TOWARD MEANINGFUL MUSIC EDUCATION IN THE MIDDLE SCHOOL MUSIC CLASSROOM: AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Cade McNaughton Bonar
Master of Education
(Queensland University of Technology)
Bachelor of Music (Distinction)/Bachelor of Education (Honours)
(Queensland University of Technology)

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ABSTRACT

Music commands a significant presence in the lives of young adolescents. Earphones ‘housed’ in the adolescent ear are near accessories to everyday life, and smartphones and other portable devices – and the streaming of content they allow access to – afford the opportunity for music to be consumed anywhere at any time. Furthermore, emerging technologies are enabling greater accessibility to music making and production. Students can learn, create and share music using digital technologies alone. Whether it is consumed or produced, music is firmly cemented in adolescent life – it affords a medium for the construction and identification of ‘self’ and the expression of emotion – and is a significant part of the adolescent ‘Being’ (Lines, 2005a).

Despite the significant role of music in the lives of adolescents, school music often fails to demand the same attention. It can present a crisis of relevance for the students it proclaims to serve, with student expectations of music and musical experiences offered often existing at considerable remove (Regelski, 2005a; Lines, 2005a; Swanwick, 1999b). This problem is not new – over three decades ago, Paynter (1982) observed that, “music which, outside of school, almost continuously goes in and out of young people’s heads – which stirs their feelings and activates their bodies, becomes when presented – or as presented – inside schools, a ‘dead bore’” (p. vii). For many students, school music education is perceived as unhelpful, irrelevant, even detrimental, to their musical selves.

This project used an action research methodology to examine the ways in which I could address this divide and increase engagement in meaningful music learning in my classroom. The study involved one of my Year 8 Music classes, and focused in on my practice in relation to the provision of meaningful musical experiences. The Zuber-Skerritt (2009) action research design guided the project, and four cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting comprised our journey of searching for better educative interactions. Throughout the project the students acted as co-researchers; together we engaged in a symmetrical dialogue that honoured the democratic and collaborative nature of action research.

Together we uncovered five pedagogical conditions – a) centrality of praxis; b) student agency; c) authenticity of interactions with music; d) fluency with music as a discourse; and, e) the social construct surrounding music learning – that I needed to consider and embrace in my practice in order to promote experiences that were more meaningful for the students involved in
the project. These conditions are flexible and inclusive and offer a basis for practice as well as a model for planning and reflection. Further, the project demonstrated the transformative power of action research for the author, the students, and the context, and contributes a model for teachers to engage in their own research to enhance critical thought and to inform the action of their own classrooms.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY
This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed: ________________________________ October, 2016

Cade McNaughton Bonar
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I would also like to extend my deepest appreciation to the late Dr Steven Dillon (1953-2012). I was fortunate enough to learn from Steve during my undergraduate study at QUT, and his influence continues to challenge my views on music education. Steve was ahead of his time with regards to what effective music education should encompass, and I hope this project paves a small part of the way toward me catching up with his vision. He continues to live on through his passionate contributions to the field.
To my beautiful wife, Emily, I have been balancing many things over the past few years and I am indebted to you for giving me the encouragement and strength to continue, and for reminding me why I started. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your continued support and patience as I negotiated this project and our life together. I know that this has been a long and arduous journey for you as much as it has me, and I want you to know that I thought of you and drew from your encouragement every moment I was locked away in my office or down in Brisbane. I couldn’t have done any of this without you. I love you.

To my intelligent daughter, Milly, this journey started before you were born, and I am glad that you shared in part of it with me. I enjoyed your company around the computer at home and all of the little drawings and notes you contributed to my desk, whiteboard and pages of notes. They kept me going and I will treasure them forever. I have attached one you drew below when I was only days away from finishing – I know you were as excited as I was.

I have learnt a great deal from you as I watched and listened to you explore your new world and your language as you grew. This deeply influenced my own thinking on the development of our own musical languages and has confirmed the central importance of praxis and experience in learning. I hope this work somehow contributes to making music education something that provides you experiences that will enrich your life for many years to come. I love you.

Lastly, but by no means least, I wish to express my sincerest of thanks to each of the 25 students who embarked on this project with me. I thank them for letting me become a student again and learn from and with them in our classes. Their willingness to participate in the project was greatly welcomed and I am indebted to them for their enthusiasm and commitment towards making our classroom one in which more meaningful music education occurred.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my grandfather, Thomas Clifford Lawrence (1924 – 1995). As a young boy I fondly remember sitting with him at his piano where together we made the sounds of ‘breaking clay pots’ and ‘sinister thunderstorms’. Through this he planted the seeds of my lifelong engagement with music – which has been nurtured by other influential musicians and teachers – resulting in the continued flowering of my passion for music and music education. He was my first and most influential teacher.

I wish I could have shared this journey with you.
PRELUDE

“All we did was sing boring songs and learn about Bach,” was a comment from new Year 8 student, Liam, when I approached him about what he did in classroom music at his last school (researcher journal, 4 February, 2011). This discussion was prompted by Liam’s sudden disengagement from the lesson, overtly and somewhat defiantly signalled by him packing his books away long before it was time to move to the next class. It appeared that he had been significantly challenged by the task he had been set – he grew increasingly frustrated, and then gave up. New to the school, Liam’s past experiences of music education did not appear to be enjoyed or engaging. His comments relating to the singing of “boring songs” and learning about Bach, did not only suggest that school music education held little significance or meaning for him, he clearly stated he “hated it” (ibid.). Liam’s past experiences of school music appeared to be based on factual knowledge – knowledge about music – rather than, as Swanwick (1999b) identifies, knowledge of music gained through experience with it. Throughout this discussion, it became clear that in his previous school context, Liam was provided with little opportunity to construct knowledge of music.

Though Liam “hated” school music, it became evident that he did not feel the same way about the music he engaged with – his music. There existed a stark contrast between the values he associated between ‘school music’ and ‘out-of-school music.’ Liam told me he “strummed a few chords on guitar” and wanted to know how to play more (researcher journal, 4 February, 2011). He also mentioned that he wanted to experiment with his own music and to “be left alone to work it out my own way, or my friends’ ways” (ibid.). He powerfully asserted that school music had little to offer him by way of making him ‘musical’. His comments highlighted the manner in which many forms of informal music learning (often in the context of popular music) are often more authentically approached and therefore more engaging to young adolescents. Liam’s familiarity with music was largely through informal experience. Through these informal experiences Liam did know quite a lot of music. Despite this, he felt limited and not musical – in his words, “I couldn’t play anything my teacher wanted [me to play]” (ibid.) – with the few performance opportunities provided to him not acknowledging his music or way of learning.

Unfortunately, Liam’s case is not an isolated one. I affirmed that the class would be involved in plenty of ‘hands-on music-making’ over the year. This focused me to ensure that I

1 Pseudonyms are used when discussing student comments and actions throughout the thesis.
made every effort to hold true to this promise. I felt more determined to focus on providing a meaningful music education for the class. What would my classroom be like for Liam? This rich and timely experience validated my research ideas; it encouraged me to continue to seek out these ‘conversations’ and endeavour to work with such young people towards an answer. Music is often a significant influence upon adolescent identity; therefore, it is one subject in which it may be easier to ‘engage’ students, though it often doesn’t. What are we doing wrong for the likes of Liam? According to Liam, music shouldn’t be subject to rigorous analysis and theory – “all the boring notes and stuff … I don’t need to know that to play guitar” – rather he wishes to be immersed in it, “make it and play it” (researcher journal, 4 February, 2011). How do we successfully integrate practical and theoretical experiences – ones that inform each another and promote the continued growth of knowledge? How do we get this balance right? How can we better engage students in school music education? This project investigates these questions.
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

It is impossible for anyone who is receptive to the influence of art to rate it too highly as a source of pleasure and consolation in life.

(Sigmund Freud, *Civilisation and its Discontents*)

For many young adolescents, music is ‘infused’ with a sense of self. Lines (2005) argues that music is interleaved with the “adolescent ‘Being’... it pervades many aspects of the adolescent self” (p. 1). As one of my students once straightforwardly put it, “music is my life” (personal conversation). For this student, and countless others like her, music provides both pleasure and consolation – joy and escape – and is something that is greatly valued. Music can noticeably influence and assist young adolescents to articulate their physical and emotional ‘selves’. Gracyk (2004) argues, “music is exceptionally suited to serve as a tangible model for making sense of both self and self-identity” (¶ 14). Campbell, Connell and Beegle (2007) state that music provides adolescents with a “medium through which to construct, negotiate, and modify aspects of their personal and group identities, offering a range of strategies for knowing themselves and connecting with others” (p. 221). I see music used in this way each day in my classroom, the rehearsal room, the practice studio, as well as the schoolyard and other classrooms. I am aware of many of my students making music in ‘garage bands’, community orchestras, as singer/songwriters, and creating music using a variety of software packages. Some learn from each other, some from band directors, some via web-based technologies; they access, make and share music over the internet – and in all these cases, music is highly valued. These students talk passionately about these experiences and how much they mean to them. What then are the implications for school music?

As a secondary school music teacher I have noticed an increasingly defined difference between the values young adolescents place upon music at school and music outside school. My interaction with students and music teachers reveals a common theme: many students see school music as incongruous to their accounts of valuable musical engagement. This is not limited to my context. Colleagues share similar stories, and there is growing body of research literature showing that this theme is one of international concern (Durrant, 2001; Lamont & Maton, 2008;
Lamont, Hargreaves, Marshall & Tarrant, 2003; Lines, 2005; Lowe, 2010; Regelski, 2005a; Ross, 1995). The student voice is increasingly coming to the fore through such research. In an interview by Durrant (2001), UK school leaver Andrew stated:

‘I gave up music at school when I was thirteen; there didn’t seem any point to it. It just didn’t bear any relation to the music I was interested in. I played and listened to music outside school. The teacher didn’t care about my music. I was there with my mates drumming and mixing but it was totally unrelated to music at school. So I gave it up at thirteen.’ (p. 1)

Similarly, a monologue by UK high school student Danny (now a professional musician), outlined by Odam (1996), provides insight into his perceptions of his school music education:

‘The first three years of my secondary schooling (11-14) were of no use. I used to think “What am I learning? This isn’t really useful”. It was too geared towards classical music and was quite boring…” (p. 185)

According to Andrew and Danny, school music failed to provide significance and add value to their musical lives. Their accounts highlight that school music focused on practices and styles that appeared incongruous to their music and ways of constructing musical meaning. For them, school music was a closed system that failed to connect with ideas and events in the wider world (Swanwick, 1999b). Such accounts are widespread – evidenced anecdotally and within an increasing body of research literature – and provide a catalyst for student disengagement from school music education.

The problem of student disengagement is not new; school music has housed such discontent for some time. In the 1970s, the problematic nature of school music became evident. Applebaum (1972) noted that the then pedagogies of school music education saw teachers engage “in a destructive process of rapidly narrowing opinions rather than a creative process of expanding horizons” (p. 44). In the 1980s, Paynter (1982) further identified the problem of school music, when he stated: “music which, outside of school, almost continuously goes in and out of young people’s heads – which stirs their feelings and activates their bodies, becomes when presented – or as presented – inside schools, a ‘dead bore’” (p. vii). This concern continued into the 1990s, with Swanwick (1999b) adding, “music education is not problematic until it surfaces in schools and colleges, until it becomes formalised, institutionalised” (p. 37). In the following decade, Regelski (2005a) observed this increasing problem, stating:

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2 This list is by no means exhaustive, but identifies key literature centered on practice.
3 The name Andrew is a pseudonym (attributed by Durrant, 2001).
4 Danny is also a pseudonym (attributed by Odam, 1996).
the important praxial role of music in students’ lives outside of school – especially as they approach adolescence – the structure-of-the-discipline approach to curriculum becomes a sure-fire recipe not just for failure to promote relevant learning, but also promoting alienation. The praxis of music, otherwise so relevant to their existential Being, gets reduced to a mere ‘academic subject’! (p. 14)

The formalisation of music in schools has created a crisis of relevance for many young adolescents today (Lines, 2005a; Regelski, 2005a). Despite these long-standing warnings and voiced discontent, the contribution of school music education to many young adolescents remains negligible, even negative.

The Australian context is not exempt from this crisis. In 2005, the National Review of School Music Education (NRSME) (Pascoe et al., 2005) reported that school music education was “approaching a state of crisis” (p. 2). The NRSME unapologetically defined “lack of quality provision” as one of the main reasons students miss out on effective music education, and demanded prompt action to rescue music from a “critical point” (p. v). A second stage of the NRSME was implemented in 2006 through the National Music Workshop, which sought to “develop a series of creative, actionable responses to the issues raised in the NRSME” (Australian Music Association, 2006, p. 2). However, the recommendations made in Making the Progression: Report of the National Music Workshop (Australian Music Association, 2006), have failed to materialise and evoke change in music classrooms. Despite the prominence and weighty claims of the NRSME, there appears little change in music education since. Subsequent studies by Lowe (2007, 2008, 2010) from a Western Australian perspective, and Hartwig (2009) from a Queensland perspective, continue to describe an impending state of crisis for school music education unless well-informed action is taken.

As Swanwick (1999b) notes, school music can create a musical subculture unrelated to any other. Students value music highly, but as much of the literature shows this is not often the case for school music. Despite the prominence of music in the lives of young adolescents with whom I work, I see increasing evidence of Swanwick’s observation in my classroom. Despite being cognisant of this and endeavouring to address this through practice, I still often come across instances in which my classroom practice does not fully acknowledge a wider definition of musicality. I do not sense that my own students hate school music, they mostly enjoy it – playing it, listening to it, singing along with it, making it – but I do think that the subject only genuinely appeals to a select few. If music holds a deep and significant place in many young adolescents’ lives, then why are post-compulsory Music classrooms not bursting at the seams? What is wrong with Year 8 Music? How can my practices cater for all of my students – their
interests and their diversities? It is within this background context and with these questions that I embark on this action research project.

**Focusing the Research**

The disengagement of students from school music is generally most pronounced in the middle years of schooling\(^5\) (Durrant, 2001; Lamont, Hargreaves, Marshall & Tarrant, 2003). It is at this stage that contrasts in musical understanding and ability between students are most pronounced. As Year 8 Music is the final year of compulsory music education in Queensland, such division in understanding and ability can mark the end of engagement for students at both ends of the spectrum. The Year 8 Music classroom often presents one of the most challenging environments to position effective learning and teaching, and alongside the significant presence of music in the lives of young adolescents, it offers a rich and value-laden context for me to explore practices and pedagogies that address disengagement.

At the introduction of music as a subject in Queensland schools, pedagogies sat defined within the framework of music education as aesthetic education, largely influenced by the content and pedagogies of the Western classical tradition (Hartwig, 2009). This was relatively unproblematic until such content and the pedagogical practices associated with them were challenged by the inclusion of ‘popular music’ in the 1970s, and ‘ethnic music’\(^6\) in the 1980s (Vulliamy & Lee, 1976; Vulliamy & Lee, 1982). The acceptance of these styles broadened the scope of music education in schools, though not without considerable challenges to existing pedagogies. Music education remained defined by historical and aesthetic bias (Applebaum, 1972). The imposition of Western classical music pedagogies upon the teaching of popular and world musics saw them analysed and practised according to aesthetic principles, which served to often awkwardly remove them from the context that made them meaningful. Popular and world music styles\(^7\) demanded to be engaged with first-hand; as a result, a practice-based (praxial) approach to music education that better acknowledged and reflected musical context and intent emerged (Elliott, 1995). This presented new approaches to pedagogy, at times conflicting with the philosophy and emanating practice of the aesthetic tradition. Today, the vast array of musical styles and the many ways of accessing and engaging with music have seen these pedagogical tensions further challenged, and have heralded a wealth of intermediate pedagogies.

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\(^5\) In most Australian contexts this is Year 7 – 9 (students generally between 11 – 14 years of age).

\(^6\) A more accepted term today is ‘world music.’

\(^7\) These terms are used in a very broad and encompassing manner.
Though aesthetic and praxial approaches to the delivery of music education are often seen at opposing ends of the spectrum, each approach has much to offer music education. Exclusivity to one can potentially limit broad and inclusive musical experience, but a balance between them may assist to accommodate music and develop musicality in its broadest sense. Considerations also must be given to intermediate pedagogies, along with new technologies that are forging new pedagogies and approaches to music learning. The merit of all music education pedagogies must be put to the test, and examined and reflected upon in context. The Music Council of Australia (2011) supports:

a situation in which they [pedagogies] can compete on merit. In Australia, pedagogical innovation is not vigorous at the systemic level, probably in part because of a long-term and debilitating contraction of resources. Innovation is not important only for its direct consequences but because the opportunity to innovate encourages an inquiring spirit and a dynamism in the system. (Proposals for a National Cultural Policy, 2011, p. 29)

Pedagogic approaches that innovatively consider the complexities of music learning and acknowledge a range of ways of understanding music are needed. How do such pedagogies position school music education as a significant influence in music learning, rather than an estranged musical subculture? The role of informal musical engagement upon the development of musical understanding and how pedagogies can learn from them also demands consideration. As Green (2002) asks:

[t]he open, informal and collective learning processes at work in the everyday practices of many popular styles differ in several respects from those of institutional education. To what extent and how such ‘alterative’ learning processes can be used … within music education institutions remains an urgent question. (p. 7)

This project focuses on the above considerations and how they may influence engagement in school music through practice and critical reflection of pedagogy. The focus of this research is to interrogate the educational philosophies and methodologies that inform my teaching in an attempt to locate ways in which I can promote meaningful engagement with music.

Though the background to this study identifies a widespread concern for school music education, this study focuses upon a purposefully defined context – a Year 8 Music class – by means of an action research methodology. Each classroom context contains a different range of complexities, and teachers researching in their own ‘backyard’ have the potential to uncover innovative approaches to best practice for their own sites. Though action research provides situation-specific insights, it is hoped that this project will promote dialogue concerning the teaching of Year 8 Music, and encourage other music teachers to research into their own practice to ensure that they are responsive to the ever-changing nature of their classrooms.
Problem Statement

The problem providing a catalyst for this research project is the well-recognised and documented level of student disengagement from school music education, coupled with the fact that an acknowledgement of this and subsequent responses in practice have not seen significant improvement. Despite the prominent role of music in the lives of young adolescents, many continue to make a clear distinction between the values attributed to school music and music outside of school. In my own context, I am aware of students for whom school music fails to resonate; many of these students seek alternative opportunities for more personally meaningful interaction outside of school – at worst they disengage entirely. Some of these students are very musical, but their view of school music suggests that it does not offer them meaningful musical experience.

Significance of the Study

Music is a more potent instrument than any other for education.

(Plato, The Republic)

The impact of music on adolescent development is significant. There are many claims made of the intrinsic and extrinsic values of music and music education, with advocacy groups quick to engage with and argue these points. Transcending these claims, Bowman (2014) encourages us to consider the ethical significance of music making – an asking of “what kind of person is it good to be?” (p. 4). Finney (2014) supports Bowman in arguing of ‘fulfilment’ – the notion of music education as contributing to human flourishing – what the Greeks called eudaimonia, or the ultimate good. Considered in these terms, music education embodies a set of musical practices:

… whose value depends upon whether and how they distinctively enable their practitioners to thrive, none of which follows automatically or necessarily from musical engagement. The values afforded by music-making depend on the kind of music at hand, the ways we engage in it, and the uses to which that experience is subsequently put. (Bowman, 2014, p. 4)

Finney (2014) argues that an ethical significance for music education goes beyond the “chatter of those who claim music to be good for this and that, including employability and economic productivity” (¶ 5). Music as creative and ethical practice then embodies multiple forms of knowing and is indeed a potent instrument in the education of the whole person.

Within these practices, music supports a construction of personal and group identities and values; it enables the expression of ideas in unique, innovative and creative ways. Eisner
(1998) and Sinclair, Jeanneret, and O’Toole (2009) argue that music can develop cognitive potential by reaching beyond traditional conceptions of literacy. Fiske (1999) argues that the “ability to generate ideas, to bring them to life and communicate them is what matters to workplace success”, and that in working “as an artist, the young person is learning and practicing future workplace behaviors” [sic] (p. ix). To realise this, Gardner (2008) argues the need for education to develop the creative mind – one that breaks new ground, puts forth new ideas, poses unfamiliar questions, conjures up fresh ways of thinking, and arrives at unexpected answers – “by virtue of its anchoring in territory that is not rule-governed”, one that seeks to remain at least one step ahead (p. 3).

The National Review of School Music Education (NRSME) (Pascoe et al., 2005) recognised this potency, and argued for quality music education to be made available in every Australian school. Despite the importance surrounding this finding, very little research has been completed in this area. This study seeks to contribute to an understanding of how practice and pedagogy may be revitalised to reflect and accommodate an increasingly diverse society and multiple ways of knowing music. With the implementation of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts 8 (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013), this study may contribute ways to interpret the general organisers of this document and formulate context-specific pedagogical approaches. In this regard, this project provides a model of research for other teachers who may wish to affect change in their own classrooms to achieve this aim. As Fiske (1999) asserts:

With the 21st century now upon us, we, too, must be champions of change; we must meet and exceed the challenge of giving our young people the best possible preparation we can offer them. To do so, we must make their involvement with the arts a basic part of their learning experiences. In doing so, we will become champions for our children and their children. (p. xii)

In researching this contention, the action research methodology adopted by this project is also significant. Zuber-Skerritt (2009) argues that action research is fast becoming one of the most appropriate methodologies for educational research as organisations “rely more and more on the collaborative abilities of their own people to solve problems swiftly … and to anticipate change” (p. 49). Importantly, action research in education provides the voice of the student. If effective change is to be enacted, then the voices of all stakeholders in that context must be considered. Action research projects provide the conditions for this to occur. Such dialogue can

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8 The Australian Curriculum: The Arts was undergoing continued development and refinement over the duration of this project, and given this state of flux was not used as a principal document in the development of this project. At time of publication, implementation in schools remains ‘patchy’. Though this document falls outside of the scope of this project, the findings herein may influence the enactment of the curriculum.
inform new and more responsive teaching, and allow informed pedagogical experimentation and innovation.

**Research Questions**

Through this project I sought to identify practices that increased the engagement of my Year 8 students in their school music education. Firstly, I investigated the following question:

What are the major tensions in the philosophy and practice of school music education, and how does this impact upon student engagement?

The main research question then followed:

What considerations do I need to give to my own practice to ensure meaningful music learning occurs in my Year 8 Music classroom?

These questions drew upon the musical experiences of my students both at and outside of the school context. I examined ways in which the experiences they engaged with outside of school influenced their engagement in music as school, and then considered if I could embrace these experiences in a manner supportive to the intent of my classroom practice.

**Research Approach**

As a teacher researching in my own setting, an action research methodology was deemed the most appropriate methodology to investigate the research questions. The project was conducted within my own school, henceforth known via the pseudonym Sunshine College, which is located on the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia. The project was conducted with one of my Year 8 Music classes over the course of the 2011 school year. The research class consisted of 25 students, twelve male and thirteen female, either twelve or thirteen years of age. This was one of four mixed-ability classes of Year 8 Music at the school, purposefully selected solely due to its position between non-contact periods in my daily timetable.

A survey was administered and focus group interviews were conducted in the first week to gain a foundation from which to construct the first research cycle and to measure change across the data collection phase. From this initial data, the action research design of Zuber-Skerritt (2009) guided the progression of the project. This design presents a cyclical process comprising four stages: planning, acting, observing and reflecting, which feed back into the development of subsequent cycles. The four stages are not static steps, but dynamic moments in
the action research spiral – they flexibly allow the emerging data to guide the direction of the research. This allows a high level of responsiveness to context, and the direct application of findings from the previous cycle into the next. Four main cycles in total were completed for this project. The data collection tools used in the cycles consisted of a survey, my own observations and reflections compiled in a research journal, written student reflections, focus group interviews, and student responses to set tasks. The use of these data collection tools within this methodological approach enabled our classroom to be characterised by symmetrical communication; the students and I were equal partners in the process of research. This enabled rich and direct insight into the complexities of our social interactions and the opportunity for a greater understanding of the nature of the realities within and of our classroom.

**Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis is organised into seven chapters. Chapter One presents the background to the project, and articulates the problem statement, research questions and the research approach. Chapter Two surveys the literature relating to the problem statement and research questions. Four main organisational themes provide structure to this chapter; namely, the principal philosophies of music education, the tensions surrounding school music education, necessary tensions in music learning, and responsive approaches to pedagogy and practice. Chapter Three details the methodology of the project, articulating and justifying the use of action research as a means to synthesise theory and practice. The research context and my position within it are identified, and considerations made relating to the acquisition of valid and trustworthy data are presented. This chapter also details the data collection tools employed and the manner in which data were verified and analysed. Chapter Four presents the data from the reconnaissance phase of the project, which informs the development of the interventional strategy of the first action research cycle. Chapter Five reports and analyses the action research cycles; it details the planning, acting, observing, and reflecting stages of the four research cycles, and summarises the main themes and learnings drawn from across the entire project. Chapter Six then locates the considerations for practice that were drawn from the data of the action research cycles in light of the problem statement and research questions. Finally, Chapter Seven summarises the project and presents the contributions of the study to the field, acknowledges the limitations of the research, provides suggestions for further research, and identifies the transformations brought on by the project.
Conclusion

There is growing evidence of disconnect between values attributed to music experiences in and out of the school within the research literature. Furthermore, music and ‘school music’ are often seen as separate entities by some of my students. Given that music provides pleasure and consolation, supports the construction of identity, and contributes to a general eudaimonia, I felt compelled to explore whether school music could be as highly valued as other forms of musical engagement. Many of my Year 8 students engage with music in a variety of formal and informal ways outside of school, often enthusiastically sharing with me what they do; however, less of them talk with such enthusiasm about school music. I often share the frustrations of students who are genuinely musical, but not in a traditional ‘school music’ way. The appearance of this theme in my own context demands that my practices and pedagogical approaches better acknowledge and address this disconnect. As Jacques-Dalcroze (1915) stated, “there are not two classes of music … there is only one music” (p. 93). Music should be engaged with musically. We need to ensure that there is significance and meaning located in music making, and that our engagement in and with music allows us to thrive. The following chapters detail my approach to investigating what meaningful music education in a Year 8 Music classroom may look like.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction
This chapter critically examines prominent tensions within music education philosophy and practice in schools. It begins by briefly unpacking the major philosophical contributions to school music education in Australia, and critiques their influence and impact on school music education today. The review then examines school music education from a practical standpoint, through both the actions and inactions of the school context. This discussion is framed by two tensions that are cultivated by the school context – the culturally conservative nature of music education and the promotion and perpetuation of Western classical traditions, and the manner in which schools often treat musical knowledge as abstracted and promote a transmissive vision of schooling. The review then considers the increasing prevalence of informal music learning and the new environments created by music technologies, examining the ways in which they further invite tension in the music classroom. The nature of musical knowledge and understanding are then explored, and the notion of music as discourse is introduced (Swanwick, 1999b). Drawing this examination to a close, the review then considers the themes presented across the chapter as a basis for locating practices that may promote access to meaningful musical experience.

Philosophical Positions and Tensions

Music education as aesthetic education
Since the 1970s, the philosophical basis for school music education in Australia centred on music as a symbolic form and an aesthetic and artistic way of knowing. Bennett Reimer instigated and clearly articulated this as a philosophical stance for music education, setting forth a philosophy that came to dominate music education in subsequent years. His 1970 work, A Philosophy of Music Education – with revisions in 1989 and 2003 – marked the beginning of a phase of putting aesthetic education to work through a series of efforts by the profession to implement this philosophy. Aesthetic education sought the “development of sensitivity to the aesthetic qualities of things” (Reimer, 1989, p. 29). Reimer’s (1989) philosophy is based on the premise that “the essential nature and value of music education are determined by the nature and value of the art of music” (p. 1). His philosophy sought to guide the efforts of music teachers and act as a “collective conscience for music education as a whole” (pp. 3-4). This was in
response to an aim to improve the image of the profession at a critical point in music education history (Westerlund & Väkevä, 2011). Music education as aesthetic education – founded on a philosophical base of ‘absolute expressionism’ – was quickly embraced and became deeply institutionalised in the profession.

Reimer (1989) proposes that aesthetic meaning should be sought in all teaching and learning experiences in order to help students “produce meaningful art effectively and gain the meanings available in works created by others” (p. 76). To share in the aesthetic meanings that come from expressive forms, Reimer (1989) suggests that art should be approached:

(1) as an expressive form, (2) that is capable of yielding an experience of subjectivity, (3) embodied in its intrinsic, inanimate qualities, (4) that will be open to a variety of possible ways of feeling, (5) but will always be caused by the particular, concrete events in the work, (6) that are apprehended directly and immediately from those events in the work, (7) through the presentational form, (8) that is the bearer of the meaning as “knowledge of” the inner feelings of human life as lived and experienced. (p. 93)

To experience “knowledge of” such expressive forms, Reimer (1989) articulates four principles: 1) music which is genuinely expressive in its characteristics must constitute the core material for studying and experiencing, it should be good music; 2) the experience of music as an expressive form is the only way of sharing the aesthetic meaning of music, the “power of music must be felt”; 3) the study of music must concentrate on the characteristic of sounds that make them expressive, it must assist students to become increasingly sensitive to the elements of music which embody musical meaning; and, 4) the language and techniques of the music teacher must be true to the nature of music as an expressive form, it should “illuminate the expressive content of music” (pp. 53-54). Reimer’s principles focus on the inherent qualities of the music object and the intrinsic nature of the experience. Under an aesthetic framework, it is argued that teachers must understand the value of music so they can guarantee the value of their educational practices by making value choices in the music they teach (Westerlund & Väkevä, 2011).

As the aesthetic movement progressed through the 1990s, however, its raison d’être became increasingly questioned. Arguments against music education as aesthetic education focused upon its location of aesthetic experience in musical works – music as an object – principally within the realm of the Western classical tradition (Elliott, 1995; Regelski, 2005b; Walker, 1996). This contributed to a questioning of its suitability for a pluralistic society which contained many musics and modes of musical thought. As McCarthy and Goble (2005) state:
aside from its [aesthetic education] validity in Western European music (principally as applied to common practice), absolute expressionism is simply not universally acceptable…. As a theory, however important and even applicable in its own right, absolute expressionism should be viewed as limited; relative, not absolute; Western European, not global. Its educational significance must also be considered with cogent concern for its appropriate application. The large bulk of music, worldwide, calls for musical understanding (of meaning, value, etc.) on other grounds, more contextual and even extramusical. (p. 32)

These ‘other grounds’ were not easily catered for under an aesthetic framework, especially one that perpetuated a focus upon the objects of the Western classical tradition. Small (1977) sees this tension as resulting in “our present uncomfortable, if not downright dangerous condition” (p. 3). Small (1977) continues:

Education, or rather schooling, as at present conceived in our society has worked to perpetuate those states of mind by which we see nature as a mere object for use, products as all-important regardless of the process by which they are obtained, and knowledge as an abstraction, existing ‘out there’, independent of the experience of the knower, the three notions being linked by an intricate web of cause and effect. (p. 3)

Small argues against the notion of the aesthetic; that art is more than the production of beautiful or expressive objects for others to admire – it is essentially a process. The focus of aesthetic education on music as an object – which embodied a focus on product over process, and abstract conceptual notions independent of the knower over experience with them – was recognised as a problematic basis from which to study music, especially those of different cultural contexts. Philosophical writings on music education from the early 1980s reflected a growing uneasiness within the music education profession, and a fermentation of conflicting ideas and positionings began as philosophical unity drew to a close (Koopman, 1998).

A distinctly utilitarian philosophy of music education that stressed the relationship between music education and society in which it is practised was born from the perceived failings of aesthetic education. In a seminal article entitled The Evolution of Music Education Philosophy from Utilitarian to Aesthetic, Mark (1982) states: “there is now no longer a connection between the philosophy of the profession and societal needs” (p. 15). This utilitarian philosophy was rooted in the importance of musical ‘doing,’ the product that results, and the context within which the ‘doing’ is done, as a basis for experience and understanding music. Reimer, however, continues to stress the importance of aesthetic education as a fundamental concept that provided coherence to the profession – he warns that setting it aside would cast music education into a constant state of turmoil over its purpose (Reimer, 2003). Despite these challenges to the aesthetic philosophy, its features still remain evident within music education in Australia.
Praxial music education

The utilitarian philosophy that challenged music education as aesthetic education was based in ‘realistic’ principles based upon the preservation, refinement, and transmission of cultural heritage to succeeding generations (McCarthy & Goble, 2005; Jorgensen, 2003). This philosophical challenge was spearheaded by David Elliott and created new ways of thinking about the philosophy of music education. His book, *Music Matters: A New Philosophy of Music Education* (1995) – in which he articulates his positioning after years of philosophical argument and fermentation – presents a new pragmatic or praxial philosophy that is based on the nature of music and its significance in human life. Elliott’s (1995) philosophy positions self-growth and self-knowledge as central to the values of music, and therefore music education. This is founded upon the progressive development of musicianship and ‘listenership’, and how they extend the range of students’ “expressive and impressive powers” by providing opportunity to “formulate musical expressions of emotion, musical representations of people, places and things, and musical expressions of cultural-ideological meanings” (Elliott, 2005, p. 10).

*Music Matters* highlights the importance of music as an experience – a process of making; an activity – something that people do. Elliott (1995) refers to the activity of making music as *musicing* — to use the word ‘music’ as a verb, or action – highlighting it as a practice, rather than a collection of identifiable products or works. Elliott (1995) identifies *musicing* as a human activity that involves doers (makers and listeners), particular kinds of doing (music making and listening), something done (musical works of some form), and the “complete context in which doers do what they do” (pp. 39-40). Musicing, then, embodies a “*musicer*” (an agent), *music*, and the entire context within which they operate. Elliott (1995) sees music as a cognitive activity that involves the simultaneous combination of thinking and acting. Through this, musicianship and listenership form the procedural knowledge domain (the ‘know-how’) – knowledge is realised in action. Music, then, is conceived as “a multidimensional achievement rather than as an object” (Koopman, 2005, p. 81). Elliott (1995) seeks to present a ‘pan-cultural’ conception of music and music education based on the premise that each style of music is not simply a collection of identifiable products. His philosophy aims to engage learners in musical actions, transactions, and interactions in ways that order and strengthen the ‘self’, and parallel real music cultures within reflective musical practicum. Gruhn (2005) argues that the praxial philosophy focuses music education on making and listening, together, to understand and develop culturally relevant musical products.

