appealing courses offer no guarantee of meaningful experiences, however, nor do courses need to have “curb appeal” to become meaningful to students. As Gardner observed, “Kids talk, and if quality experiences are happening then the word will spread.”

The findings of this study suggest that a different orientation to school music may be fruitful. Earlier in this chapter I suggested that we may focus on the group to the extent that we lose sight of the individuals. We may concern

ourselves with creating a version of the ideal ensemble, one that reflects the “right results” communicated by stakeholders at the societal or communal levels, such that we lose sight of, or worse compromise, the quality of students’ experiences. Rather than focus our attention on specific types of ensembles, then, we might instead focus on the students who we wish to serve and on creating contexts that facilitate meaning in multiple, variegated ways. This may prompt us to offer different courses with different praxes, as Kratus suggests. It may also require us to approach current offerings differently, to ask different questions, and make different decisions as we proceed. In both cases, placing increased focus on students and the quality of their experiences involves being less rigid and less formulaic about the ways that music groups look and operate, and more focused on the humans in the ensemble.

The guitar class offers one example of a musical group less rigidly bound to the ensemble model of music education. The structure of the guitar class was fluid, and the pedagogy highly differentiated and responsive to the needs of the students therein. The Musical Futures project in the United Kingdom is another model of music education that focuses on the quality of experience for individual students. Shifting focus from the ensemble to the experiences of students may free educators to reinvent old praxes or to invent new ones, and may help to revitalize music education.

Regardless of how we proceed, school music offerings ought to meet the two conditions for meaning identified earlier in this chapter: they should provide opportunities to be successful in ways that are meaningful *to the students in the*

*group*, and they should take place within a safe, supportive, and connected community. Those two conditions are a moving target and require a responsive and reflexive teacher.

### **Whither Meaning?**

In our last conversation together, after the school year had ended and the graduating wind ensemble students had said their goodbyes, I asked Cohen about the students who go on to major in music. “They do well,” she told me. “They say it’s different. They’re more sold on the group and the relationship than anything else, and they have to lose that when they leave.” She took a sip of her coffee and continued, “They think they’re going to still hang out at the Faculty [of Music] and have it still be the same people and the same feelings and it’s not necessarily so. That’s when you find out if the music was really their passion, or the group.”

The results of this study suggest that the group *was* a substantial part of the music. The sounds may have been meaningful, but that meaning was embedded in a social context. Upon leaving, students may continue to find wind ensemble music meaningful in other ways specific to other contexts but they will never encounter that particular group, in that place, again.

This is worth considering from perspectives both pedagogical and personal. How might educators help students to carry forward what has been gained, both musically and personally, through their participation? What curricular and pedagogical decisions might teachers make to ensure that musical experiences in school extend beyond a transitory ensemble? And, if the

experience of participating in a musical group has been powerful, how might teachers help students to recognize and process their emotions as that experience comes to an end? Cognizant of the investment that some students have made and recognizing all that they stand to lose upon leaving their school music groups, what responsibility do teachers have to facilitate transition?

Facilitating the transition to life after high school may mean helping students to consider opportunities for music making and music listening in their future lives. It may also involve helping students to bridge in-school and out-of-school music participation well before graduation. The guitar students were likely to go on making music after graduation because their musical practices *already* extended beyond the boundaries of the guitar room and their identities as musical people existed independently of the class. How music experiences in school might connect to meaningful experiences beyond the boundaries of school—physically and temporally—is an area for further investigation.

In this study, music was about far more than sound and practice, and what might endure after graduation for these students, and potentially for others, is not limited to musical engagement in other contexts. The experiences that students in this study valued most related to fundamental human concerns. Focusing on transition, then, should also entail making conscious *these* “right results” and showing how they might continue throughout life in ways musical *and* non-musical.

Students’ meaningful experiences related to achievement, relationship, identity, expression and communication and music. To be conducive to these

kinds of meaningful experiences, school music groups should enable students to achieve in ways that are important to them within learning environments where they feel safe, supported and connected. For teachers, this requires asking questions that extend beyond the standard (and important) question: “Are all students in my group achieving success?” It also involves asking questions such as: “Are students achieving in ways that matter to them?” “Are they forming positive relationships and if not, what can I do to help?” “Do they have opportunities to be seen and heard, both when making music and within the social environment of our group?” “Do they feel they belong here, and that they are part of something good?” “Do they have opportunities to express themselves and communicate with others, and do they have the skills and knowledge necessary to do so?” “Are they connecting in some way with the music we’re making, and do they have opportunities for choice?” And finally, “What are *these* students telling me explicitly and implicitly about the experiences they find meaningful, and how am I responding?” These questions are responsible, ethically grounded, and may extend far beyond performance goals to make a significant difference in students’ lives.

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APPENDIX A  
SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your musical history.
  - a. When did you start being involved in music?
  - b. What are your earliest musical memories?
  - c. When did you start participating in school music?
  - d. Tell me about the first music ensemble that you were in that you really loved being a part of. What made you love it?
  - e. What ensembles are you in?
  - f. Which ensemble is your favorite group, and why?
  - g. How do music classes compare to your other classes? In what ways are they different?
  