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9 The term *musicking* was coined by Christopher Small in his 1977 work *Music, Society, Education.*
Elliott’s (1995) philosophy assumes an incompatible stance with the music education as aesthetic education philosophy. In the introduction to *Music Matters*, Elliott (1995) boldly states that his praxial philosophy is “fundamentally different from and incompatible with music education’s official aesthetic philosophy” (p. 14). Through his “new” philosophy Elliott sets up two dichotomies: *aesthetic* versus *contextual*, and *musical work* versus *event (praxis)* (Panaiotidi, 2005). Firstly, he argues that music lacks an aesthetic dimension, instead that it is essentially a cognitive activity situated in socio-cultural contexts. Panaiotidi (2005) argues, however, that his first dichotomy is flawed:

> according to Elliott, music is a kind of human practice; its value is derivative: musical practice has value because musical experience, which is its ultimate end, is valuable; musical experience as a subset of *flow*10 is a case of aesthetic experience; *ergo*, music(al practice) should be thought of as a kind of *aesthetic* experience. (p. 64)

According to Panaiotidi, this aesthetic dimension cannot serve as a reason for incompatibility if cognition and feeling are intertwined. Koopman (2005) criticises Elliott’s cognitive conception of music as disregarding the role of feeling in music. He argues that feeling is vital to musical engagement, especially in relation to cognising musical form, expression and representation – “constructing musical patterns is not simply a matter of ‘cold’ cognition but … is accompanied and informed by feeling” (p. 85). Feelings *always* feature in our musical experiences. Further, Panaiotidi (2005) argues that Elliott’s second dichotomy – *musical work* versus *event (praxis)* – is also problematic. This takes direct aim at Elliott’s focus on the *process* of music. As Reimer (1996) states:

> He [Elliott] wants to demonstrate that music is a process rather than a product and that, therefore, music education should consist of involving students in the process of music (performing being the obligatory, essential involvement) rather than with the products of music. (p. 63)

Reimer (2003) further states that Elliott argues that musical works are “not the point” in praxial music education because “process is the be-all and end-all of music” (p. 48). He further adds:

> …in a praxial philosophy of music education, or at least in Elliott’s construal of what that is, we would focus not on finished, formal objects as “revered pieces” or “esteemed works” but on music as “a matter of singing and playing instruments.” (pp. 49-50)

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10 The concept of ‘flow’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) will be examined later in this chapter. A useful clarification here may be the state of mind whereby people pursue what they are doing for its own sake. It is based in cognition of the activity in progress.
In this criticism, Reimer (2003) implies that praxialism urges us to abandon our enjoyment of musical products, and focus on the ‘doing’, rather than what is done. Praxialists acknowledge, however, that musical works – their performance-interpretation, form, standards and traditions of practice, expression, representation, and cultural-ideological information – are central to the nature and significance of both music and of music education.

In two major papers, *Music Education: Aesthetic or Praxial?* (1998) and *The Nature of Music and Musical Works* (2005), Koopman offers an informed critique of both philosophical approaches. He moves away from unhelpful semantics and ontology, and instead argues for an intermediate position that retains both the idea of music as aesthetic and that of music as practice. In his later work, Koopman (2005) states:

Elliott’s account of music as knowing-in-action…. [as with] a general account of the role of feeling in musical experience may have considerable claim to universal validity. It seems to be a general fact about music that sensuous forms make us feel… and, together with musical cognition, these feeling responses are constitutive of our musical experience. (pp. 94-95)

Similarly, several other authors also propose that a broadening of the concept of music does not mean giving up on aesthetic experience as a central notion in a philosophy of music education (Mansfield, 2002; Swanwick, 1999a; Westerlund, 2003). The dialogue emanating from such debate positions the two philosophies as more complimentary than mutually exclusive – music education should be inspired by the best ideas that originate from both. Though there is much value to be taken from an intermediate stance, tensions between the two philosophical positions continue to be echoed in practice today.

**Tensions and new conceptions**

Tensions between these philosophical approaches to music education have been firmly established by this rigorous philosophical debate. Proponents and detractors of the respective philosophies each argue the superiority of their position. Swanwick (1999b) argues that these important debates have been unfortunately “hijacked by writing which verged on pedantry or even personal attack” and that “there are more effective and productive ways of engaging with the ideas of other people” (p. xi). Here, Swanwick (1999b) focuses on both Reimer and Elliott, comparing their debate to something of:

a sideshow, offering very little to our understanding of the nature of music or the priorities of music education. Furthermore, neither side of the argument seems to be based on any systematic study of how people actually make and respond to music, let alone teach it. (p. 6)
Such criticism targets the contributions of music education philosophy to where it matters – the classroom. As Regelski (2005b) asserts, “it is evident that present theory and practice in music education have not made a difference” (p. 9). Gould (2004) challenges both the aesthetic and praxial philosophies, arguing that they do not connect with, or are responsive to, the everyday lives of music teachers. Gould (2004) continues:

> They require ways of thinking and being that exclude the music educators they claim to address – not because practitioners are incapable of understanding them, but because the philosophies do not address problems of material life and cannot account for difference in perspectives and values. (p. 291)

Instead of dealing with the concepts of the nature and value of art and musical experience, music education philosophy should be directed towards local issues, what Gould (2004) calls “the more mundane, but nevertheless philosophical questions concerning the reality of music education” (p. 291).

In an effort to provide clarity and direction, several arguments have been founded upon the need for philosophy to embrace more situated and contextual grounds (Hargreaves & North, 1997; Small, 1998). In her book In Search for Music Education, Jorgensen (1997) sets out to take a “dialectical and dialogical view of music education, recognize [sic] tensions in need of resolution, and hope that through dialogue these tensions can be worked through and either reconciled or tolerated” (p. xiii). Jorgensen (1997) does not search for a systematic philosophy of music education, but rather accepts pluralism between the dominant philosophical fields. She identifies conceptual polarities and tensions as differences, and does not offer any syntheses or final solutions. In a later work, she argues that such discontinuity promotes the opportunity for teachers to engage in reflective practice and continued personal and professional development in search of their own clarifications (Jorgensen, 2003). This view is also responsive to the range of different contexts of school music education across the world.

Similarly, Westerlund and Väkevä (2011) propose conceiving philosophy as a ‘map’ – in that a “map is supposed to be practical and in coherence with empirical facts, but it is by no means a detailed picture… nor does it replace the actual experiences of travelling” – that can be interpreted and explored in new ways (p. 46). Such a map could thereby provide a platform upon which the implications of different options could be discussed in a way that teachers are able to justify their decisions. This view dually accounts for the theoretically abstract as well as the practical without suggesting universal or prioristic rationalisation (Westerlund & Väkevä, 2011). The strength of such a position acknowledges that it is unlikely that any practice can ever
be based on one coherent set of assumptions and that music might best not rest on any one philosophical position, but rather interactions between them.

**Tensions and Challenges of the School Music Context**

Young people show a lively interest in music outside the school context – it is school music they object to.

(Malcolm Ross, *What's Wrong With School Music?*)

School music harbours some destructive tensions, and has done so for some time. In a scathing review of school music education across the UK, Ross (1995) identified the “sad history” of school music, and argued that it was “a mess!” (p. 192). Paynter (1982) cites lack of relevance central to this issue:

Music which, outside school, almost continuously goes in and out of young people’s heads – which stirs their feelings and activates their bodies, becomes when presented – or as presented – inside schools, a ‘dead bore’.” (p vii)

This theme is of international concern. Lamont and Maton (2010) cite a “patchwork quilt of disparate potential problems”, but argue that central to these problems is the ongoing question of relevance (p. 65). Students often find the teaching of music unsuccessful, unimaginative, and lacking connection with their experience and expectation. Bowman (2005) sees music education in nihilistic times, in that it sees indifference, disengagement and mechanistic enactment rather than creative exploration, with “music-like gestures deprived of the vividness and intensity essential for values that are durable and resilient” (p. 29). Finney (2003) and Spruce (2015b) propose that student resentment and disaffection with school music is situated in that students are not helped to speak their musical minds, and that teachers fail to grasp that music offers a way to express thoughts, feelings and ideas. Often influenced by these international contexts, school music education in Australia is far from immune from these challenges.

The most confronting issue in the failure of schools to offer relevant musical experience is our awareness that most students *love* music – as Ross (1995) claims, they are “crazy about music” – and this is “the most painful part” (p. 189). They see school music as less creative and less imaginative than out of school offerings, which creates a dichotomy between the two forms. Jacques-Dalcroze (1915/1967) warned us of this a century ago, saying:
Before everything else, always make sure that the teaching of music is worthwhile. And there must be no confusion as to what is understood by ‘music’. There are not two classes of music: one for adults, drawing rooms and concert halls, the other for children and schools. There is only one music. (p. 93)

This dichotomy can be perpetuated by school music; namely, in the ways pedagogies preserve long-standing cultural traditions, and promote abstract musical knowledge. These tensions are further exacerbated by increased accessibility to musical experiences out of the school through informal means and technological capabilities. As Spruce (2015a) argues, if one cannot make the case for music as mirroring society, then fundamentally one cannot make the case for music education. It is in the uses to which people put music that gives it its meaning; music is a key means by which individuals, groups and societies create and project their identity. If school music fails to support this, it may further drive this unnecessary dichotomy.

*Traditions and cultural conservatism*

Though traditions do benefit music education in important ways, they can easily stifle imaginative action and make it challenging for teachers to forge new approaches and adjust and react to societal changes (Jorgensen, 2003). Vulliamy (1984) states that music teachers are often “unwittingly constrained by the dominant ideology, concerning the relationships between music and culture, which goes back to the very origins of music teaching” (p. 25). These ideologies are resistant to change. Applebaum (1972) argues that music education is engaged in a “destructive process of rapidly narrowing options rather than a creative process of expanding horizons”, as we have positioned an historically-oriented symbology central to our thinking (p. 44). Holloway (1999) discusses why an appeal to tradition alone as an argument is doomed to failure:

By the time we start appealing to tradition, in order to preserve some custom or practice, its days are clearly numbered, because traditions really only work when they are legitimated by widespread consent. Once we start appealing to the past as argument we are being false to the past itself, because we have removed it from the circumstances that gave it logic and integrity and have started recasting it to suit our own very different needs. Traditions work by unconscious acceptance. While they are effectively and unreflectively their role, they continue to have one… This does not mean, however, that it is impossible for traditions to evolve into new uses. Prudent historical institutions maintain themselves by a process of adaptation to changing circumstances. There is a profound instinct in us to maintain the historical community of our institutions, but there is also a need for adaptive adjustment to new knowledge and the changes it brings. Many of the most significant changes to our values and ideas can be cloaked and obscured by the apparent continuity of the institutions that carry them through history. (pp. 29-30)

A tradition is something accepted and internalised – *the* way things are done – fixed by our efforts to maintain the dominant ideology. Holloway (1999) rightly acknowledges that we *are* able to adapt to new knowledges and practices of our changing society. In this view, music should reflect our culture and advance a ‘new institution’.
School music is often motivated by out-dated methods and Western pedagogic principles (Bowman, 2005; Ross, 1995; Small, 1998). Lines (2005) cites Lyotard’s concept of the post-modern as “incredulity toward metanarratives”, stating that these metanarratives have held firm in music education despite changes to the contemporary environment, and that Western schools and universities continue “to perpetuate traditional systems of music learning by means of strictly controlled pedagogic systems and ordered curricula” (p. 2). Small (1998) also states, that “schools emphasise the knowledge transmitted and acquired in institutions as being the only legitimate one” (p. 193). He proposes that it is:

not surprising to find that education in music takes on the nature of western music and western education [sic]. Here, as in general education, the concept of the product is dominant. If music is … a product, the musician is in the paradoxical position of being not only the purveyor of that product but also, as one who has passed through a type of schooling, as himself a product… The concern for the product, as usual, means that little attention is given to the process. (ibid.)

This form of education perpetuates systems that focus on the lofty products of the past. In this view, Small (1977) proposes that school music then has little to offer students as they “undergo a kind of caricature of professional training, being told about music rather than being involved in its creation, or, mostly, re-creation” (p. 195). The knowledge and experiences students bring to class are then not honoured, as they are not considered part of the traditional paradigm. Swanwick (1999b) notes that school music is still very often a “closed system,” bearing little relationship to the social and cultural worlds of young adolescents (p. 37). Reimer (2003) argues that school music is therefore in danger of only providing limiting experiences that “serve few students, with few options, and with restricted kinds of music” (p. 297). This demands that school music better reflects the ways in which music is made, taught and learnt today. As Regelski (2005a) asserts, we must build music on students’ backgrounds, not convert them to “models of connoisseurship that are so alien as to be alienating” (p. 13).

As follows, adherence to these Western systems perpetuates pedagogies that are central to the tradition itself (Small, 1998; Lines, 2005). Such pedagogies are generally characterised by their excessive focus on musical information, skills and concepts, often within limited musical contexts. Heuser (2008) identifies that one of the paradoxes of formal Western music education is that the aural art of music is taught almost exclusively through visual musical notations. On this, Green (2008a) states that:

Again, sadly, this list is far from exhaustive.
Despite the oral-aural approaches and deep musical understanding espoused by educators from Curwen, Orff, Kodály or Suzuki to Paynter, Swanwick, Reimer, Elliott and many others at the present time, our syllabi and assessment mechanisms have long placed high emphasis on the development of linguistic concepts, theory and notation. (p. 70)

Further, Regelski (2005a) suggests that an adherence to these traditional values stifles the output of music education:

Rather than engaging students in the kind of musical sense-making that is gripping, momentous, compelling, and tightly bound to character (inseparable, that is to say, from one’s identity); and rather than encouraging the pursuit of creative engagements that can take root and flourish outside the confines of the institutions in which we work; we have been content to cultivate appreciation of others’ efforts and to mimic the external trappings of music making. (p. 42)

Through this we endorse canonisation and teach deference to the works of genius, rather than attempting to generate and ground value in active and creative thought. In doing so, Gouzouasis, Bakan, Ryu, Ballam, Murphy, Ihnatovych et al. (2014) state that, “we risk acting unethically in the promotion and proliferation of out-dated, outmoded music curricula that predominately use teacher-centred and teacher-directed pedagogies” (pp. 2-3). Music education should be a means by which students are enculturated into the values and norms of society. As music is a culturally embedded, human expression within the context of life, Jorgensen (2003) suggests that it should be approached more “as a humanity than a science, holistically rather than atomistically”, and that we need to move towards music education reflecting lived culture (p. 122). Despite these contradictions and concerns, Lines (2005) criticises that music education practice in general has remained under-theorised and obscured. This sees the profession sheltered from creative and modernising transformation.

A result of this cultural conservatism is that school music education has tended to create its own subculture (Durant, 2001; Swanwick, 1999b). Hentschke and Souza (2003) identify two distinct ‘worlds’ that operate simultaneously – one that perpetuates classical music, traditional approaches and methods carried out within the schools, universities and conservatories, and the other that occurs outside of education institutions – that are detrimental to music education. This serves to separate school music education from the musical behaviours of contemporary society. As Swanwick (1999b) argues, “music education is not problematic until it surfaces in schools and colleges, until it becomes formalised, institutionalised” (p. 36). Finney (2015a) cautions that the “statutory, once weekly secondary school music lesson is in danger of being viewed as contrived, and in socio-cultural terms, moribund compared to the situations and contexts where musical learning is achieved out of the classroom” (¶ 2). All music arises in social contexts, and it exists alongside and interleave with many cultural activities; it nurtures and transmits the
values of students, and is intertwined with their identities. Schools must strive towards an understanding of this culture. As Georgii-Hemming and Westvall (2010) argue, students need to have their own experiences of music and be given opportunities to understand cultural processes and structures in society, as well as in educational settings. Swanwick (1998) proposes, that:

The first and unique aim of music education in schools and colleges is to raise consciousness and purposefully and critically explore a number of musical procedures, experienced directly through the reality of various inter-cultural encounters. A second aim is to participate in creating and sustaining musical events in the community, events in which people can choose to be involved and thus contribute to the rich variety of musical possibilities in our society. In these ways, we avoid transmitting a restrictive view of music and of culture and may help to keep prejudice at bay. Human culture is not something to be merely transmitted, perpetuated or preserved but is constantly being re-interpreted. As a vital elements of the cultural process, music is, in the best sense of the term, recreational; helping us and our cultures to become renewed; transformed. (pp. 118-119, italics in original)

Music in schools should no longer mean simply a socialisation into dominant culture, but instead contain dialogue initiated by the teacher that honours different ways in which music is used, learnt and taught in society; it must be unbound from the rigid structures of traditional schooling and draw upon a wider range of resources and styles of delivery (Finney, 2003).

The ‘academickisation’ of music

Music education as culturally conservative imposes traditional assumptions on musical knowledge – what it is, and what is valued. Applebaum (1972) identifies that musicians are the only artists who have found it necessary to abstract a theory from their art, which, “would not necessarily be so bad, except that the theory we use in music education is based on elements rather than essence” (p. 44). Music is often presented to students in schools as a collection of facts and techniques, which need to be learnt, mastered and remembered. Rose and Countryman (2013) refer to this as the ‘academickisation’ of knowledge and music education. They use this term to describe the way that musical knowledge in schools is viewed as “atomistic, static and transmittable” as compared to the ways students know music – personal, emotional, physical, unnameable and complex (p. 1). Regelski (2005a) also notes this dichotomy and the problems it creates:

The intimate relation of adolescents to music – their deep familiarity and association with popular music outside of the school, and their very specific use of music in ways that go beyond or even contravene traditional assumptions of music value – complicates the teaching of it in ways that is not the case for most other subjects. (p. 9)

This approach to knowledge denies that students are already musicians capable of constructing their own understandings and framing their own questions. The tendency to academickise sees music education uphold a transmissive vision of schooling, which “emphasises conformity and
denies subjectivity, emotion, uncertainty and the importance of human relationships” (Rose & Countryman, 2013, p. 1). In doing this, we squeeze everyone into the same mould. Applebaum (1972) identifies the concern with this approach:

When an individual has finished this core curriculum [of theory], he [sic] is given the privilege of entering the contemporary world – but is it almost too late. He has been nurtured upon concepts of consonance and dissonance that he does not understand; indoctrinated into a way of thinking, hearing and aesthetically responding that is contrary to the music of his own time (he [sic] will doubtless be confused in attempting to differentiate between the music of his time and the music written in his time, but in the style of a previous period); and most importantly, taught that his success as a musician depends on his [sic] ability to imitate semantics and syntax that are transferable only to the world of music that exists in schools but not outside them. With this training behind him [sic], the student will continue being an aesthetic and intellectual bigot, lacking the equipment to deal with concepts and seeing only a gradually narrowing horizon ahead. (p. 44)

The promotion of abstract musical knowledge also encourages students to be consumers, rather than producers, of knowledge. As Small (1977) argues, we are afraid of encounters with musical experiences that fall outside this model. When existing knowledge and expertise are no guide, we retreat into the safety of the past, “where we know what to expect and connoisseurship is paramount” (ibid., p. 5).

Ross (1995) sees the music curriculum as the “academic invasion of a highly personal musical space” (p. 198). What students see as enjoyable is often reduced to a formula, or taken apart for analysis, ultimately removed from the context that gives it meaning. Further, music between the school and outside contexts often serve very different functions. As Boal-Palheiros and Hargreaves (2001) state, music in informal contexts tends to fulfil emotional and social functions, whereas music at school tends to mainly have a cognitive function. This contributes to a ‘cultural dissonance’ between these contexts of musical experience. Ross (1995) provides a humorous but accurate account of a reductive and decontextualised experience of school music, where the social and emotional functions of music are lost:

I once watched a small ensemble comprising an elastic band, a paper crumple, a comb picker and zip fastener in the extremes of embarrassment and personal confusion as they attempted to realise their ‘graphic’ score to a bemused audience of class-mates. (pp. 190-191)

These experiences are far removed from the expectations of students who wish to engage with music, and they undoubtedly push students away. Ross (1995) states that we need to question the relevance of what we do to ensure that what we teach has the single goal of helping students understand their music more deeply – the point about “conflict of loyalty, and the delicacy of engaging with actual tastes and private passions of students cannot be underestimated” (p. 190). Further, Ross (1995) sees this not simply attributable to an outmoded, unappealing curriculum,
but mainly music teachers themselves, “their training and the tradition of musical experience in which they themselves were entailed” (p. 189). Green (2008a) argues that we need to think of new pedagogies that enable music to be authentically taught – these pedagogies need to differ radically from those of the past, and focus on the processes of authentic music making.

Swanwick (1994) suggests that music is academickised in schools because in this way it fits and is manageable – facts and techniques are things that can be taught. The true meanings of music, however, are located within genuine dialogic encounters, where something of essence is caught (Swanwick, 1999b). Music academickised is music taught – knowledge about music, not knowledge of music, or what Ross (1995) terms ‘music proper’12. He argues that “music cannot be taught”, and if we think we are teaching it, we are in fact teaching ‘pseudo-music’ – music as a set of skills and techniques seen as the means to a productive end – and not ‘music proper’ (p. 195). Music is more than a store of information and knowledge of convention; we cannot teach or be taught ‘music proper’, we must learn music for ourselves. Ross (1995) suggests that music teachers:

... seem unable to imagine themselves – as teachers – in anything other than high-profile, managing all the classroom transactions from some central vantage point (phantom podium) and committed to teaching a curriculum that issues in readily accessible outcomes, all of which have transparent relevance to music as a craft, a technical achievement rooted in its own technology and semantic system. So, music teachers teach what can be taught, and they do so, on the whole, indefatigably. They teach about music – they can’t of course teach music, since music cannot be taught: not in any way that would tally with the normal understanding of what might be meant by ‘teaching’ – i.e., instruction. (p. 192, italics mine)

Learning ‘music proper’ is learning of music through ‘musicking’13 (Small, 1977; Elliott, 1995). Ross (1995) continues, that ‘to music’ is to speak with a personal voice, “to utter one’s own musical feelings using a language we share with others but always have to deal with creatively in order to effect the quality of communication and of communion we seek” (p. 195). Further, Finney (2015a) encourages us to appreciate that critical and contextual understanding of music is developed as part of the student being engaged in the artistic process. It is after the experience of music that we might come to know more about music in our artistic out-workings. As Paynter (1982) supports, theory in itself cannot lead to musical understanding – “it exists principally to explain what has already been experienced” (p. xiii). If we embrace holistic and authentic music learning in schools, Applebaum (1972) argues that “it will become relatively easy to design a completely new curriculum – one that will service the professional world of music and at the same time fulfil the academic function of educating through a search for truth, rather than

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12 Ross (1995) refers to Collingwood’s Philosophy of Art, which discriminates between ‘pseudo-art’ and ‘art proper’, and mostly uses this term. I have borrowed his less used ‘pseudo-music’ and ‘music proper’ for clarity.
13 To treat music as a verb – an action (Small, 1977).
training through indoctrination” (p. 44). Music proper constitutes a meaningful music education in which students put to use the materials of music to express themselves and their culture.

**Popular music and informal learning practices**

Away from the classroom, there is a buzz of musical discourse from many places, and popular music is likely to be one of the most powerful discourses available to students (Green, 2008a). Such discourses can make music meaningful in that it offers a means through which students can construct and express identity, and negotiate culture (Green, 2008b; Hargreaves & North, 1999). For this reason, many have argued that popular music should be incorporated into the curriculum (Frith, 1989; Green, 2002; Folkestad, 2006; Vulliamy & Lee, 1976)\(^\text{14}\). Popular music has its own aesthetic and social value, and it has considerable potential to connect with the everyday lives of students and the ways in which they use and make music (Green, 2008b). The way in which students engage with popular music, however, often runs counter to the way it is explored in the music classroom. The presence of popular music in the classroom is often restricted to a change in curriculum content, with the music being analysed and practised in traditional ways; it is focused on the product, and largely ignores the processes by which the product is transmitted in the world outside school (Green, 2008b; McPhail, 2012). Green (2006) argues that we have not seen a change in the process of learning surrounding the use of popular music in schools,\(^\text{15}\) which challenges the authenticity of the musical experience. If we do not appeal to the authenticity of popular music learning, then we are again dealing with ‘pseudo-music’ – “a simulacrum, or ghost, of popular music in the classroom, and not the thing itself” (Green, 2006, p. 107). If school music academickises popular music through Western classical means, then students will access experience in more authentic and personally meaningful ways beyond the school.

Students are increasingly trading their formal classroom music experiences for informal ones with popular music (Folkestad, 2006; Green, 2008a; McPhail, 2012). Their willingness to take up these informal experiences provides a significant tension for school music education as currently practised. Whilst formal musical experience in schools may still be a “central plank in the platform of musical opportunities”, it is far from being the only educative influence (Swanwick, 1999a, p. 136). Swanwick (1999b) adds:

\(^{14}\) Among many others.

\(^{15}\) The **Musical Futures** approach to music education, which is based on Lucy Green’s (2002, 2008) investigation of the ways popular musicians learn informally, explores this and has seen promising connections made between music and school music – see [www.musicalfutures.org](http://www.musicalfutures.org) and [www.musicalfuturesaustralia.org](http://www.musicalfuturesaustralia.org) (active as of April, 2016).
If we want to strum a guitar, get into the plot of a Wagner opera, play a sitar or sing in a chorus, then finding a teacher, reading a book or joining a performing group may be all we need to do. There is no need to form a curriculum committee, produce a rationale or declare a list of objectives. The informal music student can copy jazz riffs from recordings, ask friends about fingering or chord patterns, learn by imitation – ‘sitting next to Nelly’ – or widen musical experiences by watching television, listening to the radio or exploring record shops. (p. 37)

These musical experiences, unconstrained by formalised syllabi, are readily available outside of the school. As Regelski (2005b) argues, these informal experiences often sharply contrast with many models of school music, but are “neither passive or lacking in intensity” – as a result, “school music and what for students is ‘real music’ exist at considerable remove” (p. 13). As Folkestad (2006) recognises, a great majority of music learning takes place outside of schools in situations without teachers, where the intention is to learn not about music, but to engage in music informally through playing, singing, listening and dancing.

Informal learning is strongly linked with popular forms of music, and both are regarded as tools for potentially increasing the motivation, participation and inclusion of students within school music16 (Green, 2008a; McPhail, 2012; Frith, 1989). Green (2008a) offers five principles of informal learning: a) it always starts with music that students choose for themselves – it is music they already know, understand, like, enjoy and identify with; b) the main method of skill acquisition involves copying music by ear; c) it takes place through self-directed, peer-directed, and group learning, and there is little or no adult supervision or guidance; d) skills and knowledge tend to be assimilated in “haphazard, idiosyncratic and holistic ways”, starting with ‘whole’, ‘real-world’ pieces of music; and e) it often involves the “deep integration of listening, performing, improvising and composing throughout the learning process” (p. 10). When viewed as a possible pedagogical approach, Folkestad (1998) maintains that informal learning offers a change in perspective:

… from teaching to learning, and consequently from teacher to learner. Thus, it also implies a shift of focus, from ‘how to teach’ and the outcome of teaching in terms of results as seen from the perspective of the teacher, to ‘what to learn’, the content of learning and how to learn, the way of learning – in our case, how various musical phenomena are perceived, experienced and expressed in musical activities by the learner. (p. 99)

In this pedagogical shift, students also have the opportunity to participate in their own society as active citizens (Green, 2008b; Folkestad, 2006). It offers opportunities for democratic decision-making, and emphasises the importance of recognising other people’s views and opinions. This approach values equally the personal, musical and social aspects of learning within the frame of formalised education (Finney, 2003).

16 I am careful not to make equivalent the notion of informal learning ipso facto with that of popular music; however, it is common that students learn popular music in this way (Davis & Blair, 2011; McPhail, 2012).
Whilst informal pedagogies and popular musics could offer us a way forward for formal school music education, McPhail (2012) cautions we risk denying students access to important conceptual and analytic knowledge about music through their exclusive use. Though Green (2008a) champions the use of informal pedagogies in schools, she also sees an exclusive focus on it as insufficient for a complete music education. In addition, McPhail (2012) poses that students need access to foundational knowledge if they are to move beyond informal music making alone:

Finding a balance between the potent empowerment of localised and student-centred education while retaining knowledge components that engender wider and context independent learning can be seen as a central challenge for music teachers. (p. 52)

Georgii-Hemming and Westvall (2010) also argue for this balance, stating that informal music learning approaches need to be supported by formal ones. They encourage teachers to “reach out and involve students in active musicianship” – resisting the functions and uses of music as a means of socialisation into a dominant culture – and engage in “respectful, critical, playful, musical and educational” dialogue with students about musical experiences (p. 31). Similarly, Feichas (2010) asks teachers to become part of the community of learners and be attentive, open and “not anxious for quick and expected results”, and be able to see multiple possibilities with the class from situations that happen at the moment (p. 55). Folkestad (2006) sees education as “the meeting place for formal and informal learning”, where the kind of learning that is obtained and the ways in which it is achieved mirrors the characteristics of learning outside of school (p. 139). In this way, informal learning approaches can complement and run side-by-side existing ones and make students more confident in their own musicality; it may also allow them to ‘get inside’ the inherent meanings of music and develop a critical appreciation of a wider range of musics (Green, 2008a).

Technology and accessibility

The rapidity of technological growth in our society is radically changing the nature of musical experience – music is more accessible and musical experience is more individualised – and this houses potential tensions for school music education (Savage, 2012). Music learning is continually being reshaped and redefined by new and emerging digital technologies, and this is challenging many of our previously unquestioned assumptions about ownership, teaching and learning (Green, 2010). Technology and the internet provide a near endless supply of music, and applications such as iTunes Music, Spotify, and YouTube, enhance the ability of students to explore and develop their vocabularies in a range of musics and express themselves in a socially connected manner. An ever-increasing range of music creation technologies, such as FL Studio,
Ableton Live, and GarageBand, provide an unprecedented level of accessibility to music making. It is now possible for almost anyone to create their own music irrespective of their training, or formal and explicit knowledge of music theory. Technology is increasingly closing the gap between creator and consumer, and lessening the distinction between professional and amateur music maker (Hentschke & Souza, 2003; Cayari, 2011; Nilsson, 2003). Lines (2005) suggests that this has led to the decentralisation of music creation practices, and afforded greater potential for the expression of musical identities and the location of meaningful experience. As Thwaites (2014) suggests, we are no longer only exposed to the sounds of our neighbourhood; the musical cultures of the world can be familiar globally.

The advance of technology and the internet has made it possible to learn music away from the formal processes applied in schools. Though these technologies have infiltrated society and many music classrooms, there is often a disjunction between these two ‘worlds’ with regard to effectiveness of their application (Savage, 2012). Cain (2004) states, that these technologies have brought with them changes that are very considerable to music education and question some of the most basic conceptual frames that underpin it. Savage (2012) notes a “culture of tension” between the ways technologies are used in the classroom and in wider society. At the centre of these tensions are Western classical ideologies and discourses that have held firm in the educational landscape. Traditionalists might feel that technology “threatens or dilutes the core values and principles of music education”, or they may use technology in a tokenistic way that essentially only reinforces traditional approaches (Savage, 2012, p. 17). The extent to which technology can be used to support music education in schools remains largely unexplored, and as a result, its popularity and offerings are seen as competitive rather than supportive. Green (2010) argues that it is important for “us to understand more about how the internet and digital technology are being used informally, and what possibilities these uses might suggest to us” (p. 91). With technology offering ease of access for many young adolescents, music education must investigate its potentialities.

Despite the offerings of technology, we cannot assume that all technology is good, or equally available or attractive to learners (Green, 2010). Veenema and Gardner (1996) warn:

Technology does not necessarily improve education. Take a simple innovation like the pencil: one can use it to write a superlative essay, to drum away the time, or to poke out someone’s eye. The best television has educated thousands, while the daily network offerings dull the sensibilities of millions. (p. 69)

This captures the double-edged sword of technology in education. Bell (2015) identifies this as the ‘facile fallacy’, proposing that the misconception that music can be made instantaneously
and effortlessly with technology actually fosters a “musical miseducation” (p. 52). Cain (2004) also warns of the dangers of seeing music technologies as an end in themselves, rather than as a “means to achieve a musical outcome engaging aesthetic responsiveness” (p. 218). Bell (2015) advocates that modern technology is an instrument in the music:

> I am an advocate for technology as long as it’s something that’s used rather than something that somebody is used by. It’s very easy to become a slave to technology and do something over and over again. Even though you have the ability to try a lot of options with a computer, that doesn’t mean that it will be done any better or quicker. It is important that you make sure you use technology to your advantage and don’t ever let yourself become used by it. (p. 52)

Doing anything otherwise can lead to uncritical musical responses and do more harm than good. Swanwick (1999b) also sees technology as a tool and not an end in itself. He is concerned that it appears easy to “progressively mechanise human imagination out of existence” and thereby fail to “develop expressive range or structural sensitivity” (p. 108). It is important not to neglect these imaginative and social aspects that are fundamental to the nature of music education, or to allow technology to replace authentic musical practices. There is a need to use technology in ways that support musical thinking. Savage (2012) offers that music technologies also need to offer us ways to think deeper than we could without it.

> For music education to be enhanced by technology, it must first accept that students are able to access, learn and create music in many new ways through its use (Green, 2008b). They are part of a culture that allows them to express themselves musically through these media. The use of technology in formal music education may see the emergence of a new musical language, but this will only happen if the use of the technology is of musical value. As Thwaites (2014) cautions, we need to be careful that we do not “promote educating technically rather than educating musically” (p. 31). The use of music technologies in the classroom demands that we challenge current models of musicianship and musical development, and integrate technology in ways that extend from the traditional underpinnings of music education and promote musical thinking. Bell (2015) suggests that doing so might be “the key to unlocking the hibernating musician within” (p. 45).
The Construction of Musical ‘Knowing’

Intuition and analysis

Edward Elgar once heard someone describe a phrase of Wagner’s in terms of the chord of the supertonic. He responded with ‘what is the supertonic? I never heard of it.’

(Keith Swanwick, Musical Knowledge: Intuition, Analysis and Music Education)

Swanwick (1994) proposes that musical knowledge has two forms – the intuitive and the analytical. Swanwick sees intuitive knowledge – personal or acquaintance knowledge – at the “heart of musical experience”, and crucial for all knowing (p. 26). Swanwick argues that intuition is immediately engaging and an “active way of constructing the world”, making all other ways of knowing possible (p. 28). Indeed, proponents of aesthetics stress intuitive knowledge as a fundamental way of accessing music – it is personal and constructed through acquaintance with music itself – and central to aesthetic awareness and artistic understanding. Swanwick (1994) argues that intuitive aspects can only be “caught by rubbing up against them”, and positions intuitive knowledge as “central to all knowledge – the medial exchange between sense and significance” (p. 31). He proposes that the only justifiable reason for selecting a musical activity within an educational program is that it has potential to engage significantly at the intuitive level. It is here that music is felt through acquaintance – unlabelled and experienced first-hand.

Analytical knowing is positioned as a dialectic with intuitive knowing – not adversarial, but interdependent and interwoven. Analytical knowledge is represented symbolically, which enables us to articulate and document musical history, culture and action. This symbol system provides a pathway for the growth of skill and the complexities of our interactions with music. This form of knowledge can be easily organised into a curriculum – it is something that can be ‘taught’ (Swanwick, 1999b). Swanwick (1994) argues that an initiation into the symbolic world is what education is all about; though he also cautions analytical conversations about music alone “are no substitute for musical experience” (p. 40). He positions analytical knowing at the heart of attempts to engage in education, as it feeds the imaginative workings of intuition with data, yielding more and more understanding:

In essence, intuitive knowledge is the bridge of imagination between (musical) sensation and analysis. It is pre-analytical. But left to itself, untended, not taken up into symbolic forms, intuition cannot thrive. (Swanwick, 1994, p. 42)

Analysis informs intuition, never replaces it – together they lead to understanding. Analysis as part of the musical experience nourishes intuitive insights (Swanwick, 1994). In his work, The
Consolations of Philosophy, de Botton (2004) offers support to the ways in which intuition and analysis work together to inform understanding through reference to Plato’s Meno:

Meno and the generals held unsound ideas because they had absorbed the prevailing norms without testing their logic. To point out the peculiarity of their passivity, Socrates compared living without thinking systematically to practising an activity like pottery or shoemaking without following or even knowing of technical procedures. One would never imagine that a good pot or shoe could result from intuition alone; why then assume that the more complex task of directing one’s life could be undertaken without any sustained reflection on premises or goals? (p. 21)

Musical knowledge is constructed between the intuitive and analytical. Analysis forms a support mechanism for intuitive experience – by itself, it cannot lead to musical understanding. Paynter (1982) agrees in that analytical knowledge “exists principally to explain what has already been experienced …. ‘knowing about music’ can never be a satisfactory substitute for the living reality of musical experience” (p. xiii).

Analytical musical knowledge – knowledge about music – is factual and can be clearly positioned within a curriculum. Whilst providing a sensory experience of music is an easy task, ensuring it is intuitively experienced is fraught with difficulty. It is more challenging to define and difficult to place in a curriculum. Swanwick (1999b) argues that an experience of music is central to locating intuitive knowledge – it is something that is ‘caught’ rather than ‘taught’ – it allows us to know of music itself. Swanwick (1994) describes how students might be presented with both intuitive and analytical opportunities for constructing knowledge within the classroom setting:

The educational process here is simple. We start not with concepts but from music and we end with it: beginning with intuitive response to music and then analysing by ear some perceived feature of materials, character or form. This reality forms the basis of practical classroom activity. The essential component is that the teachers behave musically as both critics and models. (p. 140)

This process offers a good model for music education, and it is mirrored in several approaches, including the Kodály methodology and Dalcroze approach, that espouse ‘sound before symbol’. It is the attachment of this analytical label, however, that is often problematic, with a danger of factual knowledge replacing intuition as central to musical knowing. It is within the ‘space between’ intuition and analysis where significance is attached to the sensory. It is in this space that we may challenge Ross’s (1995) ‘unteachable’ nature of school music.
Dissonance and flow

The space between the intuitive and the analytical can often be an uncomfortable place. Significant learning, in general, is impelled by discomfort – as we engage with the content and concepts of music, our schemas are constructed and reconstructed according to our experience – and our educative endeavour as teachers is to both craft and stabilise such discomfort (Bruner, 1977). In order to grow, the learner needs to confront problems in order to reach beyond the present stage and develop the constructs that will sustain growth at another level. Joyce, Weil and Showers (1992) suggest:

The purpose of education is to generate the conditions that will enable us to acknowledge the disequilibrium of change as a fundamental of the continuance of growth, so that we can reach beyond ourselves toward richer understanding and accept the wisdom that lies within ourselves – that discomfort is our lot if we are not to be arrested along our road. (p. 403)

Joyce, Weil and Showers (1992) term this discomfort as ‘cognitive dissonance’ – that challenge, carefully stabilised, invites growth in skill and understanding, and can lead to greater feelings of control and fulfilment. de Botton (2004) agrees: “the most fulfilling human projects appear inseparable from a degree of torment, the sources of our greatest joys lying awkwardly close to those of our greatest pains…” (p. 215). He continues:

… no one is able to produce a great work of art without experience, nor achieve a worldly position immediately, nor be a great lover at the first attempt; and in the interval between initial failure and subsequent success, in the gap between who we wish one day to be and who we are at present, must come pain, anxiety, envy and humiliation. We suffer because we cannot spontaneously master the ingredients of fulfilment…. (p. 215)

This dissonance is a natural stage of working musically, and rich meanings are to be found in these tensions; however, dissonance needs to be carefully constructed so that it does not induce anxiety and prevent students from constructing meaning.

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) proposes the notion of ‘flow’ to impel learning. He describes flow as “the way people describe their state of mind when consciousness is harmoniously ordered, and they want to pursue whatever they are doing for its own sake” (p. 6). A state of flow occurs when attention is invested in realistic goals and when skills match the opportunities for action. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) describes flow as an optimal experience or happiness. When we are involved in musical activity, we have the potential to experience flow:

Music, which is organised auditory information, helps organise the mind that attends to it, and therefore reduces psychic entropy, or disorder we experience when random information interferes with goals. Listening to music wards off boredom and anxiety and when seriously attended to, it can produce flow experiences. (p. 109)
For Csikszentmihalyi (1995), optimal experience or happiness occurs in a ‘flow channel’, where skill and challenge intersect to impel us forward. If a task is too challenging, then anxiety will result; conversely, boredom can result if the task is not challenging enough. Within the ‘flow channel’ one can experience a “concentration so intense that there is no attention left over to think about anything irrelevant … and the sense of time disappears” (p. 71).

Elliott (1995) appropriates Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow into the context of musical challenge and musicianship. He states that it is the “matching increase in the level of challenge and know-how that propels the self to higher levels of complexity, that results in self-growth, and that participants experience as an exhilarating and absorbing sense of flow” (p. 116). Elliott expresses the outcomes of matching and mismatching within his graph in Figure 1.

![Figure 1](image_url)

**Figure 1**
Musicianship x Musical Challenge = Musical Value (from Elliott, 1995, p. 122)

Elliott (1995) identifies Csikszentmihalyi’s flow channel as a place for “self-growth and musical enjoyment” (p. 122). When the skill level is high (expert) and the challenge is low, boredom is the likely result; when the skill level is low (novice) and the challenge is too high, anxiety or frustration is likely. If the challenge is matched, then self-growth and musical enjoyment are the
likely outcomes. If carefully located, musical experiences provide the opportunity for students to experience flow – a place where challenge and skill meet outside of boredom and anxiety.

Music as discourse

Swanwick (1999b) develops the argument that music is a discourse ‘impregnated with metaphor’. He proposes that if formal music education is to help students into a situated musical discourse, then it must offer more than one entry point. In an earlier work, Swanwick (1979) refers to these entry points for music education as the parameters of musical experience – the ways through which we engage with music – and represents them through the acronym CLASP:

![Figure 2](CLASP.png)

These five parameters – three of them (composition, audiation, and performance) directly relate to music, with the remaining two (literature and skill acquisition) providing both supporting and enabling roles – “provide a model for education” (Swanwick, 1979, p. 46). The focus here is on practice with the expressive elements of music, and Swanwick (1979) advocates that teaching must focus on ‘making’ activities that attend directly to the expressive qualities of music. Here there is a clear distinction between distinctly musical learning activities, and the analytical and skill-oriented experiences, within a definition of the nature of musical experience.

The parameters of musical experience provide different ways for us to engage in music. In each of these contexts, Swanwick (1999b) identifies three ways in which music functions metaphorically. Through the process of metaphor, he proposes that teachers aim to:

1. transform tones into ‘tunes’, gestures;
2. transform these ‘tunes’, these gestures into structures;
3. transform these symbolic structures into significant experience. (p. 43)
Within the third of these metaphorical transformations, he argues that terms such as Reimer’s ‘aesthetic experience’, Csikszentmihalyi’s ‘flow’, and Elliott’s ‘peak experience’ are completely interchangeable. Swanwick (1999b) suggests that the significance encountered in the third of these metaphorical transformations is enough to motivate students to “put themselves in the way of musical experiences” (p. 43). The goal for music education is to support access to all three metaphorical processes, and open up the ‘space between’ sense and significance (ibid.). Swanwick’s vision is one of “music permeating and expanding our minds at every level” (p. 44). These processes support the notion that music is a symbolic form, rich in metaphorical potential, and that we can explore the materials, form, expression and value of music though engaging it as a discourse.

From this metaphorical footing, Swanwick (1999b) proposes three working principles to inform effective music teaching: a) care for music as a discourse; b) care for the musical discourse of students; and, c) fluency ‘first and last’. Swanwick (2008) states that he uses the term ‘discourse’ in a non-technical sense – “close in meaning to ‘conversation’, the expression of ideas, meaningful interchange” (p. 12). The aim of the music teacher is to bring music from the background into the foreground of awareness. Swanwick (1999b) argues that effective music education means to observe a “strong sense of musical intention linked to educational purposes”, and that running alongside any system or way of working should be the ultimate question – is this really musical? (p. 45). Fundamental to interaction with music as a discourse is fluency with ‘tones and tunes’. Swanwick (2008) continues:

Musical discourse involves thinking and communicating in musical images, in tones and tunes. Fluency is the ability to share, produce and collaborate in the production of these sonorous images. This is analogous to but not the same as fluency in a language. It is discourse in music not about music. (p.12, italics mine)

Ross (1995) makes similar claims, in that learning music is to acquire musical speech; “having musical speech means being able to have musical ideas, and being able to give musical voice to them” (p. 194). This positions musical meaning and value as social products, to the extent that they are formed in and through the defining activities of people as they interact. As Swanwick (2001) argues, we engage in a particular set of discursive forms deriving from our social experience, and tensions, contradictions, and incompatibilities within, provide a constant source of dialogue. By engaging in discourses inherent in musical experience, “understanding seeps in and lingers” (Askew, 1998, p. 40). In these encounters, ‘tones’ transform into ‘tunes’, ‘tunes’ into forms, and forms into significant life events.
The second principle – care for the musical discourse of students – is by definition, one that can never be a monologue (Swanwick, 1999b). Students bring a wealth of understanding and experience to school; we do not introduce them to music, they are already well acquainted with it – “though they may not have subjected it to the various forms of analysis that we may feel are important for their further development” (Swanwick, 1999b, p. 53). Swanwick cautions of the need to be responsive to autonomy and the “natural energies that sustain spontaneous learning”: curiosity; a desire to be competent; wanting to emulate others; and a need for social interaction (p. 54). In order to create new knowledge, an active dialogue based upon awareness and understanding is required. As Georgii-Hemming and Westvall (2010) argue, “teachers must be able to comprehend students’ experiences, understanding and thinking in order for them to deliberately change it” (p. 27). Further, learning experiences that offer differing possibilities for decision-making are a critical feature of student autonomy. Regelski (2005a) argues that the music used in music education must be expanded to include “not just a broader range of musics, but to the idea of enabling students to appropriate musical meanings and values in ways … that ‘make a difference’ as a direct result of their schooling” (Regelski, 2005a, p. 19). In this way, Swanwick (1999b) argues that individual differences of students can be respected.

Thirdly, Swanwick (1999b) identifies that, if music is a form of discourse, then it is in some ways analogous to language; mainly centred on aural and oral engagement with “other languagers” – ‘fluency, first and last’ (p. 55). Swanwick also proposes that we have to look for music’s equivalent – aural engagement with other ‘musicers’ – before any written text or other analysis of what is essentially intuitively known. Swanwick (1999a) cautions that “literacy is not the ultimate aim of music education, it is simply a means to an end in some music, and is often unnecessary” (p. 137, italics in original). He proposes that an effective educative sequence should be listen, articulate, then read and write (Swanwick, 1999b, italics mine). Musicians from outside of the Western classical tradition are well aware of this third principle, that musical fluency takes precedence over musical literacy. Many students today also engage in informal practices that share this view – playing by ear, copying the playing of another, imitating, improvising, and inventing within a clear framework (Green, 2002). Swanwick (1999b) advocates that students in any kind of formal music education should be able to engage in at least some of these very ‘natural’ musical strategies. Music education will benefit from taking into consideration the how, why and when questions of music as used in society.

Taken together, Swanwick’s (1999b) three principles assist to keep music education ‘musical’. Care for music as a discourse, care for the musical discourse of students and an emphasis on fluency “are likely to be more effective across a range of teaching settings that the
detail of curriculum documentation” (Swanwick, 1999b, p. 57). To adopt this view is to allow music to extend the ability of students to function in the space between, in the symbolic world of musical images and ideas (Swanwick, 2008). In this way, we move towards the meaning and value of music being located in praxis, and we allow experience in from the world outside. We approach Ross’s (1995) ‘music proper’.

**Conclusion**

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise – with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew.

(Abraham Lincoln, *1862 Annual Message to Congress*)

The tensions that have been identified in this literature review demand that we think and act anew. These tensions are complex and interleaved, and are ultimately situated between the assumptions and values presented in the competing philosophies of music education and how each has been translated into practice. Though each philosophy has advanced thinking in music education, care must be taken as to how each is translated into a coherent model of practice for teachers. We must resist our interpretations falling destructively towards the firm and inflexible traditions of Western classical music education. Our practice must shift from the handing down of this culture alone, as well as move from the teaching of abstracted knowledge about music, to situated knowledge of music – through learning to music – that is ultimately responsive to the changing nature of society and our greater connectedness with other cultures. An understanding of music is developed through practice; therefore, we must invite students to construct their own knowledge through authentic musical experiences with other musicians (Elliott, 1995). As Ross (1995) demands, we must engage students in ‘music proper’ – by treating students as musicians working directly with the materials of music to support their musical thinking and acting.

If this fails to materialise in the school context, then many students may turn to informal experiences. Schools must examine these rich and authentically approached musical encounters, as well as investigate the ways in which music technologies are put to use within them. Insight into these ways of working will allow us to understand the ways students construct meaningful musical understandings that are put to active use, and offer us possibilities to work with and not against students, and allow us to better comprehend their musical lives. Our role as teachers is to

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18 Reimer’s ‘music education as aesthetic education’, and Elliott’s ‘praxial music education’.
engage students in the discourse of music – in doing so we must engage them in and with music as we would with language; we must listen to what they have to say and provide experiences that enrich their ability to use it. Their experiences with music offer us an entry point into their musical ‘spaces’, where there is comfort in musical dialogue drawn from known musical languages and conventions of discourse. Through supportively extending their ability and fluency with this discourse, we may then challenge them to move beyond these spaces and into new musical worlds. In these interactions, we must aim for learning to be social, ‘talkative’, supported and celebratory; through this we will be offered insight into who they are, how they feel and what they know (Finney, 2003). We must endeavour to have our classrooms offer a network of rich conversations situated in musical experience. The challenge facing us is how we reconceptualise our teaching in ways that weave these ideas together into a fabric that is rich, engaging, and authentic (Bowman, 2014).

This literature review has provided insight into the tensions inherent in formal school music education, and has explored the guiding research question posed at the start of this study. Though the literature offers some solutions to these tensions, they are not clearly articulated with respect to their implementation in the classroom – they offer us an ideal, but less in terms of concrete practices. Jorgensen (2003) and Spruce (2015b) suggests that we might explore the tensions we face in school music education though engaging in dialogue with our students. An examination of the dichotomies that face music education – what Jorgensen (2003) terms as ‘dialectics’ – suggests that such dialogue may offer new and previously unconsidered approaches to be revealed:

As dialectics are voiced and negotiated in the process of dialogue between teachers, students, and those interested in their work, these dialogues, in turn, engender further dialectics. Despite the fact that this approach is a potentially and fragile endeavour, it offers a way to envisage transforming music education that respects and listens to the other and draws on reason, intuition, imagination, and feeling. In doing so, it creates a space where many voices heretofore silenced can be heard. (Jorgensen, 2003, p. 18)

In subscribing to this view, we are provided a means to reflect on and understand the impact of our pedagogies. Davis and Blair (2011) offer a similar message in the form of an analogy:

In order to come to school and learn new things, students need to cross barriers (for example, the street) to get over to the teacher’s side (the school). But a teacher who is closed to the child’s experience may not be aware that the student is still trying to understand things ‘from the other side of the street.’… A tactful teacher realises that it is not the child but the teacher who has to cross the street in order to go to the child’s side. The teacher has to know ‘where the child is,’ ‘how the child sees things’, how it is that this student has difficulty crossing the street to enter the domain of learning. The teacher has to stand beside the child and help the child locate places to cross over and find means for the child to successfully get to the other side, to these other worlds. (pp. 155-156)
In recognising and responding to the musical needs, expectations and desires of our students as we engage in symmetrical dialogue, we learn how to best support them, as well as something of ourselves. Through such dialogue we hold up our pedagogical approaches to see if they honour both music and musicer. This may prompt a significant amount of reflection and consideration as to where we position and situate our pedagogies if we are to minimise or even resolve the tensions present within our context, and in music education more generally. This provides the focus for this action research project.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND CONTEXT

Overview

I believe – and I’m sure most music educationalists feel the same – that as researchers in the field of music education we should not fly off into the blue skies of ‘theory for theories sake’; but that at some level, we need to keep our research grounded in either the practicalities of music-teaching and learning, and/or in our intellectual needs to educate ourselves.

(Lucy Green, Response)

This project is built upon the premise that research in music education must be grounded within the context of the music classroom. Regelski (1995) laments, that “research happens everywhere else except in the classroom, where it is needed” (p. 65). The MayDay Group\(^\text{19}\) continues to advocate “an approach to music education inquiry that draws its problems from and applies its conclusions to the authentic musical actions of people” (Bontinck, Bowman, Bunting, Colwell, Cutietta & Elliott et al., 1997, p. 4). Teachers are in an ideal position to engage in such research, and thereby keep research grounded in the practicalities of music teaching and learning.

In this chapter, I present why I believe an action research methodology is appropriately responsive to these ideals and supportive of my own research aims. This methodology positions me as a teacher-researcher endeavouring to enhance my own practice through a systematic study of my own classroom. I detail the Zuber-Skerritt (2009) action research design, which was used to inform and guide the planning, acting, observing and reflecting stages of each cycle. I also present a theoretical frame of reference, which supported the intervention process and research aims of the project. The context within which these interventions were made is identified, and a description of the students involved in the project is also provided. I also identify the data collection tools used and describe the manner and stages in which resulting data were analysed and used to inform proceeding cycles. Furthermore, I present the considerations made to ensure the authenticity of the data, principally through attention to a range of validity measures. My reflexive stance, the engagement of a critical friend, and the triangulation of data sources are also discussed with regards to the authenticity of the project.

\(^{19}\) An international community of music scholars and practitioners, who apply critical theory to music education.
conclude the chapter with a reflective statement concerning the methodological stance of the project and how I believe the research methods are aligned and appropriate to the research questions generated by the research context.

**Action Research**

*Worldview underpinning action research*

Action research is a relatively new methodology that emerged after World War I from the intellectual climate and ethos of an era that focused on empowerment and change (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007). The conception of a theoretical model of action research can be traced back to Kurt Lewin, whose social experiments of the 1940s melded the experimental approach of social science with programs of social action to address social problems (Creswell, 2008; Herr & Anderson, 2005; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Through these experiments, Lewin challenged the orthodoxy surrounding the role of the social scientist as a “disinterested, objective observer of human affairs” (Burns, 2000, p. 444). Lewin’s new approach to research aimed to promote social action through democratic decision-making and active participation of practitioners in the research process. In this approach, practical and theoretical outcomes are grounded in the interests and perspectives of those immediately concerned, not filtered through outsider preconceptions. Reason and Bradbury (2008) state:

> when we assert the practical purposes of action research and the importance of human interests; when we join knower with known in a participative relationship; as we move away from operational measurement into a science of experiential qualities, we undercut the foundations of the empirical-positivist worldview that has been the foundation of Western inquiry since the Enlightenment. (p. 4)

The importance of human interests and a connection between the knower and known has evoked a participatory worldview in which the complex nature of reality is recognised as being co-authored. This requires us to be “both situated and reflexive, to be explicit about the perspective from which knowledge is created, to see inquiry as a process of coming to know, serving the democratic, practical ethos of action research” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 7). A participatory worldview allows researchers to approach the complexity of human ecology and epistemology and honour and respect such complexity in its own right. As Melrose (1996) discusses:

> the hermeneutic world recognises multiple interpretations of events, based on the different understandings, motives and reasoning of unique individuals. Just as there are many languages and ‘texts’ in the world, there are many and varied meanings for the individuals using them as they act and react with their environment. Each individual has their own construction of the world and creates their own reality and their own learning pathway through it. (pp. 50-51)
The participatory metaphor is particularly apt for action research; as we participate in the social construction of our world, we are embodied by it, which draws us to consider how we evaluate the quality of our acting.

**Defining action research**

Action research sees theory and practice as interdependent and complimentary phases of a change process aiming to develop practical knowledge of a context or situation. It begins with everyday experience, and is concerned with the development of actionable knowledge, rather than academic theory. Developing such knowledge requires democratic, collaborative and inclusive engagement with all participants through shared practical and theoretical discourse and reflection. Reason and Bradbury (2008) state that action research is “only possible with, for and by persons and communities, ideally involving all stakeholders both in the questioning and sense-making that informs the research, and in the action which is its focus” (italics in original, p. 2). This process informs change, and at the same time is informed by that change (Dick, 2005). Practitioners of action research link practice and the analysis of practice into a productive and continuously developing sequence, which link “researchers and research participants into a single community of interested colleagues” (Winter, 1996, p. 14).

Action research pursues a flexible and cyclical process that alternates action with critical reflection. It is a dynamic process in which the situation of the context changes as a consequence of deliberate intervention; emergent processes are not seen as distractions, but as central to the research process (Coghlan, 2007). Reason and Bradbury (2008) see it as a “living process” which cannot be predetermined; rather, it changes and develops as communities deepen their understanding of the issues under investigation (p. 1). It draws upon many ways of knowing through this process whereby new “communicative spaces in which dialogue and development can flourish” (p. xxii). Through collaborative dialogue, all views are taken as a contribution to understanding the situation, and various accounts and critiques create plural structures. Becoming aware of our perceptual biases through reflexive critique, and submitting them to dialectic critique, provides a way for greater understanding of a context.

**Suitability of action research**

Action research engages in vital arguments relating to participation, the identification of context-specific problems, and the construction of multiple meanings to find workable solutions (Coghlan, 2007). It seeks knowledge that is actionable and contributes to the development of a theory of what really is occurring in a context or situation. In Schön’s terms, it positions “research in the swampy lowlands where problems are messy” (as cited in Coghlan, 2007, p. 42).
As Regelski (1995) asserts, this is where research is needed. Coghlan (2007) and Zuber-Skerritt (2009) argue that it is time for a model of research that is transdisciplinary, heterogeneous, socially accountable, and reflexive, produced in the context of application. Action research fulfills this demand. It challenges the empirical-positivist epistemology, arguing against a detached, disinterested, external observer who is grounded by a reductionist perspective, ignores contextual information and “distorts an understanding of self and world” (Kincheloe, 2012, p. 16). To the contrary, the perspective of action research as situated and reflexive, as drawing together multiple understandings of the context under inquiry, honours an understanding of the self within the complexities of the world. Practitioners – or in this context, teachers – are best positioned to engage in such research.

Teachers do not generally live in the same professional culture as researchers. Applebaum (1972) observed some time ago that there often appears little relationship between the professional music community and the professional academic music community. A disconnect between music education theory and practice, with research flying “off into the blue skies of ‘theory for theories sake’” is often cited as a contributing factor to this relationship (Green, 2010, p. 89). Conway and Borst (2001) state, “even when music education research is presented in a practitioner-friendly way, problems arise because most research ideas and designs come from the university community” (p. 3). Much music education research is often viewed by music teachers as irrelevant to practice, which contributes to gaps between the production and consumption of research results. Reimer (1992) suggests this gap is due to perceptions relating to the ownership of research:

[as] long as college faculty members are the (almost) sole producers of research, and school teachers and administrators are expected to be (almost) entirely consumers of research, the gap will remain, and no attempts to persuade or intimidate school people to use research more than they do will be effective. (p. 10)

As Kincheloe (2012) argues, “teachers must join the culture of researchers if a new level of educational rigor [sic] and quality is ever to be achieved” (p. 18). Action research conducted by teachers shifts the ownership of research solely from the academic community. It can generate research findings that directly relate to the problems teachers face, and is concerned with teachers critiquing their own praxis with a view to applying understandings gained to improve future praxis. It empowers teachers in that it allows research into their own pedagogical choices within the classroom that specifically work to meet the needs of all involved (Esposito & Smith, 2006). Gay, Mills and Airasian (2006) suggest that this makes such research more persuasive, authoritative, relevant and accessible to teachers. The locus of control, Mertler (2006) argues, is in essence returned to the classroom level, thereby enhancing pedagogical effectiveness.
Action research has the potential to greatly enhance teaching practice as teachers adopt critical stances on education matters. Cain (2008) argues that action research is “a natural extension of a teacher’s professionalism, one where reflection and development of one’s practice is crucial” (p. 284). Similarly, Winter (1996) states that action research is part of the general idea of teacher professionalism, “an extension of professional work, not an addition to it” (italics in original, p. 14). Robinson and Lai (2006) propose that action research is an effective form of professional development in that it is “collegial, job-embedded, and evidence-based” in its approach to improving teaching and learning (p. 12). Megowan-Romanowicz (2010) argues that action research is much more than just a professional development exercise, “it engenders a community of sustained reflective practice that not only results in positive changes for participants, but also in growing a body of practitioner research that is respected and shared among teachers” (p. 1010). Research by teachers for teachers develops context-specific solutions to problems through systematic inquiry and shared professional and practical dialogue. It affirms the professionalism of teaching by giving teachers a voice in their own professional development.

As action research can provide context-specific professional development, it can be bound to sustainable improvement in teaching and learning. Sustainable improvement requires the continued critical examination of practice between teachers and their knowledge, beliefs and actions. It relies on teachers engaging in dialogue with other teachers about their perspectives and reflections on an issue, and their theories and justifications on action. Robinson and Lai (2006) argue that this is “more likely to foster significant and worthwhile improvements to teacher practice than attempts to disseminate academic research and theory to practitioners” (p. 198). Such a culture of inquiry is necessary if sustainable improvements to specific contexts and situations are to be made. Zuber-Skerritt (2009) sees this level of inquiry as essential to successful organisational development today:

I believe that in the next five to ten years, action research will become one of the most appropriate methodologies in professional and organisational development, and the most relevant to all sectors of society, because of the increasingly rapid change under way in all spheres of life. Organisations will no longer be able to rely on external experts and knowledge recorded in books, which is anyway too quickly outdated. Organisations will have to rely more and more on the collaborative abilities of their own people to solve problems swiftly, to network, and to anticipate change. (p. 49)

Collaborative attention to experience, understanding and judgement, which leads to action, is the best way to confront the challenges of our classrooms. Through this, teachers challenge positivistic standards and move away from a ‘this is what the expert researchers have found – now go do it model’, to one in which they explore and attempt to interpret the learning
processes of their classrooms, and analyse and contemplate the power of each other’s ideas to uncover best practice (Kincheloe, 2012).

The Action Research Design

Fundamental to quality action research design is recursive critical reflection upon action that is focused upon seeing change in practice. Coghlan (2007) argues for a “praxis-reflection methodology of attention to experience, understanding and judgement which leads to action” as the basis for rigorous action research (p. 338). In addition, Herr and Anderson (2005) argue that in action research inquiry “there is a sense that the methodology evolves as it is implemented in the field, depending on the conditions that greet the researcher as the study is being implemented” (p. 76). Taking into consideration the principles of critical, reflexive and dialectic reflection upon action within a context of evolving conditions, the action research design of Zuber-Skerritt (1996/2009) provided a clear and appropriate means to guide the project. The Zuber-Skerritt design is presented in Figure 3.

![Figure 3](image-url)  
*Figure 3*  
The action research spiral (adapted from Zuber-Skerritt, 1996/2009)
The Zuber-Skerritt (2009) design shows a recursive cyclical process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Initial reflection on the situation in light of thematic concern, in conjunction with a reconnaissance stage, precedes the first planning cycle. The momentum of the cycles then sees a **planning** stage informed by reflection, in which critically informed action seeks to improve what is already happening. The plan adopts an interventionist stance and remains flexible enough to cope with unforeseen issues and circumstances. The **acting** stage sees the implementation of the plan in which the action is deliberate and controlled. The **observing** stage includes the observation and documentation of the effects of critically informed action in the context within which it occurs. The **reflecting** stage sees reflection on these effects as a basis for further planning based on critically informed action, and so on, through a succession of cycles (Zuber-Skerritt, 2009). The four phases of this design are not in themselves static steps, but “dynamic moments in the action research spiral” – they allow for flexibility and allow the data to guide the findings of the research (Creswell, 2008, p. 112). The cyclical process of action research is flexible and responsive; the research is refined as a greater understanding of the situation develops. As Dick (2002) suggests, each cycle is a step “in the direction of better action and better research” (¶ 7).

I reviewed several action research designs – those proposed by Mills (2007), Sagor (2005) and Stringer (1999) – each including recursive stages of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. I purposefully selected the Zuber-Skerritt design as a basis for this project not only due to Zuber-Skerritt’s respected and long-standing authority on action research, but also the visual modelling of the design – the upward spiralling and widening of the successive cycles suggest a deeper, more encompassing knowledge and understanding of the situation. I found that this encapsulated what my project sought to achieve – a growth in the understanding and awareness of my own practice and context through critical and informed reflection.

**Theoretical Frames**

Two broad theoretical frames guided each stage of the research project – a) the theory of constructivism, and b) the notion of ‘music as discourse’ (Swanwick, 1999b). Constructivism is a theory of learning and knowledge developed through the work of Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky, and has come to exist in multiple manifestations in education (Morford, 2007). A contemporary understanding of constructivism combines the cognitive learning theories of both Piaget and Bruner, with the social constructivist theory of Vygotsky to provide a comprehensive understanding of the way knowledge is constructed. From an epistemological perspective, constructivism posits that we can only truly know the world through the lens of our own sensory
and sociocultural experience (Wiggins, 2001). Constructivism links the ‘knower’ to the ‘known’ by positioning meaning as a personal construct, rather than being external to the individual. It proposes knowledge not as truths to be transmitted or discovered, but rather “as emergent, developmental, non-objective, viable, constructed explanations by humans in meaning making in cultural and social communities and discourse” (Fosnot, 2005, p. ix). Meanings are not subjective and personal, but constructions are socially generated by the interplay between consciousness and the object of experience. Knowledge is not created by the individual mind, but through a process of social exchange (Bruner, 1977; Gergen, 1995; von Glasersfeld, 1995). Constructivism places the learner as an active participant in a social process of building knowledge and understanding. In generating new possible ‘knowledge worlds’, it demands that teachers become aware of students’ capacities, needs and experiences, and act as a stabilising partner as they encourage cooperative purpose and growth through social negotiation and dialogue (Bruner, 1977).

Keith Swanwick’s (1999b) notion of ‘music as discourse’ is naturally accommodated within this constructivist framework. He argues that music education must: a) care for music as a discourse; b) care for the musical discourse of students; and, c) be centred on fluency of interaction with other ‘musicers’. Swanwick proposes that these three principles guide music education towards a “strong sense of musical intention” and thereby enable opportunities for students to encounter meaning through authentic educational transactions (p. 45). Interleaved with these principles is an awareness of “the natural energies that sustain spontaneous learning” – curiosity, a desire to be competent, wanting to emulate others, and a need for social interaction (ibid.). Swanwick’s ‘music as discourse’ positions social interplay as central in the exchange of musical ideas and the development of musical knowledge and understanding.

The Context

The project was located within the research site to be known via the pseudonym Sunshine College. Sunshine College is a P-12\(^{20}\) co-educational independent school in a high socio-economic area of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia. Sunshine College is single campus situated within a new estate development, which has experienced significant growth since its establishment in 2001. Opening in 2003 with 161 enrolments, Sunshine College grew to host 1,192 students in the year of data collection. The Music Faculty is well resourced, with two large classrooms, nine studio practice rooms, a storeroom, and a large office space for 16

\(^{20}\) P-12 refers to Prep (Preparatory) to Year 12. The Australian Curriculum uses F-12 (with ‘F’ representing Foundation). Both Preparatory and Foundation refer to the first year of schooling, approximate student age 5.
staff (peripatetic, part-time and full-time). Of the two classrooms, one is predominately used for Primary Music (Prep to Year 6), and the other for Secondary Music (Year 7 – 12). The Primary Music room is an open space with a piano, sound system and data projector, and a class set of instruments that include Orff xylophones and glockenspiels, and a range of auxiliary percussion. The Secondary Music room contains 24 desks in three rows, with 20 additional workstations at the sides and rear of the teaching space. Each workstation is a two-tiered desk housing a 24-inch Mac and MIDI keyboard controller. This room also contains a sound system, roof-mounted data projector, a piano, 30 battery-powered keyboards (separate to the MIDI controllers), 30 acoustic guitars, and an electronic drum-kit. The resources in this room were additions ready for the start of the 2011 school year. Fortunately, this class had access to both main classrooms as no other classes were timetabled in the other room during this time. The two rooms were separated by a retractable wall, which could be opened easily to create a very large working space.

Music is a compulsory subject studied by students from Preparatory through to Year 8. The classroom program provides experience in a range of musical styles and genres, framed by study in musical analysis, theory, composition and performance. Year 8 Music at Sunshine College, like many Australian schools, marks the final year of compulsory music education. Students in Year 8 receive one 80-minute music lesson each week for the entire school year. Students may continue to study Music as an elective subject from Year 9 through to Year 12. Furthermore, Music Extension is a subject available to both Year 11 and 12 students who wish to specialise in composition, musicology, or performance strands of study. In addition, students from Prep to Year 12 may elect to become involved in the Co-curricular Music Program, a performance-focused program in which students receive private or small group lessons on a variety of instruments and voice. Within this program, students have the opportunity to engage in a range of traditional and contemporary instrumental and vocal ensembles.

The Students

This project was based in the Year 8 Music classroom. In 2011, there were 96 Year 8 students enrolled at Sunshine College. These students were already randomly assigned to four approximately even-sized classes, or ‘streams’, moving from subject to subject as a cohesive group. Of these four streams, one was identified to be involved in the project. The selection of this particular class was based solely on the location of the class in my timetable – a spare period before and after, which enabled greater attention to be paid to lesson preparation and post-lesson reflective activity – especially given my other responsibilities as Head of Music at the site. The selection of this group constituted a purposeful sample. By nature, action research
embodies purposeful sampling as the sample is drawn from a defined context housing a specific issue; the selected sample provides illustrative, not definitive, findings (Glesne, 1999). This said, any of the Year 8 Music classes at the site would have presented equally valid options for selection – as the research problem is embedded in a larger population; each class was rich in potential data. As Glesne (1999) notes, the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in the selection of information-rich cases for in-depth study.