2. Tell me more about participation in your favorite high school music ensemble.
  - a. Why did you decide to join the ensemble?
  - b. What is it like to be a student in the ensemble?
  - c. What do you like best about being in this ensemble?
  - d. What do you dislike about being in this ensemble?
  - e. How would you make this ensemble better if you could?
  - f. What kind of music do you play?
  - g. What is your favorite kind of music to play, and why?
  
3. Tell me about the other players in your favorite ensemble.
  - a. Who is in the ensemble?
  - b. Do you have friends in this group?
  - c. Are there any people you didn't get along with?
  - d. Do you think it's important that people in the band are close to each other? Why or why not?
  
4. Tell me about your ensemble director.
  - a. What is she/he like as a person?
  - b. What is she/he like as a teacher?
  - c. What methods does she/he use to teach?
  - d. What is it like to be in her/his class?
  
5. Talk about what is important in your (favorite) ensemble.
  - a. Is there an ensemble ethic communicated? How?
  - b. What do you think is most important to your director? How do you know?
  - c. What do you think is most important to the other players? How do you know?
  - d. What is most important to you? Why?
  - e. Do you think other people should be in the ensemble? Why/why not?

6. Tell me about what being in the ensemble feels like.
  - a. What are your most positive memories of being in the ensemble so far?
  - b. Do you recall any experiences that changed you or changed how you see things?
  - c. Do you recall any experiences in the ensemble that were particularly emotional? Tell me about that.
  
7. Tell me about your perceptions of the value of this ensemble.
  - a. If I told you that this ensemble was no longer going to exist, how would you react? Why?
  - b. Have you ever been in a school music ensemble that was not very meaningful to you? Tell me about it.
  - c. How does that ensemble compare to this one?
  - d. What, if anything, does being in this ensemble bring to your life?
  - e. What single part of being in this ensemble would you never want to give up? Are there other parts that you would never want to give up?

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE ENSEMBLE DIRECTOR QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your musical history.
  - a. When did you start being involved in music?
  - b. What are your earliest musical memories?
  - c. When did you start participating in school music?
  - d. Tell me about the first music ensemble that you were in that you really loved being a part of. What made you love it?
  - e. What ensembles are you in?
  - f. Which ensemble is your favorite group, and why?
  - g. How do music classes compare to your other classes? In what ways are they different?
  
2. Tell me about your ensemble director.
  - a. What was she/he like as a person?
  - b. What was she/he like as a teacher?
  - c. What methods would she/he use to teach?
  - d. What was it like to be in her/his class?
  
3. Tell me about your memories of what being in your ensemble *felt* like.
  - a. What are your most positive memories of being in band?
  - b. Do you recall any experiences that changed you or changed the way you saw things?
  - c. Describe the experiences in band that meant the most to you.
  
4. Talk about what is important to you and your ensemble.
  - a. Do you communicate an ensemble ethic? How?
  - b. What is most important to you?
  - c. What do you think is most important to the other players? How do you know?
  - d. What do you think is most meaningful about participation in this ensemble?
  - e. What do you think your students would find most meaningful about being in this ensemble?
  
5. Tell me about your goals as a music director.
  - a. What is it that you want to teach others?
  - b. What experiences do you hope you can give your students?
  - c. What do you want your band to be like?
  - d. How do you plan to create the band you envision?
  - e. How do you choose repertoire, and for what purposes?

APPENDIX C  
INITIAL MEANING SURVEY

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_\_ Male / Female (circle one)

What instrument do you play in this ensemble?

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List any other instruments you play, and/or music activities you participate in:

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Do you take private music lessons? Yes No

If yes, on what instrument, and for how many years? \_\_\_\_\_

What kind of music do you like to listen to in your free time? Name some music that you absolutely love:

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Why did you decide to participate in this ensemble this year?

---

Describe the part(s) of being in this ensemble that is/are most important to you:

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---

Describe the parts of being in this ensemble that are *least* important to you:

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Tell me about the music that you play in this ensemble. How do you feel about the music you play? Explain.

---

Tell me about the other people who play in this ensemble. How do you feel about the other people in this group? Explain.

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Tell me about the director of this ensemble. What difference does the director make to this ensemble? Explain.

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What, if anything, do you value the most about being in this ensemble?

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Briefly describe the most meaningful experiences you've had in this ensemble.

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Is there anything else I should know about you and/or this ensemble?

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APPENDIX D  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



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Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

**To:** Sandra Stauffer  
MUSIC

**From:** Mark Roosa, Chair *SM*  
Soc Beh IRB

**Date:** 10/26/2009

**Committee Action:** Expedited Approval

**Approval Date:** 10/26/2009

**Review Type:** Expedited F7

**IRB Protocol #:** 0910004456

**Study Title:** Perceptions of Meaning and Meaningfulness Among School Music Ensemble Participants

**Expiration Date:** 10/25/2010

The above-referenced protocol was approved following expedited review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without approval by the Institutional Review Board.

**Adverse Reactions:** If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

**Amendments:** If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.