The selected Year 8 Music class consisted of 25 students – 12 male students and 13 female students, aged 12 or 13 years at the commencement of the project. Fifteen students (60%) identified themselves as someone who regularly learns or plays an instrument through formal or informal means. Until the year of the project, I had not taught many of these students in the classroom context; however, I was familiar with some of the students through their membership of school ensembles and also my role in overseeing the music curriculum from Prep to Year 12. All but one of the students, Liam, had completed at least one year at Sunshine College, and therefore experienced Music at the school. Liam was new to the school in 2011, and in my initial discussions with him, it became apparent very quickly that school music was not something that he enjoyed. He stated that he “hated Music” and that all he did in class at his previous school was “sing boring songs and learn about Bach” (researcher journal, February 4, 2011). Further, few in the cohort had completed more than three years of study at the College. This was due to the rapid growth of the College and a common intake of new students into the Secondary School from local primary schools. To this end, much of their formal music education had been scattered between contexts and not always sequential. At this stage, I knew relatively little about their disposition towards classroom music and so employed the survey and focus-group interview data collection tools in the reconnaissance phase of the project.

**Self and Motivations**

I have taught Music in two Queensland schools – a state and an independent school – since 2003. My undergraduate training provided a very solid basis from which I could act, and I was very fortunate to have three exceptional mentor teachers – each with their own ways of teaching, and each from different systemic and socio-cultural contexts – on my practicums. Common to their approaches was the centrality of an aesthetic framework, and though rich with practical experiences, classroom activities held music as a *product*, more so than a *process*. This is a viewpoint that I came to adopt and practice in my own teaching. Music as a product was

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21 Eight of the students (32%) had been at Sunshine College for at least three years.
22 Secondary School in Queensland now starts in Year 7 (approximately 12 years of age).
more tangible and teachable; practical experiences with music were based on informing an understanding of concepts and content in relation to this product. As an early career teacher, I was (and still am) a traditionalist at heart, but aware that this could place music education on the outskirts of importance for some of my students. I endeavoured to make my classroom a place in which I could show the students the ‘great musical products’ of many styles and genres, and increase a symbolic and traditional way of knowing; in this, I largely taught about music. Despite the diversity of the practical and theoretical experiences I provided for my students, however, there remained a disconnect between school music and their own. I have worked with some incredibly musical young people for whom this disconnect was too great – music at school did not inform their musicality anywhere near as significantly as their own experiences did.

Why was the formal study of music at school offering so little? I began to question the students about their own experiences and the experiences of my classroom. I watched and listened to them work, and in doing so, I learnt a great deal about the ways in which we come to know music – we experience it as a process – we learn in, of and through musical activity. This project represents a formal investigation of my own questioning and observation of music teaching and learning – its motivation was to explore practices that made school music more meaningful and engaging for all students in my class.

**Critical Friend**

A critical friend, Daniel²³, was involved in the project over the course of the school year. At the time, Daniel oversaw professional learning and teacher development at Sunshine College and was a member of the administrative body of the school; hence, he was an excellent person for this crucial role. Importantly, Daniel and I engage cohesively as professionals and continue to share a very strong professional relationship built upon a passion for teaching and learning, and critical reflection upon our practice. We had spoken of matters central to this project prior to my enrolment, and often shared professional readings with each other. Daniel and I met to explore the notion of ‘critical friend’ and the positioning of this role within the project well before the data collection phase of the project began. We explored a definition outlined by McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003) whereby a critical friend from within the organisation – one who understands the research context and micro-political nature of the site – acts as a confidant willing to debrief with the researcher. After a period of familiarisation with this positioning, Daniel assisted me achieve a critical perspective through weekly meetings; he attempted to ‘render the familiar strange’ by challenging any assumptions that underpinned my thinking (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 2003). He posed questions that provided the conditions

²³ Daniel is a pseudonym for the ‘critical friend’.
for me to critically examine my actions and articulate my standpoint on decisions made of the project; importantly, as Waters-Adams (2006) suggests, without providing answers of his own.

Due to Daniel’s then position as a member of administration at Sunshine College, it was planned that Daniel would not be present in the classroom, nor would he be involved in data collection via the focus group interviews. I discussed with him my desire to keep the classroom environment as natural as possible, and how I felt that the presence of another teacher, especially one in his position, could diminish the potential to gain authentic data from classroom interactions. The credibility and dependability of the data were established through my own prolonged and naturalistic engagement within the classroom, as my presence afforded a kind of transparency (Mertler, 2006). Given the importance of maintaining this naturalistic setting, Daniel’s access to my classroom remained via audio-visual recordings, audio data from the interviews, and my fieldnotes. This greatly enhanced my understanding of the action, as I had to make explicit what I understood on a more tacit level.

Our weekly meetings assisted me keep to schedule, and Daniel’s clear and considered questioning, enhanced my own considerations and reflections of classroom action. We would meet after school each Friday to discuss my observations, thoughts and reflections of the lesson that had occurred that day. Due to this scheduling, no time constraints were placed upon the meeting, and we would meet for up to an hour, sometimes more. As I completed my own reflections (researcher fieldnotes) immediately after the class, I would bring these along to talk to and prompt discussion. I also provided audio-visual recordings of several lessons to analyse, discuss and verify my written reflections. We both watched these with interest and uncovered additional insights to student engagement within class activities. Daniel also listened to the raw audio data of the focus group interviews and we discussed my interpretations of the responses and discussions emanating through an examination of transcripts made. Daniel assisted me to give a considered account of my research and maintained welcome encouragement and support throughout the project.
Ethics

Action research aims to influence the lives of the practitioner and participants in an educative way; therefore, there are many ethical principles to be considered. The following extract from McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (2003) neatly frames the ethical underpinnings of this project considering this intentional influence:

We can influence in ways that are educative; that is, to help people learn and grow in freedom, as well as ways that are destructive. The idea that our potentials for influence are embodied in the way we act implies that influence is in the quality of our relationships. If those relationships are educative and grounded in commitments to freedom for all to learn and grow, the influence will probably also be educative. (p. 48)

Working to help people learn and grow in freedom was a central ethical consideration of this project; it is also a consideration central to my teaching. The intentions of my actions were to bring about change in, and on behalf, of those it served. The establishment of trusting relationships were crucial for educative change to occur. Though I was acting as teacher-researcher throughout this project, the basis for my actions, and the ethical principles upon which they rested, remained very similar to those in my role as teacher. In the early stages of the project, I felt as though I was changing between two different ‘hats’ – that of teacher, and that of teacher-researcher – though this feeling diminished very quickly, as the action and ethics of my teaching and of the research merged in pursuit of the same goal.

As I had not worked with all the students of the project as a classroom teacher24, I was particularly focused on establishing a relationship of trust with the students and their families. After permission to conduct the research was obtained from the school principal, and the Griffith University Ethics Committee had approved the project, an information and informed consent form was provided to families before the project commenced. This form outlined the intentions and processes of the research project (see Appendix A). It clearly detailed that consent for students to participate in the research was strictly voluntary, and that students were free to withdraw from the research project at any time without undue influence or penalty. It also detailed that students would not be identified within the research by name via their contribution or through work samples, and that pseudonyms would be employed to de-identify data and maintain confidentiality and anonymity. Families were asked to return the consent forms signed within a week, and to contact me if they had any questions or concerns. I also organised an information session to occur through which students and families could meet with me and discuss the research project. Eight families involved themselves in this session and

24 I had not taught Year 8 Music the year prior to the project, but had worked with some students in co-curricular ensembles. My position as Head of Music within the school also saw me keep in contact with all elements of the program and many of the students within.
several others returned their consent form on this day. No issues arose from this session, nor
was any additional contact by other means received. By the middle of the week, all consent
forms were received.

I was upfront about the project and what I was attempting to achieve, and asked
students for their assistance in making sense of our experiences. I reinforced that I was a curious
student myself, coming to learn from and with them as partners in the research process (Glesne,
1999). Over the course of the project, our relationship underwent “informal negotiation as
respect, interest … and acceptance” of my actions and intentions grew (Glesne, 1999, p. 37). I
increasingly found that as trust grew, feelings of apprehension or misgiving were minimised,
and even became non-existent (Homan, 2002). The students were very keen to share their
thoughts and feelings of the classroom, and felt empowered by collaborating to bring about
change. Our relationship was as democratic as possible, with the students becoming part of the
decision-making process in all phases of the research; this yielded knowledge that may have
otherwise remained inaccessible (Nolen & Putten, 2007).

Research Timetable

The action research project extended over the entire academic year (late January to
eyearly December, 2011). The information and consent form (see Appendix A) was mailed to
parents/guardians in the week before school started. All consent forms were returned signed
before the end of the first week. With consent gained from the parents/guardians of the 25
students involved in the project, a week-long reconnaissance stage preceding the first cycle was
undertaken. Within this stage, the students completed the survey (see Appendix B), and were
involved in a self-selected focus group interview (see Appendix D). With an expeditious yet
comprehensive examination and analysis undertaken of this data, the first cycle was planned and
implemented in the second week of school.

The project comprised four cycles. As the school year in Queensland consists of four
terms of approximately 10 weeks in length, it was considered appropriate to identify four major
preliminary cycles; however, this planning also accommodated flexibility and scope for the data
to guide the cycle length. The term-long cycles proved to allow sufficient time for the effects of
the interventions to become evident and for trustworthy observations to be made of the action
unfolding. Throughout the data collection phase, most of the cycle lengths remained aligned
with the term – the planning, the intervention and action, and reflection were allowed to develop
‘naturally’ – and provided an organised and suitably compartmentalised approach. The duration
of the cycles completed were 8 weeks, 10 weeks, 7 weeks, and 12 weeks respectively. Data obtained from each cycle were analysed throughout, and served to inform the planning of the following cycle. The data collection tools implemented in each of these cycles, and their characteristics and location in the research timetable, are discussed in the following section.

**Data Collection Tools**

To gain a rich and as nuanced picture of the research context as possible, a combination of data collection tools were employed. The data collection tools included: a) a survey; b) my observations (supported by audiovisual recordings) culminating in reflective statements for a researcher journal; c) written student reflections; d) focus group interviews with students; and, e) student responses to summative assessment. With the exception of the survey, each data collection instrument was in use in each cycle. The survey and focus group interviews were used together as a diagnostic instrument in the reconnaissance stage, as well as at the end of the project, to provide comparative data to measure the effects of the project as a whole.

**Survey**

The survey employed within this project was piloted with 28 Year 8 Music students in December, 2010. Data gathered from the pilot survey gave rise to some minor clarifications to question wording and response options. Informed by these changes, the survey instrument used in this project was developed (see Appendix B). Throughout the piloting stage of the survey I found that writing clear questions that address theoretically relevant constructs was as much an art as it was a science (Berends, 2004). The final survey asked students 16 questions grouped into three areas: a) the frequency and manner with which they engaged in musical activity, and the meaning they attributed to music; b) their engagement in the school music context; and, c) their engagement in music outside of the school. I devised these purposefully broad groupings and the questions within to invite breadth of response. The survey contained both closed-ended and open-ended questions that gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. The closed-ended questions sought frequency or yes/no responses, or required students to indicate a response on a 5-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, unsure, disagree, and strongly disagree). Open-ended questions provided students the opportunity to elaborate upon the posed questions, and sought to capture data not afforded by the closed-ended survey questions. The survey afforded the collection of data in a uniform and systematic way. Further, the students were also requested not to identify themselves on the survey (or through their responses) in an effort to elicit truthful responses (Burns, 2000).
The survey was administered to 25 Year 8 students (12 male and 13 female) in the reconnaissance stage of the project, and re-administered at the end of the final cycle (a duration of approximately 11 months). Initially, the survey was to be administered via an online tool due to perceived affordances (which included a greater willingness of the age group to express themselves more readily through typed responses, and for ease of collection and collation of data); however, I decided that a paper-based survey would be more manageable and ensure responses were completed. This also negated frequent IT issues at the school at the time. Careful attention was paid to the design of the paper-based survey as so to minimise risk of non-response through confusion, or inadvertent omission due to layout and presentation (Bryman, 2004).

**Observations and researcher journal**

I maintained a researcher journal across the entire project, with entries comprising of observations and reflections of classroom action. I noted significant classroom observations as rough fieldnotes, and constructed more detailed accounts in association with the audio-visual recordings immediately after the lesson in an effort to provide the richest and most accurate account of the action as possible. These accounts also housed statements within which I reflected and theorised upon the observed action – both intended and unintended. I endeavoured to be sensing and reflective, recording action and reactions, and generated new questions for consideration. Audio-visual recordings were also made of many lessons via a small Q3 Zoom recorder, which recorded in a digital format and enabled data to be easily transferred to my computer via a removable memory card. The presence of the camera in the room did not appear to influence the classroom environment; rather, it seemed to gain little acknowledgement at all. Approximately 18 lessons (or sections of lessons) were recorded, resulting in over 900 minutes of data. All performance activities and assessment were recorded, with the students very keen to watch their performances back. Journal entries and some excerpts of the audio-visual data were used to prompt discussion and explore new considerations with my critical friend, Daniel, and additional entries were made summarising these discussions. There were 41 journal entries – totalling over 9,000 words – that were all typed directly to a laptop for ease of collation, speed of entry, searching and retrieval.

**Written student reflections**

Written student reflections, known as *Lesson Reflection Reports* (LRRs), provided significant insight into students’ attitudes, thoughts and level of engagement with classroom activities (see Appendix C). A LRR was provided at the end of each lesson as a single-sided A4
sheet, and required the student to handwrite their reflection. The questions posed on the LRR were:

1. Has your knowledge/skill changed as a result of this lesson? How?
2. What role did the teacher play in helping you to understand what we did today?
3. What did you enjoy about class today? Why?
4. What didn’t you enjoy about class today? Why?
5. How can you relate what we did in class today to your own musical activities (in and out of school)?

These questions were clarified for students and example responses were given verbally in the first few lessons to ensure understanding. This instrument was designed to gather reflective data from students immediately after the action. Initially, the LRR was designed with space for the student to write their name; however, after several weeks of their use this was removed. This sought to allow for greater truthfulness and freedom in these reflections. Almost 850 LRRs were collected during the course of the project, providing an extremely rich data set. The responses on the LRRs assisted a deeper level of understanding to be assigned to my observations.

Due to the acceptance of the LRRs, and an increasing willingness of students to reflect upon their work over the duration of the project, further written reflections were sought and embedded within the songwriting composition task of the third cycle of the project (see Appendix J). Eight additional reflective statements that focused upon student perceptions of the processes and the emerging product were collected and these became an assessed component of our class. For these reflections, space for ‘other comments’ was included in attempt to capture any additional ideas that the questions may have missed. Many of the students gave detailed responses that provided insight into their thoughts, feelings and capabilities surrounding this task. Almost 200 additional reflective statements were gathered through this instrument.

*Student focus group interviews*

Focus group interviews – five in total – were conducted at the start of the project and at the end of each research cycle (see Appendix D). The 25 students involved in the project formed self-selected groups of six or seven that remained in place for the duration of the project (see Appendix E). The self-selected groups largely hinged on existing or new friendship groupings, and it was felt that allowing this organisation would further provide the students a safe and supportive environment within which they could contribute to discussion. The interviews were
conducted in our classroom in periods when it was not being used, with students released from other subjects in negotiation with members of staff. Each interview lasted for approximately 15 minutes, and comprised semi-structured questioning in attempt to follow new and unexpected discussion that arose in the interviews and capture how students thought, felt, explained or accounted for something (Glesne, 1999). This approach to questioning was dedicated to coming to know the phenomena in the fullest possible complexity. Across the project, the focus group interviews provided over 5 hours of recorded data. The interviews were recorded straight to my laptop and then transcribed across the following days.

I was initially concerned about the willingness of the students to unpack and critically discuss elements of our classroom environment and my practice with me; however, this concern quickly dissolved after the round of interviews. I had secured their trust through my openness concerning my intentions with the project. One student, Nelson, remarked, “it’s so good that you care about what we think ... most teachers just don’t care ... but you value our opinion” (researcher journal, February 4, 2011). Another student, Victoria, stated, “I don’t want this [the interview] to end. It’s fun” (Victoria, RI). They were co-researchers in the project, and this empowered many of them: “to listen to people is to empower them” (Moyle, 2006, p. 3). The interviews provided a forum for symmetrical discussion, promoting contextual, holistic and subjective conversation; they brought the students fully and actively into the picture, positioning them as equal partners in the research. As Gubrium and Holstein (2002) state, “individuals – no matter how insignificant they might seem in the everyday scheme of things” – are important elements of a population; each person has a voice and it is imperative that this voice is heard (p. 4). In seeking the students’ voices I democratised experiential information.

**Student responses to summative assessment**

Summative responses to assessment in aural, composition and performance tasks also formed an extremely rich data set of 200 items. Two aural tasks, three composition tasks, and three performance tasks were submitted in a variety of mediums across the year, which served to further inform my own observations and add insight into student reflections.
### Mapping of Data Collection Tools

The following table locates and summarises the implementation of the data collection tools throughout the complex and involved data collection process (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Data Tool (Time Used in Cycle)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reconnaissance</strong></td>
<td>1 week</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle One</strong></td>
<td>8 weeks</td>
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<td><strong>Cycle Two</strong></td>
<td>10 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle Three</strong></td>
<td>7 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cycle Four</strong></td>
<td>12 weeks</td>
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#### Table 1
Data collection mapping of the project

The ongoing collection and analysis of data from a variety of methods provided an insight into the complexities of the setting. My understanding of the context was continually informed, challenged, and reinformed throughout this evolutionary process.

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25 The written student reflections in Cycle Four comprised of the LRRs and also the reflection questioned embedded within an assessment item.
Data Analysis

The data gained from this project presented an extremely rich insight into the context. As action research is a naturalistic and evolutionary process, I was responsive to the data, letting it guide the project and inform my planning. Though much of the data consisted of or could be reduced to written text for analysis, composition and performance responses proved more challenging to work with. I was careful not to reduce these data sets and lose their essence, and so examined them in conjunction with reflections and observations, and unpacked them in focus group interviews. I transcribed each interview in full and included conversational elements such as pause lengths, overlapping talk and interruptions, to “bring the conversation to life”, in an attempt to yield data that may be initially discounted (Freebody, 2003, p. 99). My journal notes were streams of consciousness; I would reflect ‘in- and on-action’ (Schön, 1983), noting significant events, exchanges and interactions as they were happening or immediately after. Despite the electronic storage of the all of the data, I chose not to engage with any analysis software; rather, I worked from printed transcripts and handwritten assessment tasks to analyse and trace connections between data. Through this, I annotated my thoughts and feelings, and examined the idiosyncrasies of written expression by the students in an attempt to keep the analysis process natural. As Lichtman (2006) reassured me, I was closer to my data than anyone else.

Data were analysed continuously throughout the project and formed a grounded base for eventual theory (Saldaña, 2013). A first-cycle process of initial data coding filtered and focused the data into codes; a second-cycle process of focused coding then compared, reorganised, and focused the codes into categories. These complementary processes were ongoing as the project progressed and resulted in grounded thematic and conceptual categories that underpinned the project. This process of data transformation respected the evolving narrative of the action, and the addition of new data from the respective research cycles often became the prelude to greater understandings. The transformation of the data proved an incredibly intense task due to the voluminous amounts of data collected, its staggered integration into the project, and the limited timeframe within which I had to act. The urgency of this task was heightened due to the fact that meaning had to be found in the data in order for it to inform the planning of the following cycle. The ongoing and critically reflective nature of my analysis was crucial in keeping the research cycles moving.
Authenticity of the Project

Acquisition of ‘valid’ and ‘trustworthy’ data

Action research, as a phenomenological paradigm – within which observations are not neutral, objective or value-free – demands that traditional validity criteria need to be interpreted differently. Though the term ‘validity’ is associated with the positivist notion of data accurately measuring what it is purported to measure, within this project validity is further defined through a lens of ‘authenticity’, in that data and action must be recognisable and authentic to the people involved in the research (Zuber-Skerritt & Fletcher, 2007). The five validity criteria outlined by Herr and Anderson (2005) align with the goals of action research and this notion of authenticity, and support claims to knowledge made in this project (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals of Action Research</th>
<th>Quality/Validity Criteria</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) The generation of new knowledge</td>
<td>Dialogic and process validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) The achievement of action-oriented outcomes</td>
<td>Outcome validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) The education of both researcher and participants</td>
<td>Catalytic validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Results that are relevant to the local setting</td>
<td>Democratic validity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) A sound and appropriate research methodology</td>
<td>Process validity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

Collectively, these criteria focus on the notions of relationships, change, and empowerment. They are intertwined, and centre on the “emergence and enduring consequences of research for self, persons, and communities” (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 58). The criteria acknowledge the dimensions of a participatory worldview and provide indicators for quality that were set against the project (Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

The criteria for process validity, or the extent to which problems were framed and attended to in a manner that permitted ongoing learning of both the students and myself, was addressed through the methodological design of the project. The research process was emergent, evolutionary and dually educational. Findings were a result of a series of reflective spirals that continuously reframed the research questions and challenged underlying assumptions. As Heron (1996) states:

research outcomes are well-grounded if the focus of the inquiry, both in its parts and as a whole, is taken through as many cycles as possible by as many group members as possible, with as much individual diversity as possible and collective unity of approach as possible. (p. 131)
Claims to process validity were also bound within the relationships developed with the student participants. My existing role at the school afforded long-term exposure and provided scope for trustful relationships to be built; this enhanced the process validity and the overall authenticity of the project (Mertler, 2006). Glesne (1999) discusses the benefits of such sustained long-term exposure:

> when a large amount of time is spent with your research participants, they less readily feign behavior [sic] or feel the need to do so; moreover, they are more likely to be frank and comprehensive about what they tell you or demonstrate. (p. 151)

*Outcome validity* focuses on the extent to which actions occur which lead to a resolution of the problem and the generation of new knowledge (Herr & Anderson, 2005). I sought to work towards successful action outcomes that could form a basis for practice within my context. I did not simplify the complexity of the research problem, but rather constantly reframed the research problem, which was influenced by each stage of the action research cycles. This led to new sets of questions and interventional strategies being addressed and implemented in later cycles.

The methodological nature of the project afforded a high degree of *democratic validity*, defined by the extent to which the research is done in collaboration with all participants who have a stake in the problem under investigation (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The project was characterised by democratic, collaborative and inclusive engagement with all of the students through shared discourse and reflection. Together we became a “single community of interested colleagues” seeking results relevant to our classroom (Winter, 1996, p. 14). Through a variety of data collection tools enacted over a sustained period, all of the students’ voices were heard and valued equally. As Winter (1996) states:

> [Collaboration] does not mean that we begin by trying to synthesise them [points of views] into a consensus. On the contrary, it is the variety of differences in between the viewpoints that makes them into a rich resource. It is by using this resource of differences that our analysis can begin to move onwards from its inevitably personal starting point towards ideas that have been interpersonally negotiated. To treat all viewpoints as a collaborative resource is to thus suspend the conventional status hierarchy which gives some members’ viewpoints greater credibility that others. (p. 22)

I gathered a large resource of viewpoints – both positive and negative accounts of interventions – and the research cycles were driven by reflection and negotiation upon these viewpoints. The democratic and collaborative nature of the project was highlighted in a comment by one of the students, who remarked: “it’s so good that you care about what we think ... most teachers just

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26 The variety of data collection tools used also contributed to validity through triangulation, which is discussed later in this section.
don’t care ... but you value our opinion” (researcher journal, February 4, 2011). Attention to democratic validity saw action informed by perspectives and viewpoints from students within the setting.

The criteria of catalytic validity, the degree to which the research process “reorients, focuses, and energises participants towards knowing reality in order to transform it”, was central to this project (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 56). The reorienting of social reality extended to both the students and myself, and was framed by a participatory worldview, whereby the complex nature of reality is seen as co-authored (Reason & Bradbury, 2007). Throughout the project, understandings of the social reality under study were confronted, and action to deepen these understandings, and ultimately change (or reaffirm) them, was undertaken. The project recounts a “spiralling change” in my own and the students’ understandings, evidenced by data gathered from continual dialogue and reflection from within the research cycles (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 56). As Turnock and Gibson (2001) suggest, I made transparent the analysis of the decisions I made during the course of the project to facilitate judgements of validity.

Further promoting the validity of this project is dialogic validity, which demands action researchers participate in critical and reflective dialogue (Herr & Anderson, 2005). As a deep insider I was ‘close’ to my setting, though I ensured I established sufficient distance from it in order to see things critically and enable change (Glesne, 1999). This was attained through the use of my critical friend, Daniel, who served as a ‘devil’s advocate’ for alternative insights into the data (Herr & Anderson, 2005). Our discussions established an ongoing audit trail that was present throughout the project and supportive of inferences and conclusions made of the data (Lai & Robinson, 2006). As Myers (as cited in Herr & Anderson, 2005) states, when the dialogic nature of practitioner inquiry is stressed, then studies achieve a “goodness-of-fit with the intuitions of the practitioner community, both in its definitions of problems and in its findings” (p. 57).

Though Herr and Anderson (2005) state that these criteria are “tentative and in flux” – as shown by their overlapping and intertwined coexistence – they highlight the transformative intent of action research and support claims to knowledge made in the project. As Heron (1996) states:

The challenge after positivism is to redefine truth and validity in ways that honour the generative, creative role of the human mind in all forms of knowing. This also means, I believe, taking inquiry beyond justification, beyond the validation of truth-values, towards the celebration and bodying forth of being-values, as transcendent and polar complement to the question for validity. (p. 13)
This positions claims to knowledge upon high relational aspects of research. The validity of the project rested upon authentic relationships being maintained between the students and myself, and a concern towards workability, change and empowerment.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity means acknowledging the role of the self in research to challenge biases and interpretation of meaning (Creswell, 2008). As I aimed to bring about educative change, and as the nature of the practices that realised these aims were inevitably value-driven, I worked to ensure that I maintained a reflexive positioning throughout the project. This involved a process of critical self-examination primarily informed by reflection on my actions and assumptions. As Lichtman (2006) states:

> Qualitative researchers involve themselves in every aspect of their work. Through their eyes, data are developed and interpreted. Through their eyes, meaning is brought from an amalgam of words, images, and interpretations. Through their eyes, a creative work comes into fruition. We are not static humans who maintain an aloof posture as we pursue our thoughts, dreams, and desires of those from whom we learn. Rather our work is an expression of who we are and who we are becoming. (p. 206)

Within this project, I was careful to ‘sort through’ my own biases in the interpretation of the data. I did this through my researcher journal as I reflected on action (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). My reflexive stance saw a questioning of my own practices and the location of my ‘self’ in the project; these reflections were written into the research, demonstrating transparency in my interpretations of data. Winter (1996) identifies the purpose of such reflection is:

> to question the reflective bases upon which practical actions have been carried out, to offer a reflexive and dialectical critique whose effect is to recall to mind those possibilities that practice has chosen on this occasion to ignore. (p. 25)

Reflexivity rests upon making judgements on various experiences. I endeavoured to transcend my own subjectivity by being attentive to and informed by the data and reasonable in my judgements (Coghlan, 2007). I aimed to articulate why I followed certain themes, and how these themes were then considered in future cycles. My analysis cannot be final or complete because inquiry took the form of “questioning claims” and the result of this inquiry will assume the form of a dialogue between myself and readers concerning possible interpretations of my experience (Winter, 1996, p. 19).
Triangulation

The authenticity of the project was further enhanced through the triangulation of data. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple data sources and multiple data collection methods in order to support the findings of research (Mertler, 2006). It is an important procedure for the validation and authentication of interpretations of data. Robinson and Lai (2006) refer to triangulation as a “navigational and survey technique where the precise location of a point is established by the convergence of observation taken from different angles” (p. 62). Data from within the project were triangulated through multiple data collection tools – surveys, researcher observations and reflections, written student reflections, focus-group interviews, and student assessment responses – which provided a rich description of classroom action, and evidenced the perspectives of the students. Themes emanated from the resulting data that could be traced between independent data collection tools, and this provided further confirmation of the data. This assisted to counteract threats to validity and served to ‘thicken’ the students’ response to my interventions, whilst providing a multiple lens on the phenomenon (Glesne, 1999). Further, the use of a critical friend throughout the research process served to strengthen the interpretations and validity of the sources triangulated.

Reflection

As this is an action research project, I feel it fitting to conclude this chapter with a brief reflective statement. Given my position as a teacher endeavouring to improve my practice, I defend action research as a highly suitable methodology to evaluate the quality of action within my own classroom. The action research methodology acknowledges the role of the teacher as a valid researcher into educational issues, and respects the complexities of human ecology and epistemology. My established knowledge of the context and existing relationship with the students afforded a ‘closeness’ impossible to achieve by an outside researcher. I knew of the problems of my classroom first-hand, and the students and I sought change through democratic and collaborative means; our social reality was co-authored in a communicative space (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). The students had much to say, and it empowered them to join with me to seek solutions to the issues we faced.

I felt that the research questions were given guidance by the two broad and inclusive theoretical frames, and they supported the evolutionary nature of the project remained. The theoretical frames supported the ‘living process’ that characterises action research without influencing the direction of the project and associated change. The flexibility of the research design ensured a high degree of responsiveness to my developing understanding of the problem
and as my knowledge deepened. A suite of triangulated data collection tools ensured that all voices were heard, and descriptions of the context from both positive and negative accounts were included. The authenticity of the data was enhanced through my attention to validity, my reflexive stance, and the use of a critical friend. My critical friend relationship proved to be very rewarding, and further sharpened my critical stance on music education.

The theoretical frames, the action research methodology and research design, provided me with a formal means to address the research problem. I feel strongly that the action research methodology and design embody and enhance the notion of teacher professionalism, and this has empowered me in the sense that I feel I can authoritatively contribute to bridging a gap between research and practice. Through this methodological approach, I saw theory inform practice, and practice inform theory; it has seen me challenge any ‘retreat’ into past practice, and, underpinned by critical theory, subscribe to a “disciplined basis for the rational critique of current practices, ideals and rationales of music education” (Regelski, 1995, p. 64). The start of this journey is detailed in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR
RECONNAISSANCE

Overview

¿De Dónde vienes … mi niño?
De la cresta del duro frío.
¿Qué necesitas … mi niño?
La tibia tela de tu vestido.

From where do you come … my child?
From the ridge of hard frost.
What do you need … my child?
The warm cloth of your dress.

(George Crumb, Ancient Voices of Children, based on text by Federico Garcia Lorca)

A stage of preliminary data collection – known as ‘reconnaissance’ – is a fundamental step in a rigorous action research process (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). The questions posed in the epigraph to this chapter foreshadowed this stage of the inquiry and offered support to the methodological orientation of the project. I felt that Lorca’s text in Ancient Voices of Children was reflective of an interaction between teacher and student; a questioning of circumstance and need in aim of supporting growth. The questions above underpinned my investigative intent; my aim was to become cognisant of the musical values and experiences that the students would be bringing into our classroom. Through this stage of the research, I invited the students into a collaborative and democratic process that respected and honoured their contributions. The data that emanated from our shared dialogue informed my later actions – I saw this stage of the research project as vital if genuine educative change relevant to our context was to occur.

This chapter presents survey and focus group interview data from the reconnaissance stage of the project. I present these data in a manner framed by the questions presented above. The first section provides detail of the students’ engagement with music, contextualising their values and experiences. The following sections are interpretive in focus and present emergent themes in relation to the categories of experience set out in the data collection tools: a) classroom music experiences not enjoyed; b) classroom music experiences enjoyed; and, c) out of school music experiences. In addition to these themes, I present data drawn from the focus group interviews in relation to what the students thought should comprise their school music education. Through this I sought to place further emphasis on the student voice, and enhance the collaborative exploration of our classroom interactions. The chapter then continues with a consideration of the findings of the reconnaissance stage and the way it shaped and informed
my action in the first research cycle. I then conclude the chapter with a reflection on the reconnaissance stage of the project.

“From Where Do You Come … My Child?”

I felt that if the project was to be truly collaborative, democratic and situated, then it needed to start with an understanding of my co-researchers – the students. This section of the chapter presents descriptive data that provides insight into the meaning and significance of music in the students’ lives, and the ways they engaged in music listening, making and writing.

Meaning and significance of music

Many of the students attributed meanings of music to its ability to reflect or adjust their emotional state, providing succinct insight into the role of music in their lives:

I find it [music] to be great for setting moods and just enjoying yourself. (RS4)

I just listen to it and I feel good. (Lance, RI)

Music is my life! I listen to music a lot, and when I am sad or happy or something I listen to the right music to suit my mood. (RS17)

It’s a way to forget about everything else. (Daisy, RI)

Meanings were often tied to the consumption of music through listening, most often in a passive manner. They often used music to accompany other activities, rather than primarily attend to it:

Music is always with me. I listen to it whenever I can, when I’m doing whatever. (Julie, RI)

Music is always on… it accompanies my life. (Paige, RI)

Some of the students attributed meanings with active engagement with music. Travis, Daisy and Amy spoke passionately about what music meant to them:

Music means a lot to me because I want to play as a profession. It is something that will always be there for you… because no matter where you go or whatever your resources, you can always make music… and you always feel so much better after you’ve produced a good sound… you’re like, “that sounded good…” it gives you a personal boost sort of. (Travis, RI)

It [music] means my life. Every time I play music I forget about everything else and just go with the flow of it. It is a way of escape for me. (Daisy, RI)

27 RS refers to ‘reconnaissance survey’. RS is followed by a uniquely assigned number used to identify the survey (e.g. RS4 is ‘reconnaissance survey 4’). This abbreviation will be used through this chapter.
28 RI refers to ‘reconnaissance interview’. This abbreviation will be used through this chapter after the student pseudonym (e.g. Daisy, RI).
Music to me means making it. It makes me express who I am and I feel great, so music is everything to me. (Amy, RI)

Each in their own way, all of the students identified that music played a significant role towards supporting and expressing emotion, and was tied to their sense of self. The meanings attributed to music were often linked to the nature of their own musical encounters and experiences.

*Music listening*

Listening to music was a very common activity, with all of the students reporting that they listened to music every day. Music listening was infused with their lives; they used it during travel, when studying, reading, when using social media or when socialising with friends, and when relaxing. Travis provided a detailed account, describing his listening as often more active and attentive; this was strongly influenced by his active engagement in music making:

I listen to music to hear what it’s about… to understand it. I listen to Clarke Terry, that [trumpet teacher] gave me. At first it was really slow going, but now I love it… I sit on my bed with the [sheet] music and just listen and look at it. It helps my playing, and I am trying new things and get new ideas from the music. I try to really listen to more music now, like really listen to it, like stuff I’d never look at before and stuff like that. (Travis, RI)

The stylistic preferences of the students were quite broad. The styles they identified29, and the frequency with which they were reported, are presented below (see Table 3):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>Frequency cited</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No one style identified/“most kinds”</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electronic/Dance</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hip-hop/Rap</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pop</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metal</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classical</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Folk/Surf Rock</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jazz</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blues</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musical Theatre</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3
Musical style preferences identified by the students on the survey

---

29 Students were allowed to identify more than one style of music. These style ‘descriptors’ were also constructed from student responses.
Many students reported that they liked ‘most types of music’, or that they were not selective in their musical taste. Jasmine mentioned:

I pretty much like everything that’s quality, well, except country. I think there’s good music in a lot of styles if you look for it. (Jasmine, R1)

Many of the students also identified styles that they did not like. Three indicated that they did not like ‘mainstream music’, which they later defined as ‘overly commercialised chart music’. Other styles specifically noted were heavy metal, ‘screamo’\textsuperscript{30}, classical, opera and reggae. They were quite critical of music that they did not like, which served to reinforce the way in which music was bound tightly to their identity. The broad representation of styles also demonstrated an encouraging level of musical critique.

Music making

Music ‘making’\textsuperscript{31} – the playing and singing of music – was engaged in at least once each week by 15 of the students (60%) (see Table 4):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>More than once a day</th>
<th>Once a day</th>
<th>3-5 times each week</th>
<th>1 or 2 times each week</th>
<th>Almost never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students:</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

‘How often do you play/sing music?’ – student survey responses by number and percentage

Music making was strongly associated with music learning, and learning was situated in formal (lessons at or outside of school guided by a teacher) and informal approaches (self-teaching, copying and experimentation) (see Table 5):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formal learning at school</th>
<th>Formal learning outside of school</th>
<th>Informal learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrument</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

Student engagement in learning an instrument and/or voice by formal and informal means

\textsuperscript{30} A ‘heavier’ type of heavy metal/punk in which the vocalist ‘screams’ more so than sings (lyrics are often near indecipherable).

\textsuperscript{31} With this definition, ‘making’ does not include the composition, generation or writing of music.
There was a clear relationship between instrument and learning approach. Instruments generally associated with the Western classical tradition were almost exclusively engaged with in formal ways, whereas instruments more commonly associated with contemporary styles of music were often learnt through informal means (see Table 6):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Formal learning</th>
<th>Informal learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clarinet</td>
<td>Guitar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flute</td>
<td>Piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guitar</td>
<td>Violin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Piano</td>
<td>Voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saxophone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trumpet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6
Instrument type/voice and learning style

Most students were polarised in their subscription to formal or informal approaches to learning. Rachael and Hayley viewed learning as something that was achieved only with their teacher:

My teacher shows me how to play [clarinet] and I learn from that. I don’t really have the skills to know it all, and there’s nothing really that you can do any other way. (Rachael, RI)

I only really learn from my [singing] teacher. She can show me exactly how to sing and fix problems that I have. I do sing by myself, but I don’t really teach myself. (Hayley, RI)

Leigh and Cassie identified that a teacher need not guide their learning. They accessed learning through the internet:

For guitar I just look on the internet for chords of songs that I like to do. It’s all there and I can like just learn it all myself. (Leigh, RI)

I teach myself by singing along with the artist on YouTube. There’s also backing [track] on there too so yeah you can learn it without the person. (Cassie, RI)

Daisy drew upon both approaches in learning the violin:

My violin teacher is so focused, like that’s all he thinks about, playing the right notes and stuff. Everything needs to be perfect, and I like that… but I also like playing music to get lost in it, sort of improvise and feel it. I play in orchestra, I do [formal violin] lessons, then I also just play around myself without music and without a plan… most days I do. I always like doing it, I mean, I really like waltzes, so I teach myself to play them. I think this like supports my learning so much. I think just playing lots… anything lots, helps my playing. (Daisy, RI)
Few students identified making music in groups, with four (16%) involved in school ensembles, and with two of these students also playing in different community orchestras.

Music writing

I was wary of potential connotations that some of the students may have associated with the term ‘composing’, so I used the term ‘writing’\(^{32}\) when talking of music that students may create themselves. Engagement in writing music was quite varied. Twelve of the students (48%) identified that they had written their own music. Lucas mentioned:

I wrote a song on guitar ages ago, but I haven’t really done anything else. (Lucas, RI)

Tammy, Leigh and Nelson described their compositional experiences in more detail:

I had a book of lyrics at home that I wrote songs in last year. When I had an idea I wrote it down. Sometimes now I still play at the piano and make up notes that go with them, but I can’t always make them sound good so I just sing them to myself. I have started to write the notes I use above the words so I remember the piano music… yeah, the letters of the notes ‘cause that’s easier. (Tammy, RI)

I make up songs sometimes. I write down the chords for my guitar so I can remember them… I write their names, like G, A minor, not notes… I can’t understand the notes. (Leigh, RI)

I use GarageBand to write my own music. I’ve also been playing with stuff like auto tune and some features as well. I auto tuned my little brother’s gibberish and put it in a house style mix on GarageBand. Most nights I write stuff, I mean it is so easy to drop a few beats in and layer it up. Adding in my own voice is fun, but I change the sound of it ‘cause I sound so weird. (Nelson, RI)

These experiences were associated with an informal style of composition. Tammy and Leigh both described using a form of ‘musical shorthand’ when writing music. For these students, writing music meant to work with sound directly; any form of documentation was supportive to the recalling of these aural experiences.

Other students referenced previous school composition tasks as the extent of their music writing activity. Victoria described that the music notation software Sibelius allowed notation to ‘come to life’ throughout the compositional process:

I remember composing on um… Sibelius… yeah, yeah being able to add in the notes and hear it back was good. It’d come to life when you weren’t sure what it sounded like… That’s all I’ve done. I should do more of that hey…? It was fun. (Victoria, RI)

\(^{32}\) The term ‘writing’ was understood and commonly used by the students to refer to music that they created themselves (as distinct from making). This term does not discriminate between written/non-written modes.
Cameron and James were less enthusiastic about the same experiences:

The only stuff I’ve written was for Music last year. We did I think three compositions…? That’s the only stuff I’ve written. (Cameron, RI)

All I’ve written has been for [my teacher] but it wasn’t a real song, it was just putting notes in [Sibelius] to make a story … yeah, program music … yeah, mine was about a tiger or something like that. (James, RI)

Cameron and James discussed these experiences in a way that suggested they lacked value and meaning. James’s comment referenced a degree of tension in the need to realise a score, which appeared to remove it from what he identified as a ‘real song’. Though all of the students had composed on several occasions in Year 7 Music (with the exception of Liam who was new to the school), none of the remaining 12 students (48%) cited these activities. Outside of these activities, the writing of music remained a largely unexplored dimension of music for most of the students.

*Classroom music experiences not enjoyed*

Most of the students identified aspects of classroom music that they did not enjoy. From these data I identified three emergent themes: a) the challenge and demand of experiences; b) limitations of the transferability of experiences; and, c) teacher practices that inhibited learning and enjoyment of the subject. These themes are presented in turn.

The challenge and demand of music experiences was identified by many of the students. This was always located within the context of aural skills or composition. These students felt a significant degree of challenge in relation to these experiences, expressing that they felt unable to achieve because the work was too difficult:

I find the aural stuff really hard. I can’t really tell the difference between some of the notes and it all sounds the same to me sometimes. (Mia, RI)

We did a lot of that last year [aural skills]. I didn’t like it. It’s not for me… too hard. (James, RI)

I find the compositions too hard. I mean I don’t know how to make them sound good. (RS19)

I don’t like doing compositions because I don’t know how to write it well. (Lucas, RI)

[I don’t like] that we have to write compositions, I find them really quite hard because I don’t know really what to do. (RS10)

I don’t really like doing things that I’m not good at. I don’t like things that I don’t understand… I think, you guys carry on, I don’t want to make a fuss about it. (Tammy, RI)

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33 ‘Aural skills’ is a broad organiser that encompasses the development of aural discernment and the connection of sound and symbol in practice.
For many, this challenge was centred on the use of Western staff notation. This often acted as a significant barrier in the communication of their music ideas:

I don’t like doing aural ‘cause you have to write down the notes. It makes it harder ‘cause you have to use the notes. (RS14)

I enjoy aural least out of everything we do in class. I can’t write it down, but I can sort of know what the music is doing. (Cassie, RI)

I can hear what the music is, but I can’t really easily write it down in notes. I don’t really know how to write it. (Paige, RI)

Nelson identified this in his compositional work, noting a tension between his ability to ‘hear’ what he wanted and his ability to communicate this using Western notation:

Compositions. They’re hard because you have to write them down. I like know what I want but I can’t write it. (Nelson, RI)

When notating his composition ideas, Ian mentioned that he worked in a relatively uninformed way, despite having the support of notation software:

It’s just that we have to use notes [write notation]… I used to just click randomly on the screen. Sometimes it would sound OK… I don’t know, it’s too hard… I don’t know notes. (Ian, RI)

These responses revealed degrees of misalignment between knowledge and skill required of the experience, and the demands of the experience itself. This was often influenced by an imbalance between intuitive and analytical musical knowledge. Many of the students referenced a lack of confidence when working with notation, as they were drawing from an analytical base they did not feel as fluent in. This in turn impacted their ability to realise musical ideas and demonstrate their understanding.

Many of the students felt school music experiences were limited in their usefulness and in their transferability to other contexts. Some students saw school music as unnecessary:

It [Music] doesn’t really teach me anything I want to know. I don’t really need it. (James, RI)

Music’s something I don’t want to do... (Cameron, RI)

I don’t want to do music outside of school so it doesn’t help me anyway. (Lance, RI)

Why are we doing this [theory]? I mean, who knows what if we want to follow through with this or not. I don’t think it is helpful for me at all. (Mia, RI)
Others noted that they located more meaningful experience outside of the classroom. Tammy and Nelson mentioned:

Yeah, [Music] helps, but it’s sort of not what I need to do with my music now. It may give me some ideas or some stuff though… I’m not sure. The more you try to take of other people views the better I guess. (Tammy, RI)

What we learn is OK, I mean I sort of get it, but for me GarageBand is really good and it does so much for me. I like just playing around in it most of the time. I don’t need to read music for it. (Nelson, RI)

Later in the same interview, Nelson added:

You know actually I can’t really see Music helping, umm, it’s not that I don’t like what we do in class, but it’s not for me. We never do stuff in Music that I do [with music]. We always do stuff like singing baby songs, or writing like stuff about notes or things… I mean, what’s the point of that? My stuff isn’t sort of done in class, it is separate… no, it doesn’t really help me out with Music. (Nelson, RI)

Nelson identified a disjunction between school music and his own music; he viewed each as a separate entity. Others noted:

It’s [Music] fun but I don’t think I really get much from it that I can apply to other things in my singing. What we did doesn’t help much. I learn my own way. (Paige, RI)

It’s not really useful for me mostly. We don’t really do anything I want to do with music… I can learn piano in my [individual instrumental] lesson and do stuff that I want to do with it with my teacher. (Lucas, RI)

I like my music but I don’t like the subject. (Cameron, RI)

Some of the students felt that their learnings were limited in use due to the level of challenge sometimes being too low:

It’s not really useful when you learn stuff you already know. (Daisy, RI)

Just the level. It’s too easy sometimes. (Amy, RI)

I find the work too easy sometimes… it’s sort of like revision… stuff I did ages ago. (Travis, RI)

I really want to do more harder stuff about theory so it can help with my [external instrumental] exams. It’s too easy a lot of the time and I’ve done it already. It would be good to have it be useful for exams and not just like sort of revision. (Jasmine, RI)

The experiences presented in the classroom seldom matched with what the students identified as being useful for their own musical pathways. Some felt that these experiences were not relevant, whereas others found them relevant but lacking in challenge. This impacted on perceptions of transferability of these experiences to other contexts, perpetuating disjunction between the two.
A further significant theme emerged in relation to previous music teachers. Many of the students referred to previous teachers to highlight examples of experiences that influenced their enjoyment of the subject:

One teacher when I was in Primary just yelled all the time. That’s all I remember. (Cassie, RI)

Yeah, one teacher, remember, you all know... we were on like choir stands, and he constantly said, “we gotta do this for fun”, so we all start having fun with it, and he yells like “Stop! Sensible, now slow down, we’re going to redo this thing, OK?”, and we do it, and it’s like “STOP…!” [laughs]. What, so we can’t have fun now? (Rachael, RI)

When teachers get really stubborn and controlling it’s kind of hard to enjoy anything. (Jasmine, RI)

Some of the students mentioned how these interactions prevented an educative relationship from being established. They saw this as detrimental to their learning:

I hate it when the teachers are so strict, especially like in Primary, they just like “do this do this do this”, and they didn’t explain it. You don’t connect with them then, so you don’t care. (Julie, RI)

Some just yell at you, they talk at you, they don’t talk to you. There’s no relationship. Music’s not like that, you have to be equals. (Amy, RI)

Sometimes you get the teacher that just doesn’t care. They don’t respect that I want to learn. They yell at you and say that they’ve taught you; they haven’t. They just like try to control the class. (Travis, RI)

Travis identified the quality of teacher pedagogy, and several other students also commented on how this was not supportive to their learning:

At my old school, my “drama-slash-music-teacher” [gestures quotations] was really bad, so I did extra lessons so I could actually learn something. (Thomas, RI)

There are teachers that are experienced in music that do help you, but then there are other ones… they just expect you to know without teaching you anything… (Julie, RI)

Sometimes you don’t get it when it comes to the actual stuff you need to do because the teacher hasn’t taught it. (Hayley, RI)

I had a teacher that didn’t know how to read the rhythms properly. I mean, like all credibility lost there. (Daisy, RI)

These experiences were significant for these students, and they revealed the influential nature of the teacher in the educative equation. The students spoke very openly about their frustrations and how they felt these inhibited their enjoyment and learning in the subject.
Classroom music experiences enjoyed

Despite voicing frustrations, 17 (68%) of the students reported enjoying classroom music on the survey instrument. Three themes in relation to this emerged from the data: a) the experience of music; b) the development of music knowledge; and, c) the support of the teacher in learning experiences. Each theme is presented below.

A significant theme from the data in relation to classroom music experiences that were enjoyed was based on playing instruments in class. Student responses were often enthusiastic and direct:

Playing instruments is the best thing. (RS1)
I like playing instruments… it’s a lot of fun. (Rachael, RI)
I enjoy playing different instruments. (Victoria, RI)
I enjoy being able to play music… and learn about music and performing. (Jasmine, RI)
Playing on the various instruments are the most enjoyable things. (Ian, RI)
The best thing about Music is when we get to play sick beats. (Leigh, RI)

Many of the students also made reference to the social aspects that working in groups afforded:

I like getting to work together to make music. (Mia, RI)
It brings people together I reckon. Like if you’re sitting down making music, with people…. It’s fun getting together as a group and being able to produce something that’s really enjoyable. (Amy, RI)
It is fun being able to play a new piece of music with your class group… everyone gets pulled along. (Travis, RI)
[I enjoy] the fact that we can just do a song and everybody can get a particular part and when you put it together it sounds really good. (Rachael, RI)
I like how everyone helps each other to work music out. (Hayley, RI)

Both the frequency and enthusiasm with which students mentioned these experiences indicated that they were valued and meaningful. These experiences reflected engagement in music, often alongside others as a shared social experience, as supportive to the development of their musical understanding.

34 These students indicated that the ‘strongly agreed’, or ‘agreed’, with the question ‘Do you enjoy Music as a subject?’
In opposition to the theme centred on the lack of usefulness and transferability of school music experiences to other contexts, some of the students identified that they felt school music experiences did assist in the development of their musical knowledge and skill. Amy alluded to practical experiences as assisting her to come to deeper more intuitive understandings, seeing this as a basis of coming to know music:

We get more involved in it and be able to like feel it within yourself instead of the strict remembering of facts and what. (Amy, RI)

Other students referenced analytical knowledge:

Classroom music for me helps me understand the basics of what music is, which helps my playing. (RS2)

I enjoy the fact that I am learning to be a better musician by reading notes and understanding theory. I am learning many things that have helped me with my music. (RS19)

Because of Music, when I listen to a song on the radio, I know how it goes. I can clap it and get the right beat and work out the time signature and stuff now. (Jasmine, RI)

I enjoy learning about the notes and such which helps me progress with my guitar. (RS12)

These students revealed an awareness of the role of analytical knowledge in supporting broader musical understanding and how this contributed to the growth of their interactions with music. Daisy and Travis also noted this interaction:

With Music, it’s not like you just remember it for a term and then it’s gone as soon as the term ends. We always build on the stuff that we do and it’s related. I guess I notice it most with aural [skills] and composition stuff. (Daisy, RI)

We look at different stuff, but it’s all music, stuff that makes you better for learning it and we keep looking at it… Yeah, like rhythm and chords and elements. It’s all joined together, and I get better at it the more we do. (Travis, RI)

The influence of previous teachers on the educative relationship was again mentioned, paralleling another negative theme. The students who discussed this affirmed the importance of a teacher who constructed an environment that was supportive to learning. Hayley mentioned that the teacher needed to:

… get into it with us, help us understand what it actually means to get the message across. The teacher just has to have the passion, and time and commitment and can put up with the kids. (Hayley, RI)
Tammy and Rachael described the support and influence of some of their previous teachers:

[Teacher name] wasn’t the type of person that just did it for the sake of getting the money, she was one that loved it and enjoyed it. She made us eager to learn. She was gentle but pushed you at the same time. I got so much more from her than from my last teacher. (Rachael, RI)

[Teacher name] cared about us. He let us be independent and improvise, and he was really into, um… passionate about music. He’d play with us. (Tammy, RI)

Tammy’s comment suggested that the teacher needed to be a ‘musicer’ who actively engaged in music with students (Elliott, 1995). A relational aspect underpinned many of the comments, and the students felt that this enhanced the educative influence:

It’s great when you’ve got someone you can go to if you’re not sure about, say how many sharps in this scale for example, having someone who’s not just going to shout your face off, like “oh you should know that!” You learn so much more from a great teacher who talks with you normally. (Travis, RI).

The passion of the teacher really reveals the influence. It’s like in all subjects… but in Music they [the teacher] have to be there with you… sort of like coming down to your level to help you out. It’s almost more like a friendship than a working relationship… if that makes sense… you explore stuff together. (Amy, RI)

These comments revealed that students enjoyed working with teachers who were passionate and musically knowledgeable, and who encouraged positive and supportive relationships conducive to musical understanding. Such teachers respected music as a discourse – centring on shared and symmetrical interaction – to further the musical understanding of their students.

Out of school music experiences

Over half of the students (60%) reported engaging in regular musical activity out of the school. I located two strongly interrelated themes in the data: a) freedom in experiences; and, b) access to experience. These themes are unpacked below.

The freedom associated with making and writing music outside of the school emerged as an overwhelmingly strong theme:

I enjoy having the freedom of choosing what pieces of music I want to play. (RS20)

That you can do music you want to do, you have more freedom. (RS22)

I have that freedom of what I write. I can make up my own songs. (RS2)

That you can do what you want to do with music. (RS23)

35 ‘Regular’ was defined by the survey as at least once or twice each week.
The fact that it is fun, and you can do whatever you want… it’s a free choice. There is no certain aspect. (Victoria, RI)

That you are free to enjoy and explore freely by yourself without rules, a template, or notes. (Tammy, RI)

It’s great just being able to sit and work on some stuff in GarageBand whenever you want…. I’ve got about four songs on the go at the moment…. (Nelson, RI).

Many of the students associated the freedom of such encounters with an expression of ‘self’. Hayley, Daisy and Amy enthusiastically shared their feelings on the importance of music in their lives, identifying it as central to their identity:

- Making my own songs gives me a sense of freedom and makes me happy. (Hayley, RI)
- Every time I play music I forget about everything else and just go with the flow of it… It’s a way of escape for me. (Daisy, RI)
- It makes me express who I am and I feel great, so music is everything to me. (Amy, RI)

The notions of freedom, exploration, choice and expression resonated strongly in many of these discussions.

Many of the students felt that such freedom afforded greater accessibility to meaningful music making and writing. This accessibility was often enhanced through the negation of use of traditional Western notation systems:

- I just look up tabs [tablature] on the [inter]net. I sometimes just look at the [sheet] music from the net, but mostly just check out the tabs as it has the numbers for the strings on it, so yeah it is easier. (Leigh, RI)

- I reiterate that tabs [tablature] are much easier, so I use them. (Thomas, RI)

- Sometimes now I still play at the piano and make up notes that go with them [lyrics], but I can’t always make them sound good so I just sing them to myself. I have started to write the notes I use above the words so I remember the piano music… yeah the letters of the notes ‘cause that’s easier. (Tammy, RI)

The nature of these forms of notation demand less analytical knowledge of music. These forms – often reliant on working in conjunction with music aurally – provided a meaningful point of access. The focus for these students was that music was primarily an aural art form. This was a dominant point in many conversations:

- I remember music by listening to it and not reading it, so I think that’s what I like better about doing music myself… I look on the internet for songs and I can just learn it myself (Leigh, RI)

- I remember lines by listening to the music not reading it. (Hayley, RI)
I like just working music out myself. I don’t need the notes. (Nelson, RI)

Out of school I can just go to YouTube and learn a song. (Paige, RI)

These approaches to working with music provided many of the students with a greater sense of control and ownership over their experience. Their engagement with music was primarily aural; they more readily drew upon intuitive knowledge to create their own musical understanding. These musical encounters enabled students to locate meaning and significance through more accessible avenues, and support and express their sense of self.

**Overview of Emergent Themes**

Throughout the process of analysis I was careful to ensure that it remained reflective of what the students identified and discussed. The transformation of these data was cyclical and evolutionary; several cycles of data analysis saw the themes reshaped, clarified and subsumed by others. Many of the themes were intertwined, and some were also paralleled or mirrored between categories. An overview of the themes is presented below (see Table 7).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Emergent Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom music experiences</td>
<td>• The challenge and demand of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not enjoyed</td>
<td>• Limitations in transferability of experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher inhibiting learning and enjoyment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom music experiences</td>
<td>• The experience of music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enjoyed</td>
<td>• The development of music knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• The support of the teacher in learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of school music experiences</td>
<td>• Freedom in experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Access to experience</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Table 7                           |

Overview of themes within each category of the reconnaissance data

The location of these themes provided a foundation from which the project could progress based on an informed understanding of the students and their experiences.
“What Do You Need… My Child?”

At the end of the focus group interview I asked the students what they thought should comprise their school music education. Framed by the second question of the epigraph, this located and honoured the student voice and supported the collaborative exploration of our future classroom interaction. The resulting conversations resonated with many of the emergent themes, which served to support the validity and trustworthiness of my interpretive data analysis. The responses of the students are presented below in a manner that preserves the main threads of our discussions.

Linked strongly with the themes that emerged in relation to the experience of music and freedom of these experiences, many identified that practical engagement with music should be central to our lessons. Their responses were succinct and direct:

We should just perform. (Lucas, RI)
Just playing is all we need to do. (James, RI)
We need to just play on instruments. (Liam, RI)

Thomas, Lance, Travis and Rachael also added that these experiences should be embraced by a social context, focusing on making music with others:

We should do small bands and play cover songs. (Thomas, RI)
Big group songs with the whole class would be awesome. (Lance, RI)
We should make groups of three or four and play a cover song. (Travis, RI)
Maybe like choose something you’d like to play and have a lot of people agree on it and learn it together. (Rachael, RI)

In response to the ‘non-enjoyed’ themes surrounding challenge and the lack of transferability of musical experience, and in conjunction with ‘enjoyed’ themes focused on freedom of and access to music experience, other students suggested that engagement with music should be principally aural:

Just play music the way you want… without having to use any notes [sheet music]. (Leigh, RI)
To explore music, I guess? Um, sit with your instrument and make it but without [sheet] music. (Paige, RI)
Learn music by just playing it… not from [sheet] music. (Michael, RI)
Other students stated that they felt these experiences should extend to aural and computer-based experimentation with composing music:

Compose, but not have to write it down… like get a keyboard and a friend and play and sing some of your own stuff. (Carter, RI)

We should just do stuff with GarageBand. Just make music. (Nelson, RI)

Compose songs on GarageBand. (Ian, RI)

Though many of the students reported the theoretical aspects of classroom music in a negative manner, several stated that they felt the need for more experiences that assisted them gain analytical knowledge of music. Hayley, Daisy and Jasmine mentioned:

We need to do more theory… ‘cause that’s a part of how you know music. (Hayley, RI)

We need to do more theory ‘cause it is like a universal language… it’s the basis, then you can build on that. It’s such an advantage being able to read music, just understanding it. (Daisy, RI)

Um… theory? What we do is good, but the level is too easy. I think we need to do harder stuff, or at least have different levels of people and what they can do. I mean what we do helps with my [external instrument] exams, but I find what we did in Music pretty easy. It’s good to revise though. So, um, harder theory for people who know the easy stuff? (Jasmine, RI)

These students sought experiences that afforded them the opportunity to extend their analytical knowledge. They acknowledged that an understanding of these aspects of music would support their other interactions with music.

**Considerations for Action**

The themes that emerged from the reconnaissance stage of the project provided rich insight into where the students ‘came from’ as well as what they felt they ‘needed’ in relation to musical experience. The responses housed within the categories of classroom experiences enjoyed and out of school music experiences centred on the experience and exploration of music through practice. Experiences that were perceived as meaningful were often associated with accessibility and freedom to work with music, and, in the classroom context, the teacher proved a powerful agent in either accommodating or dismissing this. Each of the themes that emerged from within and between the categories of data were strongly interrelated and often paralleled. I examined these themes in conjunction with the student comments relating to what they felt they ‘needed’ from their school music experiences, and synthesised these sources to construct and position considerations that would underpin my practice in the first action research cycle. This provided an informed basis from which to act. From the reconnaissance sources, I identified two
broad considerations as basis for my practice: a) that I would actively situate the students in musical practice in the construction of their understanding; and, that from these experiences, b) connect intuitive encounters with the analytical ‘labels’ in increasing musical understanding. These considerations drew heavily from the themes that emerged from the data, and they each retained a high degree of flexibility in their application with regard to the planned intervention strategy of the first cycle.

The first consideration – the active engagement of students in musical practice – was housed within a praxial approach that situates music as an experience or a process. In this view, music is a practice that embodies a ‘musicer’, music and the context within which they operate (Elliott, 1995). This then demanded that music be seen as a discourse – what Swanwick (1999b) likens to a conversation – that centres on the meaningful exchange of musical ideas with other musicers. The richness of such conversation is therefore reliant on fluency with this discourse; the greater control one has with the materials of music, the more one can converse with others and construct deeper musical understandings. The second consideration – the connection of intuitive musical encounters with analytical knowing – aimed to support the fluency with which such conversation might occur. Through practical encounters with music I focused on moving students from intuitive encounters, toward an association with its analytical component as to invite deeper understandings. The continual interaction between the intuitive and the analytical would invite complexity of interactions within oneself and with others (Swanwick, 1994). This offered intent and direction for my practice; as I worked towards bridging these two forms of knowing there would be greater potential for more complex musical discourse to arise. I felt that the growth of such fluency would minimise the tensions between these forms of knowing, and assist students engage with the classwork.

Reflection

The reconnaissance stage of the project provided crucial insight into the students and their experiences of and engagement with music, and provided an informed foundation for my future action. The dialogue that was opened up through this process proved dually powerful: I critically reflected upon my own practice, and entered the research process aware of my own preconceptions; many of the students expressed that they felt valued, respected and empowered that their voices were being considered. I was surprised at how forthcoming the students were in the focus group interviews, especially as I had not yet taught them at Sunshine College and we were as yet to begin the year together. I listened with great interest to their experiences and what they felt should comprise school music education, reflecting on the ways in which I could
incorporate these experiences and suggestions into our classroom. I was careful in constructing the themes of this stage of the project, and passed through many cycles of interpretation in order to house the data in a genuine and authentic manner. It is my desire that the reader will see the students as ‘voices that matter’ in this process of change. Even at this early stage of the project I felt the difference between our roles dissolve; we became a community of learners. I felt assured that our project would elicit authentic and potentially transformative findings, and that change in my practice would be responsive to the needs of our context. Through the process of data analysis and presentation, it was exciting to see common threads develop between our early conversations, the emergent themes and considerations, and the way in which these were housed by the theoretical frames. I felt that the foundations for a trustworthy and democratic partnership had been set and I was excited to act from an informed position that was co-authored with the students. The following chapter details our pathway of action and reflection.
CHAPTER FIVE
THE ACTION RESEARCH CYCLES

Overview

Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.

(Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed)

Action research centres on the emergence of knowledge from collective inquiry of those in a shared situation. It provokes a continual challenging of the way things are done and strives for the betterment of human action and interaction. In this chapter, I report on the emergence of such knowledge from the four cycles of action research conducted in this project. I have written this chapter in a style that recounts the lived experiences and actions of the research project as it was informed by incidents and themes that emerged. Each cycle is framed by the action research steps of Zuber-Skerritt (2009), and moves through the stages of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The planning sections identify the intervention strategy informed by preceding data, and the acting sections outline the implementation of each strategy. In each observing section I provide an account of the effects of the action through the evolving data, and this also serves to position and honour the voices of the students. The reflecting sections discuss the action of each cycle and the learnings that were generated. The chapter then summarises the learnings of each research cycle. A reflection upon this journey from my perspective as a teacher-researcher then concludes the chapter.

The Action Research Cycles

This project comprised four action research cycles, each guided by the action research design stages of Zuber-Skerritt (2009). Action was based upon critical reflection of the data and learnings emerging from the reconnaissance stage and reflecting stages of the preceding cycles as the project progressed. Reflection on these data afforded the development of contextualised and responsive intervention strategies. Critical incidents and themes from within the research cycles provided new insights into the understanding of the situation and were considered and reflected upon in the preparation of the following cycles. The effects of the planned intervention
strategies guided the length of each cycle, yet each strategy retained flexibility to cope with unforeseen change. The first two cycles of the project were neatly framed by the respective school terms, whereas the last two cycles were shorter and longer respectively. The project followed the concept mapping of the school music curriculum, which was based on Level 5 core content descriptors of *The Arts: Year 1-10 Syllabus* (Queensland Schools Curriculum Council, 2002), and this afforded a great deal of flexibility in negotiating musical themes and content to explore. Given the state of flux between curriculum documents in Queensland, and a later move to a generic mapping of concepts and limited content specificity in early iterations of *Australian Curriculum – The Arts* (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2013), this provided a consistent basis to the curriculum approach employed across the College. The duration and focus of the content framing the investigation of each cycle is presented below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cycle</th>
<th>Length</th>
<th>Main Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reconnaissance</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Reconnaissance to inform Cycle One</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle One</td>
<td>8 weeks</td>
<td>Composition folio based on the music elements of duration, melody and harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle Two</td>
<td>10 weeks</td>
<td>Aural skills, and aurally-based melody composition/performance situated in the exploration of I-V-vi-IV harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle Three</td>
<td>7 weeks</td>
<td>Whole-class performance; aural and transcription skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cycle Four</td>
<td>12 weeks</td>
<td>Small-group songwriting and performance project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 8**
Cycle lengths and basic focus

The length of these cycles afforded sufficient time to explore the effects of the intervention and allowed responsiveness to the outcomes of the cycle as they unfolded in action.

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36 The core content in Level 5 is to be covered across the Year 8 and Year 9 Music course, with some students working towards Level 6 by the end of Year 10 (see p. 18 of the QSCC syllabus document for this breakdown of levels to years).

37 ‘Duration’ is a term in use in Queensland that refers to the length of sound and silence in music, which can be explored through rhythm, beat, meter, pulse etc…
Cycle One

Planning

The findings that emerged from the reconnaissance stage of the project was central to the planning of this first cycle. The intervention strategy saw the students investigate the music elements of duration, melody and harmony in the context of learning to sing a single song, *Hallelujah*, and then apply them in the context of composition. This composition folio acted as a summative measure of assessment that was used alongside the other data collection tools to measure the effect of the strategy (see Appendix F). Through this intervention I aimed to place engagement with music as deep, active and sustained in order to assist students strengthen connections between intuitive and analytical musical knowledge and understanding. Further, I sought to address misalignment between these forms of musical knowing, whilst allowing students to work at their own level of understanding and experience.

Acting

I implemented this plan in the second week of school, following the completion of the survey and focus group interviews that formed the reconnaissance stage of the project. The plan was enacted over a period of eight weeks (eight 80-minute lessons). A simplified progression through the cycle is shown below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Cycle week</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 February</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Singing <em>Hallelujah</em>; focus on rhythm (worksheet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 February</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Work on polyrhythmic composition (folio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 February</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Singing <em>Hallelujah</em>; focus on melody (worksheet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 February</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Work on melodic composition (folio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 March</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Work on melodic composition in <em>Sibelius</em> (folio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 March</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Singing <em>Hallelujah</em>; focus on harmony (worksheet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 March</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Work on harmony composition (folio)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 March</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Completion of composition folio in <em>Sibelius</em>²⁹</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9
Basic overview of content of Cycle One

The first activity involved singing through *Hallelujah* as a class. We then discussed the durational aspects of the work and constructed a list of the durational features of the piece,

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³⁸ This is a very well-known piece by Leonard Cohen, which has been covered by many artists since due to its popularity. The version used here was a 2-part arrangement by Roger Emerson. The song was chosen as it aligned well with the concepts outlined the curriculum documents used in the study – namely tonality, melody and harmony.

³⁹ *Sibelius* is software that enables the notation and playback of scores.
before singing through the sections of the work that best demonstrated these features. The
students then moved to a more formalised investigation as guided by a worksheet (see Appendix
G). This worksheet explored fundamental information about rhythm, and contained an activity
based on the construction of polyrhythmic music through numbered grid and traditional notation
systems. The students then formed groups of four to perform the numbered polyrhythmic score.
They then notated the rhythmic patterns created, which foregrounded the skills demanded in the
first task of the composition folio. In the second lesson the students worked exclusively on their
own polyrhythmic compositions.

Following this, we continued to explore Hallelujah, but focused on the melodic content
of the piece. The students were asked to volunteer ideas about the melodic features and
characteristics of the work. I projected the score onto the whiteboard and made connections
between their responses and the notation, singing the respective sections to support the claims.
Supported by a worksheet (see Appendix H), we then looked at the tone and semitone structure
of the major scale of the piece (C major) and used a paper keyboard\footnote{Simply, a piano keyboard printed on an A4 sheet of paper that the students could draw on to identify the distances (intervals) between notes. This clarified the concept of ‘tone’ and ‘semitone’ for many.} to identify the notes used. We also investigated other scales (F major and G major) and the reasons why they employed sharps and flats. We then moved from scales to the construction of melodies based on the scales we investigated. The worksheet gave general guidelines as to the features of a good major melody and we made connections back to how Hallelujah employed these. The students then put this knowledge into practice in the second activity of their composition folio. The students drafted their melody on manuscript and then added it to the computer using Sibelius so they could hear what it sounded like. Based on aural feedback provided by the computer they were able refine their work. Changes that they made were transferred to the manuscript copy in their folios. This compositional activity formed the basis of the fourth and fifth lessons.

Across the last lessons of the cycle, the focus shifted to harmony. We continued to sing
through Hallelujah as a class and from this experience discussed the harmonic features of the
work. Student responses were identified on the score, and then experienced through practice. In
assisting discuss this element, we mapped out which chords were the most commonly used and
began to build a framework of the harmony on the whiteboard. We talked about the tonality and
key of the work, what the main chords used were, and how major and minor chords functioned
in the music. These discussions were supported by a worksheet (see Appendix I), on which the
students built the diatonic harmony of C major from the major scale. We examined the tonic (I),
subdominant (IV), dominant (V) and submediant (vi) triads of C major, and in parts sang the
melody of *Hallelujah* against the root notes of these chords. We then looked at the application of harmony to a melody with this experience as a foundation. Using the table of diatonic chords we constructed, we discussed how melodic notes could work against different chords and looked for matches in the score of *Hallelujah*. In the last two lessons the students continued with their composition folio, adding harmony to the melody they had constructed earlier. They completed their first drafts on the folio worksheet and then entered their work into Sibelius. Any changes made after hearing the draft on the computer were then transferred back to the manuscript. The students then worked on their folios until the final lesson of the cycle.

*Observing*

The students engaged with the practical components of the lesson with enthusiasm. The quality of their engagement increased as they became more familiar with *Hallelujah*, and many reported enjoying singing:

I loved the singing because it is getting into the active part of music, which is my favourite part. (LRR4, 4 February)

I enjoyed how we got engaged and got to sing. (LRR2, 4 February)

Singing was the best part – it was just fun. (LRR16, 18 February)

As the weeks progressed, I noticed that the students relied less on sheet music; they sang from memory and internalised the work to a greater degree. The experiences with *Hallelujah* formed the basis of our exploration into the music elements of duration, melody and harmony. This was guided by conversations about what we had just sung in the context of the respective element. Many of the students identified these conversations as assisting them in making connections:

I enjoyed the whole class getting involved in working out features [of the rhythm of *Hallelujah*] on the board. (LRR1, 4 February)

The conversations confirm everything. (LRR2, 18 February)

[I enjoyed] [t]alking about things. Mr Bonar kept going over it and it made it easy to understand. It was good because people had the same questions as I did. (LRR9, 11 March)

In my journal, I noted:

The class has been really conversant – we’re talking lots. I expend so much energy sewing the conversation together and prompting for responses, but it is making their thinking and understanding more visible. I am getting to know what they don’t know. I think this approach is really helping with creating a supportive environment too – maybe they’ll take more chances? Hopefully they’ll see that I am here to help them! (researcher journal, 18 February)

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41 LLR refers to Lesson Reflection Report instrument, with the number immediately following indicating a random identifier (different each lesson). The date completed follows this. This initialism will be used throughout the chapter.
The conversations, based on our practice, assisted the students make connections between what had been experienced and its theoretical conceptualisation. They served to clarify and affirm understanding, and assisted students to construct their own schemes of meaning:

Because we sang melodies I learnt more about melodies and singing high pitches and finding out how they fitted to a piece. (LRR15, 18 February)

I get scales and pitch now because I know about it from singing [in class]. (LRR13, 18 February)

From the piece [Hallelujah] I worked out the scale and I now know how to write a scale and what the arrangement would be in different notes. (LRR21, 18 February)

How the chords fitted was cool. I get how it works because we played it with the singing piece [Hallelujah]. (LRR23, 11 March)

I know how scales and harmonies work now if you have one you have the other pretty much. (LRR25, 11 March)

In my journal I noted:

After singing again we looked at scales. They went really well! They were all actively engaged the entire lesson – questions were being asked to clarify understanding… I couldn’t believe it, especially given the content of the worksheet. I tried to make it [melody writing] as accessible as possible; I kept the energy high, and I tried to convey why this was important (transcriptions of guitar solos, help with composing etc…). The use of the paper keyboards seemed to greatly assist their learning. They could put the T/S [tone/semitone] relationship into practice right in front of them. They seem to understand the way it all related… (researcher journal, 18 February)

The worksheets positioned the concepts experienced in an analytical way. Together we worked through these as I continued to provide connections between them and what we had sung. There were no negative references to the worksheets in the data aside from that fact that the students wanted to do more singing:

[I didn’t enjoy] all the writing. I think we should just sing. (LRR7, 11 March)

[I didn’t enjoy] the writing but we sort of do need to do it to learn. (LRR12, 11 March)

Moving to the composition folio, most of the students identified the polyrhythmic task as manageable, with many demonstrating a good degree of control in using and manipulating duration. I noted many of the students tapping and clapping their rhythms to test them across the lesson as they worked, and I assisted many of the students with their ideas through questioning them about what they were endeavouring to create and the role of each line. The ability to test what they wrote assisted with the construction of their compositions, and some even tried their ideas out with a partner or small group as we did in an earlier activity. Many of the students,
including Liam, composed a suitable polyrhythmic piece within the lesson. The students drew from their experiences in class and from the worksheet content provided:

The worksheet with the rhythms helped me lots in remembering. (LRR1, 11 February)

The rhythm composition was pretty easy… I did it pretty quickly. It wasn’t too much trouble as you only really used one thing [rhythm] and we’ve done heaps of stuff like that. (Travis, C11)

We did rhythms at my last school. I get it. (Liam, personal conversation, 11 February)

Jasmine’s composition demonstrated a mature approach to texture and structure, with all parts effectively combining cohesively:

![Figure 4](Jasmine’s Polyrhythmic Composition)

Lucas’s composition was more simplistic in nature, but showed a developing understanding of structure:

![Figure 5](Lucas’s Polyrhythmic Composition)
Ian needed encouragement in the completion of his composition, producing a simple result:

![Figure 6](image)

**Figure 6**
Ian’s Polyrhythmic Composition

As the composition tasks increased in complexity and demand, I noted some increasing tension in some of the students realising their musical ideas. The melodic composition revealed a greater divide between those capable and those who struggled. In my journal I noted:

*A very hectic lesson! Such a vast array of knowledge and ability in the room, but most students made progress with their melody writing… I found it really difficult to ‘be there’ for everyone – with some students very advanced, and some at the opposite end of the scale – very challenged by the content (even though last week showed much evidence of students engaging with the content quite deeply). How ‘deep’ actually was it then? (researcher journal, 25 February)*

Though there were varying degrees of independence and capability, I was encouraged in the fact that most of the students who were struggling tried hard to work through their challenges. These students asked questions to clarify their understanding, and I ensured that I moved throughout the room to see all of the students across the lesson. I noted that the students who played an instrument were unsurprisingly often more capable. Daisy, a violinst, wrote her melody in 6/8 and in the key of D minor. She drew upon her experience with her violin pieces:

![Figure 7](image)

**Figure 7**
Daisy’s Melodic Composition
Not all of the students shared this degree of knowledge or understanding. A comment made by Julie signalled a significant critical incident:

Julie said, “I don’t know what I am writing. Do I just stick notes anywhere?” Was this pretty much a meaningless and disconnected activity for her? Who else feels this way? (researcher journal, 25 February)

I reassured Julie and supported her by referring back to the practical experiences and revising the worksheets. I encountered other students who were in similar situations, and so decided to allow them to move onto Sibelius earlier so that they could gain immediate feedback on their work. Whilst this somewhat compromised my initial intent, it served to support these students in attaching additional meaning to the activity. They could see and hear the results of their work, and this supported them moving through the task. This incident saw me reflect after the lesson:

I am not convinced that the students can ‘hear’ or really understand what they are writing, nor have any real creative direction with this [melody writing]. It is important that the students use Sibelius as a tool to hear their composition, but many don’t have a concept of what it might sound like when initially writing it – they are following a pre-established ‘form’ [my suggestions for features of a good melody]. Is this really creative? (researcher journal, 25 February)

Student reflections confirmed that several were experiencing trouble with their composition task without immediate aural feedback being provided:

It was hard to write the melody without a xylophone. (LRR5, 25 February)

I found it challenging to write a melody because I didn’t really know what it might sound like. (LRR12, 25 February)

I’m not sure what my melody sounded like when I wrote it in. (LRR8, 25 February)

Amy also identified this problem in some of her peers:

This term until we got to the computers some people were writing rhythms and melodies without much understanding as to what they sounded like. (Amy, C1I)\(^2\)

For these students, before they worked with Sibelius, the composition comprised the application of a formulaic process removed from the aural effect. The use of Sibelius supported the students in being able to hear the effects of their musical decisions, and served to increase the meaning of the task that some students initially struggled to locate:

I really enjoyed that we did those compositions and... having the computer play the melodies was really good because you could hear what was good about it. (Victoria, C1I)

\(^2\) C1I refers to the ‘focus group interviews of cycle one’. This abbreviation will be used through this chapter, alongside C2I, C3I and C4I representing the second, third and fourth cycle respectively.
I liked writing the melody on the computer because that, um… that we could freely write our composition was good. It made it easier to know what you wanted. (Paige, C11)

I liked playing around with the notes on the computer to try and get it to sound right. (LRR15, 25 February)

The use of Sibelius encouraged a greater degree of exploration in the melodic compositions and served to reinforce and challenge understandings that were constrained by the initial task design. All of the students managed to write a satisfactory melody that worked within the guidelines, or challenged them. Amy’s composition was influenced by her piano study and showed evidence of considered articulation and phrasing:

![Figure 8]

Amy’s Melodic Composition

Nelson’s composition was much more simplistic, but showed a basic understanding of melodic concepts discussed in class:

![Figure 9]

Nelson’s Melodic Composition

Despite the issues located in the process of the melody composition concerning the lack of aural feedback, I continued to ask that the students draft their harmony composition for me on manuscript. This was to ensure that the students had a basic understanding of the principles behind harmonic frameworks and how they aligned with a melody. I encouraged the students to think of the ways in which harmony was used in Hallelujah, and invited questions to clarify understanding. In formulating a draft independent from a sound source, the students followed
the formula for adding harmony provided on the worksheet. Few understood the aural effect of their decisions:

The students’ harmony work just wasn’t developed enough – they followed the formula, that’s it. They were all pretty static – all in root position, wild jumps between chords…. It’s of little wonder why. Also, they are often trying to fit chords to a melody that often does not imply a functional progression. There needs to be interplay between the two… With some I suggested moving the pitches within the chord (inversions). There is so much to explore here. Hopefully I’ve given them a starting point to understand how it all works…? (researcher journal, 18 March)

Once the students had drafted their harmony parts, these were inputted into Sibelius as so they could hear the effect. This again allowed greater access to constructing an understanding of the relationships between these elements, affording further experimentation with their application. Rachael’s ideas were heavily guided by the worksheet:

![Figure 10](image_url)

**Figure 10**
Rachael’s Harmonic Composition
Travis experimented by inverting some of his chords to assist the functionality of the harmony:

![Figure 1](image1)

**Figure 1**
Travis’s Harmonic Composition

This task challenged Leigh. His initial melody was unrefined and sat awkwardly with basic root position chords:

![Figure 2](image2)

**Figure 2**
Leigh’s Harmonic Composition

Despite most of the students developing satisfactory compositions, the application of harmony was often forced and resulted in progressions that were not always functional. I again noted the importance of providing access to aural feedback for the students throughout the compositional process and the manner through which this enhanced exploration and experimentation with the music elements.
I had stretched many of the students to breaking point. I was also stretched in offering assistance and responding to questions. I encouraged the students to experiment with their music through Sibelius, and most of them gained a better idea of the musical effects of their decisions. I added another entry after observing the way the students were working:

Most of the students got to the final stage of inputting their work into Sibelius. They listened to them critically, and were mostly really proud of their work. Sibelius is a great tool – the students could hear their work, see their melodies played in real time…. As teachers we have so much more support through computers and software. We shouldn’t baulk at these as support mechanisms, but they must be used appropriately and with purpose. They can be a wonderfully supportive tool and can make notes on the page ‘come to life’. That said, I do feel they can replace the need to have an understanding of the fundamental components of music – with a few clicks of a mouse you can ‘compose’! …. Exploring composition this way is fine, but knowledge about what it is that is happening musically needs to grow from it so that it can be applied elsewhere. Computers can hold the musical data for us and impinge on understanding… they can even manipulate the data for us… (researcher journal, 25 March).

Throughout the cycle, this line of thinking influenced my motivation to have the students know of the analytical components of music. I wanted their compositions to be informed and for them to manipulate these components with intent; however, with such explorations, time and critical reflection on the product are crucial factors in eliciting deep and meaningful understanding.

The feedback that the students provided on the cycle was unsurprisingly mixed. Several valued the work and enjoyed the experience and associated learnings:

- It was good. Knowing how to compose this way is important. It gives you a guide. (Jasmine, C1I)
- It was good that we could create our own rhythm and melody and chords because I love to create music and this time we had some flexibility in our own choice. (Lucas, C1I)
- I enjoyed composing my melody. I liked doing this because usually I don’t compose music and I enjoy it. (Amy, C1I)
- I now know where to place the primary notes in a melody which will be good for my own songs. (LRR12, 25 February)
- I like listening to music and this [composition folio] gave me a better idea of the process. I can use this when I make my own songs on guitar. (LRR12, 25 March)
- Writing out the scales helps reinforce them for my saxophone exam. (LRR18, 18 February)

Some of the other students cited a disconnect from their own experiences:

- I didn’t really get the composition things. I don’t really do stuff like that any other place. (Lance, C1I)
- I didn’t really enjoy the composition that much. I don’t actually write music that way. (Tammy, C1I)
Nelson, who recently began experimenting with his own music in GarageBand, said:

It’s one of those things that unless you play an instrument it’s kind of pointless. One of the things I find about Music is that a lot of the things we learn is that I get this feeling that this is only going to be useful if we pick this one little career, where as it should be the stuff that’s useful for everyone. (Nelson, C11)

Nelson’s comment was quite mature. It reflected the problem statement motivating this project on multiple levels. For the students who felt Music was somewhat disconnected or unnecessary, I achieved little in making it meaningful.

Reflecting

This cycle revealed that conversations about music that emanated from practice assisted students make connections between experience and analytical concepts. The application of these understandings to composition, however, revealed that these concepts were understood at vastly differing levels. Despite my intention of supporting students make greater connections between practical understanding and theoretical knowledge, I weighted the composition folio too heavily toward the demonstration of understanding through notation. In doing so, I placed greater value on analytical knowing, and largely excluded any initial sensory and intuitive exploration. For students without a secure ability or confidence to work in this way, this approach compromised the demonstration of their understanding. For many of the students, the compositional process of this cycle was initially isolated from aural effect, and many students struggled to experience their work before writing it down. The critical incident sparked by Julie saw me engage with this issue in action and move the students struggling onto Sibelius, which provided scope for the aural exploration of ideas alongside the notated equivalent. The addition of Sibelius as a tool in realising compositional ideas was beneficial to many in opening up schemes of meaning.

A significant learning from this cycle was located in the need to base the exploration of music ideas in practice and in a way that would give students immediate aural feedback on their musical decisions. Though the use of Sibelius did afford some exploration of this type, it needed to be positioned in conjunction with the start of the process. A further learning related to the time that I afforded the students to explore and refine their music ideas based on such feedback. Together, these learnings suggested that my practice needed to embrace a greater experiential focus, based in action with music, in order to better support connections between intuitive and analytical understanding. I took these learnings into the next cycle.
Cycle Two

Planning

The planning of this cycle rested upon the observations and critical reflections from the preceding cycle. In this cycle, I retained the focus on composition due to its capacity to allow the students to work at their own level of skill and understanding. I also returned to the elements of melody and harmony, as I felt that they had not been sufficiently explored in the preceding cycle. The intervention strategy positioned students to explore these music elements intuitively through practice and composition and within a social context. I used harmony as an organising frame for melody, using the familiar I-V-vi-IV progression commonly found in popular music. The strategy involved the students learning this progression on the keyboard or guitar, and then working in pairs to add their own melody to this progression aurally. The completed melodies were then to be shared with the class through a performance at the end of the cycle. In collecting data to measure the efficacy of the strategy, the cycle also included an aural skills examination that focused on melodic dictations based on the same I-V-vi-IV framework. The presentations of the students’ melodies and the aural skills examination formed the assessment package (see Appendix J and K). Throughout this strategy, I placed greater emphasis on practical, social, and intuitive explorations with music, and anticipated that the extended time provided to these explorations would support greater depth of understanding and application.

Acting

The acting stage saw the controlled yet flexible implementation of the intervention. The duration of the cycle was ten weeks, though only incorporated nine lessons due to planned non-curriculum activities that were scheduled in the last week. Though we did not have class, I scheduled the focus group interviews in this last week. I enacted the plan of this cycle at a much slower rate than that of the first cycle, especially in terms of curriculum content. This ensured responsiveness to the need for students to engage at a deeper level and generate more robust understandings. A simplified progression of the cycle is shown over (see Table 10):
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Cycle week</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 April</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Explore how melody and harmony work together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 April</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Aural skills; learn chords I-V-vi-IV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 April</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Aural skills; continue learning chords</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 May</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Aural skills; demonstrate chords with backing track</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 May</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Aural skills; harmony (worksheet); begin melody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 May</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Aural skills; work in pairs on melody/harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 May</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Aural skills; work in pairs on melody/harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 June</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Aural skills examination; work on composition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 June</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Sharing of compositions as a performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 June</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No class – focus group interviews conducted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 10**  
Basic overview of content of Cycle Two

In the first lesson, we discussed our discoveries of melody and harmony from the first cycle and how they might be used in the context of a piece of music. I then wrote ‘I | V | vi | IV’ in large letters on the whiteboard before playing the students a YouTube video called the *Four Chord Song*, by Axis of Awesome. This song sews together a medley of 38 popular songs that employ this same chord progression, with each cycle of the progression seeing a change of the song used above it. As the video played, I pointed to the chord changes on the whiteboard. We then worked out what the chords names would be if we were in the key of G major and wrote them on the whiteboard. I then asked the students to write out the notes used in these chords, drawing from their knowledge of the major scale and construction of diatonic harmony. In the remainder of this lesson I demonstrated this chord progression on the keyboard and the guitar for the students and spoke of the assessment for the term.

I focused the next three lessons on two main activities – aural skills involving melodic dictations, and learning the I-V-vi-IV progression on the guitar or keyboard. The melodic dictations were housed by the I-V-vi-IV framework to foster connections to chordal notes, with the chords and the rhythm written above the staff for guidance. The students were given seven hearings to then notate the melody. Following this, the students began to learn the I-V-vi-IV progression on the guitar or keyboard with the support of two help sheets (see Appendix L & M). I also made up a backing track featuring a drumbeat and a bass line outlining the chords, to

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43 This can viewed on: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pidokakU4I&list=RD5pidokakU4I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5pidokakU4I&list=RD5pidokakU4I) (active as of August 2016)
assist to further contextualise this activity. The backing track was available at two different tempos to accommodate different stages of ability and fluency. By the end of the fourth lesson, the students were required to demonstrate the chord progression to me along with the backing track. Once they had demonstrated it with some fluency they formed pairs (in one case, a group of three) to work in turn on each constructing their own melody over this chord progression. At the start of the fifth lesson, we revisited the connections between melody and harmony through a worksheet (see Appendix N) to support the students’ construction of their own melodies. The following three lessons continued with the practical application of the melody to the harmonic framework, as well as the weekly focus on melodic dictations. In the eighth lesson, the students sat an aural skills examination consisting of two questions on melodic dictation – one with the rhythm given, the other without (see Appendix K). The cycle then culminated in the sharing of the melodic composition work in the last week of classes.

Observing

This cycle evolved naturally from the first cycle, with many of the students showing a good understanding of the melody and harmony content. The practical exploration of these same concepts, however, did provide greater connections for those who struggled. The Four Chord Song video greatly informed our continued investigation, clearly demonstrating the role of harmony within the context of a song/s. The students related to many of the songs contained within the video, and noted the monotony of the chord progression after only a few cycles. As I pointed to the chords as the song played, I noticed the students becoming more aware:

The students could see and hear the chords in action and could easily hear the changes as they occurred. I think this assisted in breaking down what harmony actually is – what it sounds like in a piece of music. The “chords are stacks of notes that happen under the melody” comment from Victoria! (researcher journal, 15 April)

The students easily replaced the Roman numeral chord indications with the chords of G major. When asked to identify the notes contained within each chord, many employed the technique of using the major scale to identify the individual pitches. Classroom conversations framed by stepping through the process of using the scale to construct a table of diatonic harmony assisted the students struggling with this. Encouragingly, some of the students could skip this systematic working and referred instead to mnemonic devices^44 that demonstrated a degree of assimilation in understanding of these structures. When I turned to the keyboard to play the progression, I attempted to capture the connections that the students had made through these devices, stepping

^44 Students, for example, used ‘line-line-line’ or ‘space-space-space’ to assemble the chords in root position, or simply skipped each second letter name from the scale that they constructed from memory.
through each note as I built the chord before playing. Many of the students reported feeling that this approach was effective:

We learnt about what we did Term One in a practical way instead of a sheet. (Celeste, C11)

[I enjoyed] that we learnt more about harmony by the song [Four Chord Song] as I could hear it. (LRR13, 15 April)

When we got to listen to the chords and we followed them through it was really easy to see what harmony was all about. I think this would have made it easier for those who didn’t really like get it last term… maybe? (Travis, C11)

The inclusion of the melodic dictations framed by the same four-chord progression was intended to support the students as they moved toward constructing their own melodies; however, I still noted a sense of disconnect for some of the students. Many identified aural skills exercises as challenging components of our lessons. After the first dictation, I wrote:

There was a sense of disconnection when we did the melodic dictation today. We talked about the chords, I played them again, and wrote them up above each bar of the stave. When I started the melody and talked through identifying possible chordal notes that might fit, I was surprised that they didn’t really get it – well, most of them. Even when I added the chordal notes some did not really appear to understand how this might help. I think many are just baulking at the challenge because it’s hard. It actually is pretty challenging… I just want them to build up some labels to use and some knowledge that they can transfer to different contexts. If they learn the rules, they can then break them intentionally and meaningfully. (researcher journal, 22 April)

I continued to encourage and support the students, though some continued to struggle with this area of the work:

The aural work was hard, ‘cause everyone else was good at it and I wasn’t. (LRR14, 22 April)

Aural is too hard. Don’t like them. (LRR7, 22 April)

[I didn’t enjoy] aural. It was hard to write it all down in time. (LRR21, 22 April)

It’s really hard having to memorise all the different lines, what they mean and the notes, and having to listen to what you’re playing and have to write it down. (LRR19, 22 April)

In my journal, I wrote:

I think most of the ones that are struggling just don’t feel like they can achieve in this. It’s like they’ve made up their mind that this is too hard without really trying. Nelson tries a little bit, but he doesn’t really have control over notating it down… Liam’s really having issues… he had just written the same note across the entire page – noteheads that were written over several lines, stems on the wrong side, no bar lines… He didn’t have the technical knowledge to complete this. (researcher journal, 29 April)
The students experiencing difficulty felt limited control in using notation, though I continued to support and encourage them. Upon completion of the melodic dictations we would sing them as a class, and I would often stay with students who struggled and point through the notation as we sang. I felt it important that the students continued to explore these experiences. In my journal, I wrote:

I really do think this will help the students. It is a continual reminder about what a suitable melody against the chord progression sounds like; it shows how the melodic line of each bar connects to the chordal notes – and where this tends to happen in the bar; it shows them how the bars link together to ‘say something’… How do I get them to see this? Or will it just happen when they make the connection? (researcher journal, 29 April)

Over the seven lessons we completed the dictations, the frequency of students identifying this as the most challenging part of the lesson decreased. It was encouraging to see most of the students become more confident with this section of the work:

The aural stuff was hard, but the more you do the better it is and the better you get. I think it does help but you have to try hard. It’s just a different way to think about music. (Rachael, C2I)

I didn’t do that well with the aural stuff, but I got better… (James, C2I)

You do bit by bit, and then it’s just ‘all good’ so you have more knowledge and understanding in it. (Hayley, C2I)

I’m getting better at aural skills. I got more confident. (Cassie, C2I)

I didn’t know much of the aural but now I do. (Leigh, C2I)

Increasingly, I saw that this was supporting the construction of analytical schemes of meaning and becoming connected to lived experiences. Many of the students felt more able to complete the dictations as we progressed, though other students continued to struggle to connect the aural encounter with its notated equivalent. The submission of the aural skills examination confirmed that the notation of a melodic idea was the point of disconnection for many of the students.

The practical components of each lesson saw the students actively engaged in exploring and making music. The students reported that they enjoyed working together with instruments and that they felt they were learning useful skills. The first practical task involved the students learning and then demonstrating the I-V-vi-IV chord sequence, and it was pleasing to see many of the students working together musically to support each other. This task revealed significant variation in students’ practical abilities, and the students who elected to play the guitar were often slower to develop their skills than those who chose keyboard:
Today I realised that much more time is required for students to work with the chords/patterns practically – guitar is presenting issues… It is very popular but quite challenging for someone who has never played it. It was interesting to see many return their guitars and take up a keyboard after experiencing some frustrations with making a ‘clean’ sound. Keyboard provides much more of an instant success. (researcher journal, 22 April)

The following week saw the same theme continue:

Most of the students on keyboard have really picked up the progression quickly and some can play it fluently already. With guitar, most are still ‘framing up’ the chords…. I’ve given them the chord frames, but many of them are still struggling to read what the frame is saying… Spending a little time with them seems to help though. (researcher journal, 29 April)

This gap began to close as many of the guitar students practised and refined their skills. Most were persistent in the face of challenge and began to make progress with increased focus. Ian, who had been absent in the second week, was excited that he could play the progression within the space of one lesson:

“Hey I can do this!” exclaimed an excited Ian! Ian was absent last week, so this was a significant achievement. Such a great comment to hear. (researcher journal, 29 April)

For some of the students, this took time to foster; several needed encouragement to support their beliefs in their ability to do the task. The support of social connections also assisted to motivate some of the students:

Most of the ‘harder to impress’ boys really tried this lesson to work despite a few instances of them mucking around…. Where possible I tried to work with them and help them through the finger positioning [on guitar] for each of the chords. Slow work, but it did help them. Obviously acting out because they felt too challenged – they lost focus. Once Lance got it though the rest wanted to know it… it was great to see them help each other out. (researcher journal, 29 April)

If it wasn’t for Lance I’d never have learnt the chords. He showed me and I was all cool with it. (Leigh, C2I)

Persistence and time were also noted by many of the students:

The guitar was actually so hard. I got sore fingers and dents in my skin. The G and C [chord] hurt to do at the start. It was good that I stuck with it though. I did pretty good. (Michael, C2I)

It’s hard when you’re the worst… but at least [Daisy] helped me. Oh, you did too! I just needed more time to get it. It actually wasn’t that hard in the end. (Rachael, C2I)

Actually, it’s not so much the skill – skill comes into it – but at this stage, it’s more about putting the effort in… put the effort into actually thinking about it, ‘cause it’s not a subject that you can just get, it’s a hard subject. You have to put the effort in to be able to get the skills. (Amy, C2I)

Once the students accomplished a basic flow of the progression, they started to work with the backing track. Though some of the students who drew upon existing skills did not feel overly
challenged, they still reported enjoying the experience. I encouraged those who could easily demonstrate the progression on keyboard to explore inversions of these chords. The backing track served to further focus the group approach, and many of the students felt that they were contributing to something more now that their part was put in the context of a song:

Playing with the backing track is sick! (LRR6, 6 May)

You have to move faster [playing the chords] with the backing but it sounds really cool. (LRR2, 6 May)

It was cool that I could play along to a song [the backing track]. (LRR3, 6 May)

By the end of the fourth lesson, all of the students had managed to play the progression for me. Some of them were very fluent, with some of those on keyboard using inversions that supported smooth changes between the chords; others were more basic in their approach:

Guitars were generally slower with the changes. Some of the keyboard players just ‘forked’ the three middle fingers of their hand and played everything in root position jumping up and down the keyboard! Some of them will still need to practise as we move on – they will anyway because they need to [because they will perform them with their melody]. (researcher journal, 6 May)

I enjoyed watching the students work together to become more fluent and confident in their playing. It was great to see them all experience success with these chords and build up some practical skills to support their future composition and performance activities. The students were making meaning through direct experience with music – this was meaningful to many of them – and they were excited about the knowledge that they were gaining.

The connections between this harmonic progression and the addition of a melody saw some additional understandings being formed. When then students began to engage in applying this knowledge in practice, there were unsurprising differences between their abilities and levels of confidence. Some of the students needed constant redirection and guidance, and many needed reassurance in their ability to do the task. Some just struggled to find a place to start. I recalled an interaction with Julie in my journal:

Julie seemed quite surprised when I said to her that you pretty much try anything [a note] against the chord to see if it works. She was waiting for the rules I think? I explained that there sort of were rules [on the worksheet] but that she should go with what sounds good to her. She was very reluctant to try. Luckily she’d paired herself with Paige, who had piano lessons. She had Paige helping her in my absence at least. (researcher journal, 20 May)
The benefits of grouping students together was also identified by students, often in the context of being able to work with friends:

I loved having the freedom to work with Carter and try new things. (LRR7, 27 May)

It was great to work with Victoria to make up our song. We did good work and it is sounding pretty good. (LRR19, 27 May)

It was great working as a group to learn the chords and then chose a partner to write a melody with ‘cause you could see who would be good for each other. (Mia, C2I)

The best thing was that we got in together and worked it out. Cassie was being a bit annoying [laughs], but that sort of made it fun too. Yeah, working together was the best. (Tammy, C2I)

I liked working with Nelson. He made it cool. (Liam, C2I)

Most of the self-selected pairings were working well, and most contained someone reasonably secure in their understanding and skills. I saw the social context of the task as supportive to their learning. It was exciting when the pairs started to make progress:

They are really starting to ‘get it’ – Cassie excitedly mentioned, “I couldn’t play piano last week, now I can!” Tammy played the chords and Cassie played some of her melody before laughing with excitement that she made music. This was really very pleasing to see and hear. (researcher journal, 20 May)

The task provided more than sufficient challenge for all of the students, and many noted the difficulties in writing a melody that sounded good. This approach to melody writing saw students engage in constructing their own understandings, and many reported locating greater meaning in the task:

When you had to play your melody you sort of really had to know it. I mean if you just wrote it down you sort of don’t really have to know it as much. (Victoria, C2I)

It was good being able to work on our melody by playing it ‘cause you could hear what it sounded like and what you wanted and stuff. (Celeste, C2I)

I think I learnt so much more about actually writing music. It’s something that I didn’t really do much of before or really think about. (Travis, C2I)

As the weeks progressed, I observed generally very high levels of engagement. The freedom provided by the task saw some behavioural issues arise, though they were often connected to students feeling that they were unable to progress. These instances were rectified when I sat with the students and assisted them:

Had a really great class today – almost all of the students were engaged the entire lesson. After some minor prompting and redirecting, even Liam got started. I wrote the names of the notes on
his keyboard [in whiteboard pen!] to support him and I noticed him working on the chords with Nelson for much of the lesson. Just the support he needs? (researcher journal, 27 May)

Despite some challenging behaviour earlier on, Lance and Leigh made excellent progress. They enjoyed having complete control over the music they made and worked together to test their composition out:

Lance and Leigh we so engaged in their guitar work today. The progression is happening – it’s reasonably fluent. They’re confident in testing out a melody against it – “shredding battles” as Lance called them. They’re healthily competitive. Music is something that they can achieve at, experience success in, and connect to their ‘musical world’. (researcher journal, 3 June)

Over one of the lessons they combined their melodies to form one longer song – one played the chords whilst the other played the melody, and they then swapped fairly seamlessly after the first melody. There was no notation involved – it was all from memory. It was interesting to see the ways in which other students were engaging with the ‘keeping record’ of their melodies too:

It was interesting to see how the students wrote their ideas down – most of them were letter names across a page, the rhythm committed to memory (improvised on?). Some wrote out music [staff notation] – the ones who played in [school] band and had lessons… (researcher journal, 27 May)

The ways of working I witnessed around the room reflected the many and varied ways that the students could come to understand music. They were working from an intuitive base, informed by their previous experiences and their own explorations over the duration of this cycle.

In the final week, the students presented their work. Whilst the task was engaged with well, problems with cohesiveness and narrative of the some of the melodies were apparent. The use of the backing track greatly assisted, and many groups elected to play their pieces at the slower tempo. There was a variety of quality presented: some groups played repeated ‘riffs’ that did not reflect the changing harmony; others had the melody and chords play note against note entirely in crotchets; others still were quite outstanding in their use and manipulation of music elements. Irrespective of the quality of the work, the learning housed greater connections:

Some excellent achievements today from many of the students – many fluent performances; some demonstrated the use of inversions on keyboard and some dexterous changes on guitar. Most of the melodies were quite good too – sometimes they didn’t really ‘fit’… Hayley’s group’s presentation was excellent – they added another section – using I, ii, IV, V – like a chorus, and turned their 8 bars into a song. Also, it was good to see most groups ending on chord I, they knew it didn’t sound finished if they didn’t. Their intuition at work! (researcher journal, 17 June)
Pleasingly, Liam and Nelson invested much into the task across the last few weeks:

Liam and Nelson came to see me the day before they presented their work. Nelson had made up a backing track of his own that was a pretty heavy ‘house style’ mix – he showed it to me to see if they were able to use it. It was pretty well made. I really wanted to encourage both Nelson, who was so keen on using GarageBand, and Liam, who I feared I was losing, so asked them to show me what they were doing against it for their performance. It was OK, pretty simple and repetitive, but they had done something. It was really unfortunate for them when they presented it in class and Liam lost time with the backing and dropped out… (researcher journal, 17 June)

It was encouraging to see the experimentation and exploration with music occur in this cycle. The task provided scope for students to work at their own level, with each group working well with what they had available.

The learnings the students experienced in this cycle were reported with greater degrees of enthusiasm and meaning. Lance and Carter mentioned:

I learnt much more this term I think. I didn’t really learn anything in the first term [Cycle One]. I mean I sort of did, but this was more fun…. ‘cause we got to play and just make it up like that. I can do that better. (Lance, C2I)

Last term [Cycle One] was good but this one was better. Getting to play what we made up made more sense to me. (Carter, C2I)

Julie and Hayley noted:

It was good that we sort of had less to do in a way… well you know, we did stuff that built up on each other so it felt like we didn’t do that much, but really we did quite a lot. (Julie, C2I)

This term we just progressed up to it with lots of little parts. It all joined together. (Hayley, C2I)

Many students reported greater connections between the composition task and their own music-making activities outside of school, particularly in relation to feeling more informed in writing their own music. It was encouraging to see both the aural skills and compositional experiences represented:

I sometimes sit at home at my piano and make little tunes, so the aural will help and the knowledge of chords will help. (LRR2)

I learnt how to put melody with harmony. It will help with my improvisation for my saxophone. (LRR1)

I write my own music so this will help. I know how I could make it sound better and it’s good I can do this at school. (LRR13)

Putting the melody and harmony together in this way was like what I will now do at home. It will help with what I want to write. (Tammy, C2I)
I was very pleased to see these connections formed, and felt the intervention strategy of this cycle better reflected the ways in which students might work with music outside of school. Across the cycle, the classroom was full of action and the students were engaged in constructing their own knowledge and understandings of music.

Reflecting

The compositional activity central to this intervention strategy sought to assist students directly explore and experiment with music in practice. From this basis of experience, aural skill development was positioned to support connections being made between these explorations and analytical understanding. Though these connections were made by some of the students, others continued to experience a sense of disconnect founded in a lack of control in using notation; however, the continued focus on and development of aural skills did see improvement. I was encouraged that all of the students reported enjoying the practical experiences associated with the composing task. I felt that this task was more responsive to the need for the students to gain immediate aural feedback on their compositional working. I also felt that I had allocated sufficient time to this process, and that this assisted in increasing the depth of understanding and application. Though there was a wide range of practical ability amongst the students, this task afforded opportunity for them to engage on a level suitable for them and construct their own understandings in context. Further, the social context of the practical work was beneficial for many of the students in gaining support for increasing their skill and understanding. I felt that the work in this cycle provided greater contextualisation of experience for the students.

My learnings from this cycle were centred on the approaches I took in supporting the students gain knowledge of music. Throughout the cycle it was revealed that a more meaningful approach to understanding resided in the provision of practical and socially based experiences that allowed students to explore music intuitively and use it as a discourse (Swanwick, 1999b). These intuitive beginnings afforded a platform upon which I could build analytical knowing; however, I was still aware that some of the students did not connect their intuitive realisations in the composition task with the analytical frame of the aural skills tasks. I was also aware of some of the students still not seeing value or purpose in these tasks. I felt that I needed to place greater emphasis on uncovering their ‘musical thinking’, rather than focus on their notation of a musical idea. I felt that this would provide much more insight into their musicality and assist me make locate more meaningful connections. An additional learning from this cycle focused on the need to build the instrumental skills of the students in order to support their increasing fluency with music. These learnings formed a basis for the intervention strategy of the following cycle.
Cycle Three

Planning

The planning and intervention strategy of this cycle was based on the learnings of the preceding cycle. The intervention strategy contained two aspects and positioned students as contemporary musicians learning primarily through aural means and in social contexts. The first aspect of the strategy used the song, *Steal My Kisses*, and saw the students recreate and perform this song as part of a class instrumental and vocal ensemble. The performance of this song was included as a summative piece of assessment (see Appendix O). The strategy sought to honour musical style and the context within which music is made, and aimed to increase the students’ fluency with music. In approaching this task, the students were to work in small social groups to build their technique and work on their parts before rehearsing together with the class.

The second aspect carrying the intervention strategy was an aural skills task that drew upon the aural ways in which the students were working. In this task, the students were to audio-visually record themselves singing back a melody that was presented to them as a sound file, and also transcribe a second melody using staff notation. This new approach sought to assist students internalise sound to a greater degree and value aural awareness over notation alone. This task also formed a summative assessment piece for the students (see Appendix P).

Acting

The implementation of the intervention strategy accommodated a degree of flexibility, with the cycle concluding earlier than anticipated due to a faster rate of progression through the content. The cycle concluded after seven weeks, and the focus group interviews were conducted within the week before the next class (final cycle) commenced. A simplified progression of the cycle is shown over (see Table 11):

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45 *Steal My Kisses* is a contemporary folk-rock style song by Ben Harper (1999). I chose this song as it satisfied several concepts from the syllabus documentation and was accessible in terms of melodic and harmonic complexity.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Cycle week</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 July</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sing through <em>Steal My Kisses</em>, discuss structure/form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 July</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discuss aural task; group work on <em>Steal My Kisses</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 July</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Small group work on <em>Steal My Kisses</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 August</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Small group and full class work on <em>Steal My Kisses</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 August</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Small group and full class work on <em>Steal My Kisses</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 August</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Discussions and full class work on <em>Steal My Kisses</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 August</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Final performance of <em>Steal My Kisses</em>; aural task due</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 11**  
Basic overview of content of Cycle Three

We started with action from the very first moment of the first lesson by singing through *Steal My Kisses*. I played the piano and led the class in singing. The students were given a single-page vocal score to read from. Some of the students knew the song but many did not, so I played the original recording for them. On hearing the original, many of the students appeared to enjoy the piece, and some became excited about the beatboxing sections. This generated some additional enthusiasm about singing, especially when I allowed the boys to add in the beatboxing parts (which occur at a separate time to the lyrics). After we had learnt the words and sung through the piece we discussed the structure and form of the work, noting the sections contained within the piece and their function in the song. At the end of the first lesson, the students registered their interest in parts/instruments they wanted to play in the class ensemble.

In the second lesson, the students were introduced to their aural skills task for the term. We discussed how to approach the task and the timeframe within which it was to be completed. No class time other than this was devoted to the students completing this task. The students then began to work practically on instruments and/or working on their singing for *Steal My Kisses*. Within the week leading up to this lesson, I had arranged scores for all of the parts identified by the students: voice, guitar, keyboard, bass, drums, trumpet, alto saxophone, flute, clarinet and violin. The students worked in self-selected groups to begin learning their own parts. Across this time, the students also had access to a recording of the work. Over the next five weeks, the students worked on learning their parts in these socially based groups, as well as in like-instrument groups, and as part of a whole-class ensemble. We shifted towards working as a whole class more often and for longer periods as the cycle progressed and the students gained knowledge and fluency of their parts. When working as a class group, we would collectively discuss the features of our performance that were working well, and also identified what we needed to focus on. In Week Seven, we decided that we were ready to present the piece, so we
performed *Steal My Kisses* as part of their summative assessment package. At this time, the students also submitted their aural task (as was initially planned).

**Observing**

The students enjoyed moving straight into action from the first class of this cycle. Our initial work on *Steal My Kisses* was enthusiastically approached, and many students reported the enjoyment they experienced in making music:

> It was so lively and fun, there’s so much energy. It’s great. (LRR5, 15 July)

> Singing was so good today. The song was great. (LRR18, 15 July)

In my journal, I noted:

> I’m glad I went with this song. They were so good in singing it today… so much enthusiasm! Carter, Leigh, Michael and Lance were all really giving everything. I think the beatboxing made it cool for them – no hesitancy in using their voice. They obviously enjoyed the song… they really contributed much energy to the class, and everyone got involved. (researcher journal, 15 July)

Moving onto the instruments, the enthusiasm continued even though the demands on technique for many were greater. It was interesting to see the instrument choices the students made. Those who played an instrument outside of the classroom naturally elected to play this. Those who had singing lessons, however, did not always elect to sing – many chose to play keyboard or guitar, and some both sang and played. Many of the experienced piano players elected to try two hands, and several reported taking the music to their instrumental teacher for assistance in playing it. For those students who started with the guitar last term, there was again a movement away from it due to the challenge of the strumming pattern, even though I provided a variation that allowed for growth of technique:

![Strumming patterns for guitar for Steal My Kisses](image)

**Figure 13**

Strumming patterns for guitar for *Steal My Kisses*
In my journal, I noted:

It was interesting that a few of the students who started on guitar have moved to keyboard. All of the ones that moved did guitar last term [previous cycle] and there are less chords – and they've already done those ones [G, C and D]. Even after demonstrating the pattern to them, they still all moved. Something else at work here? (researcher journal, 22 July)

Cameron, who was having a lot of trouble with the chords on the guitar, moved to keyboard and experienced some success. It was good to see him, in the midst of his ‘influential friends’, acknowledge that it was a little hard for him and change instruments (as to be the only keyboard in his small working group). (researcher journal, 22 July)

The students mentioned the challenge of the guitar part with regard to the strumming pattern as well as getting the chords to flow evenly between changes. Again, the students who persisted eventually experienced success:

Trying to figure out the chords on the guitar part was hard, but I got it in the end. (Lance, C3I)

Other students also reported some challenges in the learning of their parts, but they persisted:

Learning the melody quickly and figuring out fingering was a little challenging, but it only took a little time to work out. (LRR9, 22 April)

Some of the rhythms were quite challenging initially. (LRR16, 29 April)

Some also took the opportunity to extend themselves:

The chords are easy [on keyboard]. I think I want to do the melody too for something more challenging. (LRR17, 22 July)

Michael nominated to play the drums, having recently commenced lessons. He practised on the electronic drum-kit in the classroom, with the headphones containing both his part and the recording playing back. He struggled, but made some progress. In the fourth lesson when we got together for a whole-class rehearsal, things did not work out too well. He struggled to keep in time, and this had a detrimental impact on the remainder of the class:

Michael was doing OK on the drums over the last few weeks – he was concentrating so hard – but today with the whole class with him the challenge was too much. Despite my constant attention and encouragement, he moved himself to singing with his friends. It was interesting to see this unfold – he just couldn’t keep time and the backbeat was becoming anything but, but he intently watched me gesture the stroke pattern in trying to hold it together. He graciously moved off the drum-kit in front of everyone, which I thought was big of him. (researcher journal, 5 August)
The ways in which the students worked in their practice sessions varied dependent on their previous experiences with music and their existing technical abilities with their instrument. The students who formally studied instruments outside of the classroom were very focused on reading from the score, and enjoyed the challenge of reading the complex vocal rhythms; others focused on listening to the recording provided once they had the sequence and positioning of chords worked out. All of them worked with their friendship groups to explore their parts:

The friendship groups are mostly working well. They are using every available prac room, and it is therefore impossible for me to supervise every moment. They seem pretty aware that they need to know their part before we get to play as a class next week though, so I think this is motivation enough for most of them... They all seem busy when I come to visit them, and they can show me that they’ve made progress. (researcher journal, 29 July)

I was very impressed by the boys [Carter, Michael and James] who sang – they were giving it everything. They learnt the song by listening to it, with minimal direction from me. (researcher journal, 29 July)

This opportunity to work independently as a group was enjoyed by many of the students:

The self-directed stuff. That was the thing that made it really enjoyable (Amy, C3I)
Just being in a group and being able to interact and learn was so good. (Rachael, C3I)
Working with Nelson was the best thing about it. (Liam, C3I)
The freedom of learning at your own pace was good. (LRR23, 22 July)

Daisy, Travis, Jasmine, Amy, Hayley and Rachael worked as a group when in the small group configuration. Hayley and Rachael were less advanced than the others, but they were being well supported by their friends. If any issues arose in the rehearsal of the piece, Daisy would take on a position of leadership and help to guide the rest of the group through the problem. It was very pleasing to see:

Daisy’s group are sounding good. She’s taken control of the group and they are rehearsing together. She’s breaking down the parts, adding them in layer (part) by part, all without the song [audio file] as a support. They’re getting it and they seem to be having so much fun! (researcher journal, 29 July)

When the students worked in like-instrument groups, most had demonstrated that they had used their time to learn the piece well. The new groupings saw good focus, and the students worked well within these new configurations. These lessons were conducted within the classroom, with groups positioned as far apart as possible between the open and adjoining classroom space.
The whole-class rehearsals were generally full of energy and enthusiasm, and there was a real sense of students working as musicians. Many of the students enjoyed the challenge of working to put the parts together:

Learning to put all of the parts together as a group was pretty challenging but it was fun. (LRR5, 5 August)

I loved this term ‘cause you got to play together. (Daisy, C3I)

The class practice was fun. You learnt over the progression, then put it all together… getting the skills and coordination together was fun. (Jasmine, C3I)

Paige excitedly mentioned:

We were playing only a little bit of it and then everyone did a bit and some were singing and some were doing chords and then we were making it. There was no [sheet] music! It sounded so good. (Paige, C3I)

As I was no longer bound as much to assisting specific students or having to move between groups, I played the drum-kit part. This injected much energy into the rehearsal, and I was able to better control the tempo and assist by signalling changes on the drums:

With [Michael] now singing, I played the drums. It was great to be able to work with the students rather than be the teacher telling them what to do. [Daisy and Travis] took on that role pretty well when I asked the class what we needed to work on. I just played and assisted to keep everything in time, show changes… We were working as musicians today – making music. I was one of them. (researcher journal, 12 August)

Some of the students were really listening to what was working and what was not, and freely offered suggestions on how to improve. I could see other students just putting their heads down and concentrating on getting their part in the right place. This was telling of their technical ability and musical awareness.

After three weeks rehearsing Steal My Kisses as a whole class, the decision was made that we were ready to perform. This was motivated by the students; they enjoyed working on the piece and wanted to perform it. Many reported that they had learnt much from the experience, with improvement on their instrument and the ability to now play in time with others cited often. In addition, Travis mentioned:

It’s good to see other people improve, you see other people you think, “Woah, I didn’t think you could be able to do that, like, you’ve never really played an instrument but they can play, that’s great. (Travis, C3I)
As quite an advanced student, Amy mentioned:

It helped with your musicianship if that makes sense. You learn to play with people of other skill ranges, which if you are going to take music to a next level you are going to need to learn how to do… and learn to harmonise within the group. (Amy, C3I)

Of the final performance, I wrote:

The *Steal My Kisses* performances were excellent – we ran through it four times, chords on the board, structure written out and discussed before we started… it was fantastic! [Thomas] was happy playing away on the bass; [Jasmine, Travis, Daisy, Hayley and Rachael] were playing the melody confidently on their instruments; [Michael, Carter and Leigh] were singing their hearts out. They we all so into it! Maybe a state of ‘flow’ – or at least enjoyment – was washing over the students as they performed. Some wanted to play it again! On the drums, I controlled a steady beat, and also showed the structure through drum signals and fills. It was great to see some of them look over to me and acknowledge the change of section – some of them exchanged a glance of confirmation – an intuitive thing when you ‘just know’ the music. They could feel the music – the changes, the ends of phrases… and we communicated non-verbally. This wasn’t taught, it was caught – experienced from engagement in music. (researcher journal, 26 August)

As the aural work was engaged with independently, minimal references were made to it over the course of the cycle. Initial feelings of being overwhelmed by the task were short lived when the students realised the demands were not as significant as they first thought. Upon submission of the task, the question asking students to sing back a melody presented aurally was generally responded to well, with most singing the phrase with a reasonable degree of accuracy. The approach in connecting aural encounter with notation through an extended time given to transcribe a melody showed a general level of improvement, though some of the responses still contained notational issues despite extended time being offered through the task design. Some of the students still felt uncertain about their ability to write notation accurately, with a note on the bottom of Tammy’s transcription an interesting insight into her self-belief:

Hi Mr Bonar, Sorry if this isn’t very good, I’m not very good at things like this. I tried my best though to get it as good as I could. (Tammy, personal communication)

Tammy’s response is presented over in Figure 14 (see bottom line), with the original line for transcription above (see top line):
This was a significant improvement on her previous response to the melodic dictation in the examination in Cycle Two. Alongside Tammy, many others who were not as successful in their previous aural skills experiences also achieved better in this approach. Many reported this approach as being more accessible:

It was still hard but easier to do, if that makes sense... because you had more time to think about it and you didn’t have the pressure to write as much. (Lucas, C3I)

It was better than the last ones because you could just sing back the melody and you didn’t have to use notes… the other one [second question] was good too because you could work it out by testing it. (Rachael, C3I)

It was good because you could work at your own pace and get it done when you could. The pressure was less. (Jasmine, C3I)

This task approach appeared to be better situated in meaningful musical experience and saw all of the students report it as a preferred approach in comparison to the previous aural skills examination. Further, there was a sense of authenticity to the task in that it better reflected the ways in which some of the students aurally engaged with music through transcription, copying and imitation:

It’s was sort of like what I do to learn new songs… like when I write the notes down that the song is using. (Tammy, C3I)

Many of the students reported enjoying the experiences of this cycle as it reflected their expectations of Music and/or how they worked musically outside of the classroom. Some of the students related the experiences in class to assisting the learning of new songs, assisting with practice, and improving their sightreading. Others stated that they were now playing more for enjoyment and showing their friends that were not in their class what they had learnt. The connectivity between these experiences and experiences encountered outside of the school was
very encouraging. In relation to future activities, many expressed their desire for us to do more of the same, but with their own choices of music or with music they could write themselves.

**Reflecting**

The students responded well to the practical experiences involved in preparing *Steal My Kisses*. The social interactions and independence of the groups assisted in supporting students in constructing musical understanding from their own basis of experience. The support offered under this framework saw the students engage in formal and/or informal learning styles, often informed by their previous experiences, which afforded greater connections and meaning to be found in music making. This respect for a variety of ways to come to know the music invited greater levels of agency and fluency, especially when positioned in the context of a complete song. Through this performance task, the students engaged in working as musicians do – socially and directly *with* the materials of music – using music as a discourse (Swanwick, 1999b). I was also located within this discourse, positioned as a fellow ‘musicer’ assisting in the construction of understanding (Elliott, 1995). The progression the students made through this performance task supported its greater level of responsiveness to content and process.

There was an improved level of connectivity of the aural skills approach to meaningful musical experiences, as it adopted a more accessible and flexible approach to demonstrating aural awareness. The task assisted to build confidence in the students who were struggling in working with music analytically, and also provided me with greater diagnostic insight into the students’ aural ability. With their responses audio-visually recorded, I could see and hear their ability to internalise and realise the melody, rather than simply see a dilution of this through a notated equivalent. Similarly, the transcriptions allowed students to demonstrate their ability to move from sound to symbol in a much more supportive manner. The asynchronous timeframe and access to an instrument to complete and reflect upon their response provided greater connections that were also more reflective of the ways in which musicians work. Their ability to notate music became more fluent and mostly better realised the demands of the task.

My learnings from this cycle further indicated the importance of practical exploration with the materials of music in supporting the growth of musical understanding. We worked *with* music in context. Further, I also saw that the students’ own explorations were guided by ways of working that were comfortable to them and their skills, and were informed by both formal and informal learning approaches. I felt that working through *Steal My Kisses* in the manner we did provided a realistic social and musical context for both the process of music making, and music itself, to be explored. Much of the learning was *caught*, rather than taught (Swanwick, 1994),
and thereby afforded greater connections and meaning for students. We worked as many of the students perceived we should – *musically*, and directly *with* music – which saw an increase in technical skill and fluency with music demonstrated. I also learnt that the approach to aural skills in this cycle was more connected and representative of the ways in which many of the students work with music outside of school. The task was still suitably challenging, yet more realistic and targeted to developing links between sensory and intuitive understanding and the demonstration of analytical knowledge.

**Cycle Four**

*Planning*

The planning of the final cycle again drew from the learnings of the preceding cycles, but through a frame of both composition and performance. The intervention strategy positioned the students as songwriters tasked with writing an original song to perform for the class. The students were able to use any combination of melodic or harmonic instruments or voice, write in any style, and were to work in a group context. They were also to write a percussive backing track to accompany their work using GarageBand. The students could continually change and adapt their backing as they progressed through the songwriting process and refine and reshape their ideas as they developed. Upon completion of their song, the students were to present their work as a performance for the class. The task formed a summative assessment item for the cycle (see Appendix Q), and also comprised additional reflections focused on the songwriting process. Throughout the implementation of this strategy, I continued to explore the notion of music as a discourse, and anticipated that this would assist in the development of fluency with the materials of music themselves. The strategy also continued to explore the social context of music making, and also invited informal approaches to music making. I acknowledged that these explorations would take time, so the intervention strategy was applied with attention to flexibility and a need to be responsive to the emerging data.

*Acting*

The plan for this cycle was extremely flexible and afforded a significant amount of time for students to explore their musical ideas through the songwriting process. The duration of the cycle was 12 weeks, though it spanned a term break of two weeks, which occurred between the third and fourth week of the cycle. The action of the cycle was enacted over 11 lessons as the final week of the cycle coincided with the last week of the school year, and assessment needed

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46 The complete GarageBand sound package was installed, which accommodated almost endless options for students to work in any style.
to be conducted well before this. Across the last week of school the final focus group interviews were conducted. A simplified progression of the cycle is shown below (see Table 12):

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Cycle week</th>
<th>Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 September</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Appraising song structures; listening and discussion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 September</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Song structures; GarageBand; start mapping song ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 September</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Start work on songwriting process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 October</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Group work on songwriting task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 October</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Group work on songwriting task</td>
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<td>21 October</td>
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<td>28 October</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 November</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Group work on songwriting task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 November</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Group work on songwriting task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 November</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Group work on songwriting task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 November</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Sharing of songs for class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 December</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>No class – focus group interviews conducted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12
Basic overview of content of Cycle Four

There were very strong connections between the first two lessons of this cycle and the preceding cycle involving the experiences in learning Steal My Kisses. Across these lessons, the students listened to a range of popular musics that employed typical verse-chorus structure. I used both songs that were popular amongst the students, and ones that were likely to be less well known, and we identified the song structures employed and defined the role of each section (typically introduction, verse, chorus, bridge, and instrumental). For the second lesson, I prepared a series of backing tracks in GarageBand that outlined these structures. We listened to these to firstly ascertain the structure, and then we noted bar lengths of each section. This sought to have the students focus on developing their own structures for their impending backings that they were to play to.

The students then self-selected groups and began to map some basic ideas down about the style and structure of their song. After settling, there were eight groups formed of between two and five students. The students were then required to show me their initial planning and talk through it with me before they were allowed to move off to their own space. In the following lessons, I walked around the groups and listened in on the ideas and discussions, encouraging
and contributing where necessary and as appropriate. Once the students had added ideas to their initial planning, we reassembled as a class and I took them through some of the basic functions of GarageBand. In the following lessons, the groups then started on the songwriting process, outlining ideas in GarageBand and working practically to develop their structures and song. I was very fortunate in that most groups were able to access a practice room housing a computer with GarageBand and an acoustic piano or digital keyboard; others used the open classroom space. This arrangement afforded a workspace free from interruption. At the start of the new term, the groups were established and most had a good basis for their songwriting to develop. I provided the students the task sheet outlining the task in more detail and they began to complete the reflections. I encouraged these to be done in the students’ own time, as I also asked them to continue to complete weekly LRRs. The group-based songwriting process continued for the remainder of the cycle, and I would move between the practice rooms and the classroom to assist groups and listen to the evolving products.

Observing

The plan of this cycle was given sufficient time to be enacted, which afforded a good degree of insight into the ways the students were responding to the demands of the songwriting process. The lessons on the structure and form of popular music were very easily handed and well responded to by the students. Many drew upon their existing knowledge of the music they listened to and provided accurate and well-informed responses. The responses to the form and duration of the backing tracks were similarly well attended to, with the students easily labelling each section and identifying respective bar lengths. This was well known territory for the students; their familiarity with song structures as gained from their own music listening and experience was very evident, and they were very conversant in these discussions.
When the students formed their groups, it was interesting to see the membership of each and the instrumentation and style they employed (see Table 13):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Instrument¹⁷</th>
<th>Style</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Amy, Jasmine</td>
<td>Piano/Voice</td>
<td>Piano/Voice/Piano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Daisy, Rachael, Victoria</td>
<td>Violin, Piano, Guitar</td>
<td>Folk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Tammy, Hayley</td>
<td>Piano/Voice</td>
<td>Contemporary/singer-songwriter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Travis, James, Michael, Ian, Carter</td>
<td>Bass Guitar, Voice, Voice, Keyboard</td>
<td>Rap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cassie, Julie, Paige</td>
<td>Voice, Keyboard, Piano</td>
<td>Contemporary/singer-songwriter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Nelson, Liam, Thomas</td>
<td>Keyboard, Keyboard, Guitar</td>
<td>House/Techno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Cameron, Leigh, Lance</td>
<td>Guitar, Guitar, Guitar</td>
<td>Rock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gabby, Celeste, Lucas, Mia</td>
<td>Voice, Voice, Keyboard</td>
<td>Contemporary/singer-songwriter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: Songwriting project groups, instrumentation and style

The styles of music employed were not overly surprising, and the resulting lyrics (if used) were often personal and expressive of emotional content, reflective of the use of music as a model for negotiating self-identify (Campbell, Connell & Beegle, 2007). Instrumentation often reflected the styles chosen, with some students playing second instruments or instruments they learnt in earlier cycles.

¹⁷ In this list, I have specified between keyboard and piano. Some of the students were particular about using the acoustic pianos in the classroom and the practice rooms; whereas, some identified the keyboard as the instrument even amidst choice between the two. This was often associated with the sounds available on the keyboard, or the familiarity with the instruments from previous work on them.

¹⁸ I have used ‘singer-songwriter’ (attached to contemporary) as a label in attempt to clarify that these songs encompassed elements of rock, pop and/or folk idioms, and were often personal in terms of lyrics.
The group songwriting project was a large-scale undertaking, with the students focusing solely on this for a period of nine weeks. The enthusiasm with which the students approached the project was very obvious:

The students were so keen to get the instruments out to assist them with the [songwriting] process – they loved working with sound. Many of the groups started generating material to play above their backing tracks immediately; they were so keen to show me their work and share it. (researcher journal, 16 September)

Naturally, there were periods of challenge and success for each group, and often starting was the biggest hurdle:

Everything got confusing and it was very hard to get started with an idea. (Mia, SWR5)

It was hard knowing where to start, but once we did it was OK. (Lucas C4I)

I think it’s always hard to start because you have so many choices, but when you start you get a path and ideas and then it all starts to go into place. (Victoria, C4I)

It was really hard at the start without any real boundaries, but it got easier. (Amy, C4I)

Throughout the process, many students felt degrees of uncertainty in how they might progress:

It was frustrating not knowing what to do at times. (Jasmine, SWR2)

Sometimes we just really didn’t know what to do. You just had to keep thinking and testing ideas until something worked. (Rachael, C4I)

As the groups worked, the students exchanged and explored ideas to assist in working through the problems that they were facing. Many of the reflections cited ‘fitting everything together’ as challenging, but enjoyable:

Just trying to figure out what works with what, kind of stressful, but still fun... It was good to be able to just try things out together. (Rachael, SWR4)

It was pretty hard because it didn’t always work out… rhyming it and fitting it all together was hard, but I liked doing it, it was really fun just to play around with and make it ours. (Travis, C4I)

Over the weeks, I noted the students playing around with many fragments of ideas, and amidst some frustrations, mostly remained positive about the experience. The practical nature of the experience and the freedom in exploring their own musical ideas were the most identified factors:

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49 SWR refers to ‘songwriting reflection’, the reflections contained in the task (see Appendix Q). They are numbered according to sequence.
It’s a great idea, we should do it more often. (Nelson, C41)

It was great learning something different and having it being your own and being able to understand it by playing around with it. (Celeste, SWR2)

It’s so good being able to create your own music and play and learn it. It was really fun. (Hayley, C4I)

It was pretty awesome actually making music. (Amy, C4I)

A sense of independence and self-directedness in their music making was also noted by many of the students, they enjoyed the control they had over their learning:

The best thing really was the way that we could just do what we wanted to learn and make up our own song. The freedom of it was the best. (Julie, C4I)

I enjoyed being able to work independently. It was good to be trusted to do our own thing. (Mia, C4I)

I enjoyed making the song because it’s fun and you’re not always being told what to do – freedom! (LRR2, 7 October)

[I enjoyed] that we had a choice about what we could do and what type of song we could do. (LRR2, 7 October)

It was nice to have freedom instead of [being] stuck at desks. (Amy, C4I)

In these explorations the students enjoyed the opportunity to freely explore and develop their work. Experimentation with melodies and chords, as well as instruments, were identified as students tried to find the right combinations:

It was good that we can use different instruments and we can do what we want to make the song sound better. (Gabby, SWR4)

It was great exploring around with the chords on piano. (LRR15, 7 October)

Getting to do what we want – you let us work and do our own thing. We didn’t have to do something that everyone had to do. We could make it our own. (LRR10, 7 October)

It was fun because we got the freedom to just write on our own. (LRR14, 21 October)

As I moved between the groups, it was also interesting to see the different forms of nomenclature the students adopted in documenting their work. Almost all of the groups used letters and sequences of chords written in letters on the page, others worked solely by ear. These methods were easier to work with for many of the students and afforded some flexibility in adapting their ideas.
Though intended as a support mechanism – particularly to provide a cohesive frame to the developing works – some of the groups found working with the backing tracks challenging, and at times limiting:

It was hard to find a good beat to use ‘cause nothing really sounded right. (LRR25, 16 September)

It was hard to really find what we wanted for the style of our music in GarageBand, so we changed things into a more pop song with cool effects. (Paige, SWR3)

I like being able to play the piano instead of the computer. (Jasmine, SWR2)

For many of the groups, the use of a backing track to provide a structural backing through the songwriting process decreased as their explorations with instruments moved beyond what they initially planned. Some groups continued to restructure their backing as they worked; others discarded them and built the backing around their final products:

It was hard to write music for our backing [because] our ideas changed, so we started over. (Leigh, SWR3)

We had to focus on doing the instruments first, ‘cause that’s what I usually do. Then I added background music. (Tammy, C4I)

We decided to get rid of our backing track, and doing the piano, then making it. I have found that making the piano [part] then adding a backing track was easier than the other way around. (Paige, SWR4)

We ended up putting off GarageBand until we knew what we were doing. (Amy, C4I)

Fitting in the instruments with GarageBand was hard… was quite hard. (Liam, C4I)

Once the backings were established, most of the groups enjoyed having them as support to their songs for practice. The backing provided a context for their work:

GarageBand was fun to play with and some of the beats were pretty mad [cool]. It was good testing out the progression of our rap. (Ian, C4I)

It’s great to have a beat with it to play with. It’s like having a whole band but without the trouble. (Lucas, C4I)

Once we got our song sorted, the backing sort of completed it. (Cassie, C4I)

The social element involved in the songwriting project was again featured in many of the students’ responses and reflections. The students enjoyed working in groups to explore their ideas and produce their song. This social structure saw some of the students offer support to one another:
Rachael is helping teach me how to play piano (LRR14, 14 October)

I enjoyed helping Cassie and Victoria with their parts. (LRR6, 7 October)

Others noted that the sharing of ideas was positive, helpful and conducive to making progress:

That working in a team is rewarding. (Daisy, SWR2)

[It was] good having people to talk through your ideas with. (Lance, C4I)

It’s been so good sharing ideas. (Jasmine, C4I)

Given the longer timeframe, and a more complex activity that demanded greater creative input, there were unsurprisingly some negative aspects reported by some group members, though this centred on social interactions rather than music. Students spoke of the difficulties encountered in working with other group members:

It was hard trying to get my group to listen to my ideas. (Rachael, C4I)

It made it harder when we didn’t work together. Everyone had to be in the right mood or we got nothing done. It was OK most times though, but sometimes it was hard to achieve anything. (Celeste, C4I)

The actual writing was easy but getting other people to play was hard. It was hard getting everyone to play in time with our backing. (Gabby, SWR5)

Sometimes there were conflicting ideas and agreeing on a course of action proved challenging:

It is challenging having every member agree on everything. (LRR3, 7 October)

[Student] is not listening to other people’s ideas only thinking of her own. (LRR17, 7 October)

[Student] can’t play the piano as well and it’s hard to do the composition. (LRR7, 16 September)

One group identified a democratic approach to decision-making:

A vote was used to make it a group decision and not letting one person tell the others what to do. (Rachael, SWR3)

Throughout the songwriting process, many of the groups needed assistance, support and encouragement. I often acted as a motivator; someone to gently push the students along. Nelson, Liam and Thomas spent a significant amount of time in GarageBand, and were slow to begin creating their own parts that were to sit above their backing. In many cases, my support was often needed in the context of instilling beliefs in the students’ ability to work in crafting their own music. In my journal, I noted:
It has been great to see most of the students engaged deeply in what they are doing. There is a
gap widening between groups, but this is to be expected. I think the ones not doing so well – it is
a mixture of limited conviction to the task at times, lack of confidence, the skills bases of the
students limiting their ability to craft their musical ideas, and off-task behaviour due to the large
component of self-managed, self-directed time needed. It has proven very difficult to assist
everyone all of the time to the degree I want to. I feel though that everything is working pretty
well and that many students are deeply engaged in the process of songwriting (researcher
journal, 14 October)

Today, after a relatively unproductive few weeks, Mia, Lucas, Gabby and Celeste resorted back
to the I-V-vi-IV progression as the basis for their song. It’s comfortable and stable – completely
fine for them to use…. After some weeks characterised by a lack of focus and group members
not working together, Lance, Leigh and Cameron started to accelerate along with their work.
They have been difficult to motivate at times, they need more confidence in their abilities to
make music. Once they got started though, they’re actually very capable. I know they can see
that they can do this – they just need reassurance. (researcher journal, 28 October)

Some of the groups thrived on attention; they wanted constant feedback and reassurance, and
for me to critique their work. My feedback often provided motivation for the students:

I didn’t make it to all the groups today and some students were quite disappointed that I couldn’t
listen to their work. This has meaning for them – they are proud of their work. Overall, I was
really impressed with the work I did hear at this early stage – they know what works and what
doesn’t musically! They are very willing to share, and very much want feedback. I sensed some
of them felt a little lost/uncertain without critical musical feedback. Through this, I felt that they
gave much value to this task. (researcher journal, 28 October)

Many of the students were very proud of their work and took much ownership of the task. Some
of the groups located potential ‘flow’ experiences in the process, where time raced by unnoticed
due to skills and challenge intersecting in a meaningful way (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). I noted:

Amy and Jasmine – it all came together for these two today. They very excitedly showed me
their song – fully completed! They had been coming in over the past week in their lunch breaks
to work on their song. Today, they really enjoyed showing me their work. I was very conscious
of time and missing out on hearing other groups, so I mentioned this to them as they finished
showing me their work. Jasmine said, “I can’t believe how fast the time goes, we should not
do [another subject] and have an extra lesson of Music.” I laughed it off, but in my mind
wholeheartedly agreed. (researcher journal, 4 November)

Many of the groups took the opportunity to come in during lunchtimes to work on their songs,
and they would excitedly come to find me and ask me to listen. This signified that the task was
enjoyable and meaningful for many of the students.

In the last week of classes, the students performed their songs for the class. Some of the
students were very enthusiastic about doing this, whereas others were more reticent. The
students who were hesitant were often less confident on instruments, and often their groups
were not as well prepared. After the class, I noted:
Quite a ‘mixed bag’ today – some exceptional pieces of work, but some quite poor ones too… Some of the students found it difficult to sync together and with their backings. One of the groups seemed oblivious to the beat that their track emphasised, playing completely out of time – it felt so unnatural! The rest of the class noticed it too! What a really great session though – it really allowed them to work at a level comfortable to them and it really showed me who committed and who is skilful. (researcher journal, 25 November)

On the whole, the group songwriting project was well received, and it was an eventful journey. The students spoke positively about the process, and several revealed that the project provided greater connections between school music and their encounters outside of the school:

Our song took a lot of influence from my music I listen to at home. The rap stuff was really cool. (Ian, C4I)

I can relate this to making backing tracks for my own songs now. That’ll give them an edge. (LRR15, 7 October)

Doing stuff like this was more like what I want to do – what I think we should do. I mean, this is what music is – the stuff you make. (Nelson, C4I).

For others, it prompted more engagement in these ways of working outside of the classroom:

I’ve been writing more songs recently because of this. (Amy, C4I)

I enjoy writing songs again more now. The group project was really good for me to get back into it. I realised that my stuff was pretty alright… maybe I should continue with it more? (Tammy, C4I)

Though all of the students reported enjoying the songwriting project, few made any comment with regard to its potential connectivity outside the classroom. For some of these students, active engagement with music was simply contained to a subject at school:

I like what we did, but music is something that I don’t really do outside of school… I like music, but just listening to it. I don’t have the time to do anything else with all the stuff I do. (Carter, C4I)

Music isn’t something that I really do – I just listen to it. (James, C4I)

When asked of ways in which we could make Music better, many of the students said that they had enjoyed what we did, and many made positive comparisons to the work in Year 7 Music. Suggestions offered often related back to the performance of existing works, and many students further reinforced the enjoyment they experienced in using instruments to make music.
Reflecting

Within this cycle I explored the use and respect of music as a discourse through an exploratory frame of composition and performance. It also afforded students the opportunity to draw upon musical experiences external to the school, and the ways in which they might work musically in such contexts. I watched the students enjoy the practical and social nature of the experiences, and the ways they worked in the songwriting task saw them move closer to the ways contemporary musicians might work. They enjoyed exploring their music, and engaged well in constructing their pieces based on a ‘back and forth’ process of experimentation with music elements. Their work involved an integration of listening, composition and performance, and social interactions assisted negotiating musical challenges. My role was redefined within this process – I moved between each group as a valued ‘critical ear’ and advisor; the students were discovering and experiencing more, and I was teaching less (at least in a traditional sense). The students felt a greater sense of ownership over this task, and many of them reported locating meaningful experience. The songwriting project allowed the students to access and engage in musical activity that was personally and educatively more meaningful to them. The products of the songwriting project demonstrated much musicality and awareness, and were founded largely on knowledge that was caught rather than taught (Swanwick, 1994).

The knowledge built within this cycle was knowledge of music, rather than knowledge about music (Swanwick, 1994). Interaction with music afforded stronger and more meaningful learning; our conversations focused on musical problem-solving and decision-making and were situated in musical experience itself. The task allowed the students to engage with music as a discourse, and also respected their own musical discourses (Swanwick, 1999b). Over the course of the songwriting project, I watched the students gain increasing degrees of fluency with their music; their ability to craft music musically clearly demonstrated their understandings. Whilst largely based on sensory and intuitive experience, I felt that these learnings would assist them in building more meaningful connections to analytical knowledge. I purposefully did not directly explore this in this cycle, as I did not want to force analysis onto such an intuitive task. It took me some time to feel secure in the knowledge that the students were learning – as there were no defined analytical markers of progress throughout the process – it was the process itself where meaning and value were located. As Swanwick (1994) states, intuition is at the “heart of musical experience… it is crucial for all knowing” (p. 26).
**Tracing Learnings Through the Project**

The action research cycles detailed above were reconstructed as to provide a transparent narrative of the project as it progressed – from the interventions, through to the emergent themes and associated learnings. The first research cycle was informed by the reconnaissance data, and sought to engage students in sustained and active engagement with music in order to support connections being made between intuitive and analytical knowledge. The action of the first cycle brought forth learnings that centred on a need to position learning as experiential and focused in practice with music. Further learnings also saw the need for me to allow students sufficient time to explore their intuitive knowledge bases before analytical labels were attached.

Based on these learnings, the second research cycle sought to allow greater depth of exploration of the music elements from the first cycle. The intervention strategy centred on a composition task that saw students work principally with their intuitive musical understandings in a practical and socially based context. The aural skill development of this cycle was situated within the same musical framework, and explored connections between the intuitive learnings of the composition task and analytical realisation and understanding. The need to gain further insight into students’ ‘musical thinking’ was positioned as an important learning in this context. Further learnings of this cycle reconfirmed the need to position practical experience as central in developing musical fluency and in informing analytical knowing. In addition, the positioning of social context was located as supportive to engagement in meaningful musical discourse.

The third research cycle was informed by the learnings of the preceding two cycles and positioned students as contemporary musicians. Student encounters within this cycle were based on aural, intuitive and social interactions with music, and this was positioned in the context of the students learning an existing contemporary song. Furthermore, the students engaged in a redefined approach to aural skills that sought to connect intuition to analytical realisation. This approach to aural skills mirrored the ways a contemporary musician might work in making or creating their own music. The learnings gained from this cycle were again focused on providing conditions for students to work directly with music in an authentic context. The positioning of such experiences within a social context was again located as an important learning. The ways in which the students engaged with the music in this cycle also supported the need to embrace informal approaches within the classroom, and value the students as musicians.

The fourth cycle built from this experience, but placed the ownership of music with the students as composers. The intervention strategy invited the students to work within a creative group context to explore the songwriting process. This afforded a blending of formal and
informal styles of learning, which respected students’ previous experiences with music, and challenged students to engage in constructive musical dialogue with each other. The social context and the authenticity of the musical experience was again a focus of this cycle. My learnings from this cycle saw me further respect musical intuition as a basis for meaningful and engaging musical discourse. I identified that such discourse should again be supported by social contexts, and embrace ways of working within which they felt conformable. Further learnings from this cycle also supported the need to integrate the parameters of musical experience to allow students to work as listeners, composers and performers simultaneously when working with music as a whole. A summary of the interventions and learnings from across the entire project is presented over (see Table 14):
Stage | Intervention | Learnings
--- | --- | ---
Reconnaissance |  | • Promote active engagement with music
Cycle One | Students investigate the music elements of duration, melody and harmony in the context of learning to sing a single song as a class, and then apply their learnings in the context of composition | • Position learning as experiential and based in practical explorations that afford immediate feedback
 |  | • Focus additional time on exploring intuitive knowledge bases before attaching analytical meanings
Cycle Two | Students explore duration, melody and harmony intuitively through practice and composition within a small group | • Position learning as a social experience
 |  | • Use practical and intuitive experiences as a basis for increasing musical fluency and informing analytical knowing
 |  | • Uncover the ‘musical thinking’ of students through aural skills tasks that are authentic and positioned in music
Cycle Three | Students work as contemporary musicians learning primarily through aural means and in social contexts | • Have students work directly with music in context
 |  | • Draw upon informal approaches in practical music making contexts
 |  | • Situate practice in student-centred, socially based experiences
 |  | • Support students to work in the same way contemporary musicians do
Cycle Four | Students work as songwriters and are tasked with writing an original song to perform for the class | • Respect musical intuition as a starting point of discourse
 |  | • Draw upon informal experiences and ways of working
 |  | • Situate practice in student-centred, socially based experiences
 |  | • Integrate listening, composing and performing

Table 14
Summary of learnings across the cycles

The learnings gained throughout the project were constantly reconsidered and revisited in light of the research questions. Across the duration of the project, I felt a sense of us moving closer to practices that supported meaningful learning. There were common threads that weaved through the learnings, and they were both challenged and confirmed as the research cycles progressed. The next section of the chapter briefly examines the final longitudinal data that further informed the research cycles.
A Change in Values and Meaning?

This section of the chapter briefly examines the longitudinal data that emanated from the survey instrument and the end of the final focus group interviews, drawing some analysis of the data into the larger frame of the research cycles. It is focused on change in how the students valued classroom music and what they enjoyed. Though I make clear that there is a distinction between the *enjoyment* of an activity and finding significance and *meaning* in it, the former term was used in the data collection context to invite unambiguous discussion with students. For me, these data became useful when examined in correlation with the evolutionary qualitative data from across the action research cycles. Given the informed educative intentions underpinning the teaching within the project – and the continued action and reflection focused towards their improvement – the experiences that were enjoyed may be linked with meaningful encounters. The quantitative data presented here are not a definitive measure of the efficacy of the project; instead, they provide a concise picture of the degree of change resulting from the action, and offer support to the qualitative data drawn from across the project.

The ways students used and valued music remained strongly linked to the nature of their experiences. There again appeared to be very strong connections made between music and the expression of identity and emotion. There was an increase in the frequency in which students used music in an active manner, with more playing or singing more often (see Table 15).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More than once a day</th>
<th>Once a day</th>
<th>3-5 times each week</th>
<th>1-2 times each week</th>
<th>Almost never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students <em>before</em> study:</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students <em>after</em> study:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15

‘How often do you play/sing music?’ – survey responses before and after the project

This increase in active music making was an individualised experience; no additional students identified engaging in music socially through bands or ensembles. Further, since the beginning of the project, three students started formal lessons at the school – two on piano, one on guitar – which now saw 11 of the 25 students (44%) engaging in formal music lessons at the school, or 15 of 25 (60%) engaging in formal lessons between the school and external sources. There was
also a significant increase in the number of students engaging in informal music practices (see Table 16).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lessons at school</th>
<th>Lessons outside of school</th>
<th>Self-taught</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students before study:</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students after study:</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 16

‘Where/how do you have lessons on your instrument/voice?’ – survey responses before and after the project

The level of music writing activity remained reasonably static. Many referenced the songwriting project in the final action research cycle, and some had in fact taken their work from this project out from the realm of the classroom. Towards the end of the project, one group continued to work on other songs in addition to the one required for class, and another group mentioned that they would like to continue to work together as a band. The first group also entered their completed song into a local songwriting competition external to the school. Despite the experience of the cycles, the remaining students reported that they did not often or never wrote their own music. Further, there were no significant changes in the types and styles of music listened to, with a wide range from pop and rock, through to folk and classical, represented. Many again mentioned no real preferences, or a wide range of genres and styles. More students specified “classic rock” from the 1960s and 1970s amongst their favourite types of music. Despite some reported change in musical activity and experience, musical identities remained fairly firm. In both active as well as passive ways, the students used music to fulfil emotional needs, express themselves, and relieve tension and stress. The significance of music was linked to these experiences.

The data revealed an encouraging increase in the enjoyment and valuing of classroom music experience (see Table 17). Though one of the students indicated a shift into the negative domain, there was a much clearer identification of value, with more students indicating in the positive domain, and less unsure of the experience. It was also of significance that no students reported at the bottom end of the scale.

50 Students were allowed to answer for more than one instrument, or across one instrument (ie. I learn violin formally as well as informally).
51 The students of this group received second prize in their age division.
52 Perhaps an indication of them feeling more comfortable with me and my acceptance of a broad range of musics?
### Table 17
‘I enjoy Music as a subject at school’ – survey responses before and after the project

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of students \textit{before} study:</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of students \textit{after} study:</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The qualitative longitudinal data revealed significant associations with the initial reconnaissance data, in particular the two themes of: a) the experience of music; and, b) freedom in experience. The most encouraging connection here was that the second theme, initially located out of the school context, was now also situated within the realm of classroom experience.

Within the classroom context, almost all of the students indicated that they enjoyed the experience of making music, particularly with instruments. Common statements included:

- It’s great having fun making music. (PS1)\textsuperscript{53}
- When we get to play music. (PS11)
- The best thing is just being able to play instruments and make music. It’s sort of what I think it should all be about. (Leigh, PI)\textsuperscript{54}
- When we get to make music, that’s pretty much the best stuff. It’s just good doing something different, like just enjoying school stuff. (Julie, PI)
- Making music. (Liam, PI)

The social element of music making was also valued and identified frequently:

- Making and creating music and being able to enjoy this with others. (PS12)
- It’s fun making music with your friends. (PS17)
- Making music with a group of people. (PS10)
- I enjoyed singing in the group with my friends. (Carter, PI)

Travis also suggested that the reasons for this extended beyond musical gain and into a realm of social coherence:

\textsuperscript{53} As earlier, PS refers to ‘post-survey’, with the number a randomly assigned identifier.

\textsuperscript{54} As with earlier nomenclature, PI represents ‘post-cycles interview’ (this occurred as a two questions at the end of the Cycle Four interviews – see Appendix D).
Working with others is good, especially when you see them improve and you feel that you can help them out a little… you learn stuff even if you think it is easy. Working with some of the others was hard… but in a good way if that makes sense? Like trying to think of ways to help and trying to keep in time with them. So I guess what I enjoyed was making music in the group the most. (Travis, PI)

Now also located within the classroom experience, several students mentioned the freedom of exploring music in the classroom:

This year I enjoyed the freedom of making music that you want to. (PS9)

I enjoyed the freedom to experiment. (PS18)

I like that you have freedom to learn. (PS21)

Working on GarageBand to make our own song was good. It was good that you could mess around with it to get it right. (PS16)

Playing with instruments and having a go at something and different things. (PS19)

Space to learn… Year 8 was different, we got to do different stuff like have choice and work as a group… it was more fun. (Amy, PI)

Being able to muck around to make up our own stuff was good. It would have been great to do it more and have even more freedom to really make it… that’s how I like to make up my own music. (Nelson, PI)

It was pleasing to hear of the similarity between these classroom experiences and those outside of the school context. The social context was again a feature of these explorations:

It was great doing group work, composing our own music, being creative and having fun. (PS15)

It was good making up a song together and having the time to do it… we kept going backwards and forwards with our song exploring what we wanted to do. (Hayley, PI)

Working on music with friends. Sometimes you don’t really know what you’re doing, but it all seems to work out in the end. (Ian, PI)

Working in a group that was actually doing something good and worthwhile. The songwriting was the best thing. (PS13)

Though there were still problematic areas of classroom music discussed by the students, there were significantly fewer negative comments in comparison to the reconnaissance stage. Negative experiences were related exclusively to the challenge and demand presented by some activities – often ones that were analytically focused, such as aural and theoretical experiences. Students mentioned:

The skill level of aural. (PS22)

Having to write music on the lines [staff]. (PS4)
The theory! (PS8)

The aural stuff and the theory. Sometimes I don’t understand it. (Caitlin, PI)

The theory stuff is hard sometimes, especially writing it and understanding it on the music [stave]. It’s not that it’s not fun or boring, it’s just not as fun as other things. (Tara, PI)

Understanding the theory is hard… and the aural… wow, I can’t really do that! (Thomas, PI)

I don’t like the written work or tests. Can’t we just play music? (Ian, PI)

Tests. I know we have to do them, but I don’t like them… except for the playing ones, they’re the best. (Lucas, PI)

For these students, written work and tests took them away from the experience of music. These comments reflected ways of working that were not based on practice – a key enjoyed factor of musical engagement. Despite this, some of the other students identified these components as supportive to their understanding. These students appreciated the need for us to work in this way to build knowledge and understanding. Further, there was a better intersection of meaningful challenge located:

Sometimes the aural and stuff but I guess that’s what we need to learn to become better. (PS20)

The theory stuff isn’t that fun, but it’s important that we know it. It sort of like gives you another language to use. It helps with my guitar. (Victoria, PI)

The aural stuff was more useful, but harder, but in a different way. It was good. (Travis, PI)

The theory was more useful this year. It was more connected if you know what I mean? It linked to what we did. I didn’t find it any harder than normal – it was different, but good to work that way. (Amy, PI)

Travis and Amy both suggested that the analytical work encountered across the year did in fact contribute to increasing their musical skills and understandings. This was encouraging to hear given their comments relating to lack of use and transferability of these experiences from the reconnaissance stage.

This final snapshot into what the students thought of classroom music provided good insight into how the project moved closer to making it meaningful for them. I felt that our conversations within the focus group interviews were honest, as we had built a collective interest in improving our situation, and no data from the anonymous survey instrument hinted otherwise. The students spoke positively of active engagement with the materials of music, with many references to the songwriting project of the action research cycles. The act of making and exploring musical materials was central to what the students valued, and the songwriting project offered this in a valued social context. The recounts of what the students enjoyed in classroom
music focused on the freedom and social experience central to music making; this was significant shift between the start of the project and its conclusion. The experiences encountered attended to the agency and authenticity of the students’ interactions with music as a discourse (Swanwick, 1999b). In this view, there was a greater sense of the student as musicer, actively creating, testing, and sharing musical meaning (Elliott, 1995). Many of the comments at this stage of the project also reflected that music was engaged with intuitively at first, and that the educative process attempted to connect these to an analytical form (Swanwick, 1994). This process of negotiating the ‘space between’ and making connections between intuitive and analytical understanding was still problematic for some of the students, highlighting the complexities of these sensory and cognitive interactions (Swanwick, 1994). By working together in practice, the students were positioned to engage in dialogue in music and from a basis of these workings, construct analytical understandings that could further inform the fluency of their interactions (Swanwick, 1999b).

Reflection

In this chapter, I detailed an action research project co-authored with my students. The project examined the tensions present within our context, and sought a way for my own practice to minimise or possibly even resolve them. Though affording rich insight into our context, and greatly informing my teaching, the project challenged my thinking as a teacher and a researcher. As a teacher, I found my philosophical stance shift as the project progressed. Meaning for many of the students was irrefutably located in practice, and so my philosophical groundings began to more greatly accommodate Elliott’s praxial philosophy given its more immediate applicability to our classroom. My philosophical stance now embraces a pluralistic view, acknowledging the importance of constructing meaning through practice, but celebrating the aesthetic of both the process and the product – experience with leads to greater appreciation of. This was reflected in the shift of activity across the project, with a greater presence of practice in music coming to the fore. As a researcher, I was challenged, and at times overwhelmed, by the voluminous amounts of data that were continuously being generated. I was careful with what I left and what I took, and how I analysed and reported these data, as not to dilute, distort or simplify the reality of our classroom. I let the data guide the action to uphold the collaborative and democratic nature of the research, no matter how much it ran against my intuitions as a teacher, and endeavoured to recreate the lived experiences of each cycle through a narrative approach. I positioned all voices involved in this experience in these accounts, and endeavoured to show how they impacted on the direction of the project.
Each cycle drew us closer to locating what meaningful musical experience might look like in our context. My actions were informed by the students and I embraced their contributions with my own educative intentions. There were times when this was challenging, as I needed to stabilise the direction of the learning; and other times when I felt like we should be experiencing more issues. As the research cycles progressed, I found that I gave more control to the students and they generally used this ‘space’ well. I found it challenging relinquishing some control over what was happening, but the students were generally very respectful having invested themselves into the project. I ‘measured’ them less over the four cycles, but the depth of work increased, as did the authenticity of the tasks. I struggled at times feeling as though they were not ‘learning’ anything, though now appreciate that intuitive learnings were being constructed. There was a great deal of positivity in our classroom, and those students who were less engaged at the start of the project became more invested as the project progressed. Liam wanted to engage and did when he felt in control of the materials and skills at his disposal. These experiences suggested that classroom music could provide meaningful musical experience when all voices contributed to its collaborative construction. Together we located that meaningful musical experience was likely to occur when my pedagogy honoured the practice of music, offered student agency and authenticity of musical experience, and allowed students to develop their musical voice in social learning contexts.

In the final focus group interviews at the conclusion of the project, Cassie left me with an encouraging last statement:

Your thinking and actions towards making this year’s Music... you gave us more choice and freedom. You also trusted us with things. If your actions and thoughts were the same as all other teachers, it could be a lot better. (Cassie, C4I)

The contents of her statement underpinned key elements of the conditions we located, and made the collaborative journey a significant one. This provided me with a sense of validation of both the research findings and the methodological orientation of the project. Despite this, I now feel as though I have more questions, as the cycles opened up many possibilities for our classroom. Though this marks the completion of the project, in many ways it is only the beginning. There is still much to learn from and with my students.
CHAPTER SIX
DISCUSSION

Introduction

One of the excellent incidental effects of conducting action research is that the people involved come to some disturbing conclusions regarding their tendencies to generalize (sic) in the absence of evidence.

(Stephen Corey, *Action Research to Improve School Practices*)

Through this action research project, I sought to investigate practices that promoted the engagement of my students in meaningful musical experiences. In this chapter, I weave together the learnings of the research project and provide a synthesis of my evolving thinking and the resulting findings. This discussion is guided by the theoretical frames of constructivism\(^{55}\) and music as a discourse (Swanwick, 1999b). The findings are expressed as a set of five pedagogical conditions that I propose my practice must consider and be situated within in order to promote meaningful engagement within my classroom. The conditions located were developed from the cumulative insight and understandings gained from each research cycle, and composed from co-authored and democratised reflection on action. I present evidence from across the project cycles in ways that challenge bias and generalisation, and afford a new foundation for the reframing of my practice. The chapter then locates that meaningful music experience within my context may be achieved when these conditions are considered as a whole. I then conclude the chapter with a brief reflection on the findings from my perspective as a teacher-researcher.

Praxis

Across this action research project, I located engagement in musical practice – *in* and *with* music itself – as a prominent influence in the promotion of meaningful music experiences. Despite centrality of praxis being a strong theme across much of the literature (notably Elliott, 1995; Small, 1998; Swanwick, 1999b),\(^{56}\) this finding remains significant in that it was generated from within each of the research cycles, featuring prominently in action and reflection. I located

\(^{55}\) This theoretical frame draws across the general notion of constructivism as established by the work of Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner (as detailed in Chapter 3).

\(^{56}\) These are perhaps the principal voices of this discussion.
meanings based on praxis early in the project, when my practice comprised a complete context for students to associate with analytical labels and internalise through experience. As the project developed, I also positioned intuition central to practical engagement with music, and this form of knowing is foundational to musical understanding. This focus on direct engagement with the materials of music afforded an intuitive base where musical knowledge could be gained through acquaintance (Swanwick, 1994). This placed a developing focus within each of the cycles on the doing of music through its active use, what Small (1977) describes as ‘musicking’ and Elliott (1995) ‘musicing’. The considerations drawn from the project that attended to praxis focussed on allowing students to investigate music through situated, practical experience with it in ways that enriched them educatively and reflected the pragmatic functions of music in society. As the condition of praxis became more ingrained in the project, I positioned the students to engage in greater holistic experiences that focused on the process of ‘musicking’ (Small, 1977). This saw meaning and value reflected in the actual difference made when music is actually put to use (Regelski, 2005a).

There was evidence from across the cycles of the project that I had moved from a more conservative and ‘academickised’ pedagogical focus on music learning (Rose & Countryman, 2013), toward a curriculum of practicum and apprenticeship that reflected the ways in which music is engaged with in society. In doing this, I challenged concepts surrounding the traditional valuing and ideologies of musical knowledge, and instead afforded students means to construct their own understandings within the context of the musical ‘whole’. Viewed through the lens of constructivism, this attends to the fact that meanings can be constructed in many ways, and that every experience and interaction framed by an individual exists as a valid way of constructing knowing. Through praxis, my practice is concerned with the process of active sense-making, and the weaving of coherent and meaningful stories from action (Bowman, 2005). In these interactions, my view of music education as praxis respects that music is a discourse developed and shared through interaction with other musicers (Swanwick, 1999b). Praxis exists as a source of meaning, and the positioning of this as a consideration invited a process of students coming to know music through their own interactions. The condition of praxis demands that music be experienced, practised and made, as within this, rich understandings may be formed. From this, I positioned praxis as a central consideration that emerged from the project – it invited the uncovering of greater meanings and an increase in engagement in musical activity.
Agency

It has been established that meaning in music is created through and resides in the use of music in action (Elliott, 1995). Musical engagement promoted by praxis – where actions are sustained and embodied – acts as a foreground to musical agency (Bowman, 2005). The project revealed an increase in the awareness of the importance of student agency across the cycles. As the project developed, the unknowing and unintentional control that I asserted over the learning experiences shifted and made way for greater levels of student agency, which served to enhance the location of meaningful experience. I realised a greater degree of agency across the cycles as students’ own explorations in and with music were increasingly valued, and when I established provocations prompting investment in musical actions and processes. Within these interactions, music was respected as discourse, and the musical discourses of the students valued (Swanwick, 1999b). Through these interactions, I located that when students engaged in musical dialogue with others, it assisted them to weave meaningful and coherent stories from musical action. This was supported by the adoption of informal learning processes, and these interactions served to heighten investment and support location of meaningful experience. The provision of authentic musical processes that invited personal and cognitive challenge proved crucial in the promotion of student agency.

The musical processes engaged with by the students reflected constructivist principles of learning, and the interventions of the research cycles offered a broad frame – or a stabiliser – within which the students could work as musical agents. I located that student agency offers empowerment, and encourages students to engage in their own musical thinking as they work toward the construction of understanding. Within this, I found that I needed to move beyond mere facilitation, and find “good musical places to go” through the provision of powerful stimulants and strategies (Finney, 2015b). The findings suggested that despite my best intended actions, I initially interfered with the process of engaging students in ways that best allowed them to understand and derive meaning. The provision of agency then invites a pedagogy of diversity and inclusion; it focuses on the creation of space and of vehicles for students to share what they know about music, and for me to build upon this. I found that placing the students as musicians at the centre of musical experience, where they had control over the pace, progression and structure of their learning, promoted agency and supported them in locating meaning.
**Authenticity**

From across the findings of the research cycles of the project, I located *authenticity* of experience as a condition necessary in supporting engaging and meaningful music education. I refer to authenticity of pedagogies and practices that honour interactions with the *process* of music making itself; I found this inextricably entangled with praxis and agency. This position attends to that suggested by Green (2008b), in that teachers should aim, “not for authenticity of the musical *product*, but for the authenticity of the musical learning *practice*...” – or *process* (p. 114, *italics* in original). As the research project progressed, I attended to authenticity of musical practices and processes through the contextualisation of music experiences that created provocations faced by musicians. This necessitated that the context, goal, processes and understandings necessary for meaningful engagement were made evident, and this served to remove barriers provided by tradition and minimise tensions in locating meaning. I replaced reductive and disconnected knowledge of music with more holistic practices that promoted fluency with music as a discourse. Further, I placed greater emphasis on extended experience with the materials of music and the associated processes in realising musical products. These findings were not based on an oversimplification of music, but rather through attending to its complexities and what it offers holistically. In this, I responded to the caution of Wiggins (2001) whereby the tendency of teachers is to isolate complex concepts and thereby exacerbate a student’s inability to apply knowledge to authentically complex problems.

The project revealed that the classroom environment should replicate as far as possible musical settings that are authentic to *process* and the *musical roles* of musicians. I located that authentic experiences in music were constructed upon meaningful interactions with and between students that reflected the ways in which music is used and engaged with outside of school. From a constructivist viewpoint, when the students encountered music in authentic ways, they better constructed personally meaningful understandings of music. I found that this was given support by informal approaches to music learning, which are often conducted with attention to authentically positioned learning processes. Further, these experiences are often encountered in an holistic context that involves other musicers in a process of coming to know. Within this, the process of authenticity extends to the use of music as a discourse through musical interactions. I attended to and respected the voices of the students as the project progressed. Through engaging in different perspectives on how musicians think, act and know music, and by valuing multiple conceptions of music and musicality, the project uncovered ways of working with music that were viewed as more authentic and meaningful to the students. In positioning authenticity as a pedagogical consideration, I propose that learning processes be contextualised and centred upon genuine musical processes that honour authentic interaction with music as social praxis.
Fluency

My findings from across the project focused on fluency with the language of music as a necessary condition in the provision of meaningful music education. I aligned fluency with the manner through which music is realised and shared as a discourse. As informed by Swanwick (1994), I positioned fluency with music as an exchange between sensory or intuitive knowledge and analytical knowledge. The view taken in this thesis is that music is a language – a form of discourse – and from this, it is proposed that our educative intentions should focus on increasing the fluency with how it is used (Swanwick, 1999b). This research project demonstrated that, like language, fluency with music demands extended practice with the materials of music. It realised that a firm intuitive base must be established before analytical labels are attached if genuine meanings are to be constructed. The project demonstrated that meaningful discourse in and with music is founded upon this intuitive base, and can be further developed as it is associated with a symbolic form. Across the cycles, I advanced the notion of fluency of interaction through authentic musical processes that encouraged connections between sound and symbol. I invited this interaction to practical contexts that reflected students working as agents in real musical processes. It was revealed that this process needed to retain fluidity and acknowledge that music learning is often non-linear.

The presence of tension between intuitive and analytical knowing was evident within the project, and this proved difficult to minimise. When intuition was not taken up into analytic forms – largely due to the complexity and demand of the task – it served to inhibit engagement in musical discourse. Missing language elements contributed to a breakdown of understanding, potentiality of engagement, and ultimately meaning. I came to understand that analytical fluency could be easily compromised by demands and limitations placed upon intuitive knowledge, and this could negate musical expression, understanding, and engagement in music as a discourse. Within these encounters within the cycles, I confirmed the importance of intuitive knowledge as a basis of experience in that it provides a starting point for increasing fluency with music. These experiences provide a platform for constructing meaning if they are gradually and supportively attached to analytical fragments within the context of the whole. The project demonstrated this could be achieved if students engaged in music as a social praxis – with students talking with students musically, and teachers talking with students musically (Green, 2008b). Across the project, each student engaged in making music, irrespective of the degree of fluency; yet, this still afforded them the opportunity to engage in recursive dialogue between their intuitive and analytical knowledge through which they could continue to build their schemes of knowing and locate meaning. The findings of the project position fluency as a consideration in pedagogies that view music as both an aural and symbolic form, focussing on these interactions and the
manner in which they invite communicative ability, as central to encouraging the development of meaning.

**Social Construct**

I also located *social construct* as a condition necessary for consideration. This reflected an increasing awareness of the social aspect of music learning in practice, with each cycle implementing and providing scope for more significant social interactions to occur. In this, I support the view that music is more than a discipline body of knowledge – it exists within a lived social and cultural context (Elliott, 1995; Small, 1977). I did not fully acknowledge this in the first cycle of the project, though evidence from later cycles confirms the view that music, as a social practice, is *always* imbued with sociality (Regelski, 2005a). Within the project, I explored various social patterns – partnered, class, and small-group arrangements – in locating meaning, and there was a distinct connection between the situated social nature of experience and the location of meaning and value. The students shared in the development of their own meanings, supported by planned interventions that afforded students the means to work together as musicians. Furthermore, this supported the sharing of knowledge and experience from beyond the classroom, and positioned music as a discourse in a way that respected musical process and the language schemes brought and encountered by the students. The students constructed their own understandings through their experiences and interactions with others, as musicians, using the language of music (Elliott, 1995; Swanwick, 1999b).

The social processes realised within this project reveal that a constructivist approach to music education has beneficial grounds. The findings support that knowledge is gained through a process of social interchange (Gergen, 1995; Green 2008a). The construction of meaning in this project was characterised by the increasing social interdependence of the students within a context in which musical language served communal functions – or an ongoing relationship with others and the knowledge created (Gergen, 1995; Wiggins, 2001). I viewed music as a discourse, respected the musical discourses of students, and encouraged the development of fluency with this discourse enacted through a social setting (Swanwick, 1999b). The social aspects of the project provided greater contextualisation of learning; this made music experiences more personally meaningful and educative – the students worked *in* and *with* music in musical ways. There existed a sense of apprenticeship in this model, provided by the construction of the learning experiences as well as the presence of ‘more knowledge others’ – both as teacher and as students (Bruner, 1977). From this, meaning was revealed to be promoted by pedagogies that provided socially saturated and situated environments, and that engaged
students in the construction of relationships based on the exchange of musical discourse. I position this finding as a condition inviting students to use music as a discourse to negotiate the social network of the classroom with other musicers in the construction of their own personal schemes of meaning.

**Locating Meaning**

The conditions of *praxis, agency, authenticity, fluency* and *social construct* were born from the cumulative findings of the action research cycles, and together they provide a basis for rethinking and reframing teaching and learning practices in the music classroom. The discussion of each condition above hints to their complex interrelationship. There is a considerable overlap of each condition – they are cumulative, interconnected, and symbiotic in nature – and they do not exist in isolation, nor can they be worked with independently. This interaction is represented below (see Figure 15), with each circle representing the respective condition contributing to a central area rich in potential for meaning to be located:

![Diagram of Locating Meaning](image)

**Figure 15**

Locating meaning through pedagogy

I posit that it is within the central area created by the overlay of conditions that meaning may be located. When practice enlivens each of these conditions simultaneously, it offers students the opportunity to locate personally meaningful musical encounters through engaging experiences.
There is also a degree of flexibility within this central area, and practices may be positioned in a manner that, whilst attending to each, may feature some of the conditions more prominently than others, so that they are responsive to context and content. Together, the location of practice within this central area responds to the research problem posed at the beginning of the project. Practice that considers and places experience within the central meeting area of praxis, agency, authenticity, fluency and social construct is positioned to best promote student engagement in meaningful music education.

**Reflection**

In this chapter, I uncovered a response to the research problem and associated questions through means of an action research project. I presented a cumulative synthesis of each of the action research cycles conducted, ultimately expressing the findings as conditions that will serve to inform future action. I developed these conditions through an evolutionary process informed by the participants – the students – and the emerging data from the cycles as they were enacted and reflected upon. Though the decisions I made throughout the process of data analysis and transformation were influenced by my own position and influence within the research context – as well as my own interpretations of the action – I am confident in the findings as they were established upon responsive, sensing and reflexive practice that focused on educative change. The construction of the conditions challenged generalisation; they were founded upon specific evidence located within collective action, and aligned with key recommendations within the body of literature. The conditions exist as a synthesis of the findings – they are not a distillation or reduction, but attend to our context and the defined problem – and offer actionable change in their consideration.

I encountered an unexpected level of potential generalisability across these findings as they were realised. I feel the conditions provoke considerations for me and my own practice and the ways in which I promote meaningful engagement in my classroom; however, I also pose that they may offer other teachers a framework for consideration, action and reflection. I argue that these conditions have a wide range of application across contexts other than that of this project, insomuch as they can transcend methodological approach, curriculum documentation, and adapt to philosophical orientation. I felt warranted not limiting my approach to a specific methodology or philosophical influence, and instead celebrated that I independently located key tenets of ‘good’ music teaching – to borrow from Swanwick (1999b), I focused on teaching music

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57 Not to be confused with the generalisation of the perceived problem as identified in the preceding paragraph. Potential generalisability of the project is also discussed in the following chapter.
musically. Furthermore, I was encouraged by the alignment of the conditions located to the recommendations from the literature – they attend to ways forward in making school music education more meaningful, and have been influenced by the students they will serve. Each independent condition reflects an aspect of the research problem, yet their symbiotic relationship provides a complete picture that respects and responds to the complexities of the classroom. I see my arrival at these conditions as a new starting point – there is much potential in realising them in practice, and they provide an actionable basis for further research.
CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Introduction

There are no problems we cannot solve together,
and very few that we can solve by ourselves.

(Lyndon Johnson, Presidential Address)

This action research project sought to locate actionable findings that could increase the engagement of my students in meaningful music education. The project was conceived from an awareness of increasing numbers of students feeling estranged and disengaged by school music education, both within the literature and as evidenced within my own school context. The initial research question focused on the major tensions in the philosophy and practice of school music education, and the impact on student engagement. From this examination, the main research question focused on how my own practices could respond to or minimise these tensions, whilst promoting meaningful engagement with music. The findings of the project were not arrived at in isolation, but alongside my students through an ongoing process of collaborative action and reflection. The research problem central to the study was one that we all owned, and one best solved together – we became a community of interested colleagues focused on creating a better teaching and learning environment.

In this chapter, I summarise the action research journey and the resulting findings. I restate the research questions and then summarise the major tensions and recommendations located in the literature that informed the project. I summarise the methodological approach to the project and describe the learnings of the project, which are expressed as conditions for my pedagogy to consider in response to the research questions. I then highlight the advancements and limitations of the project, and propose ideas for future research based on this discussion. Following this, I provide an insight to the transformative power of this research in my context, detailing the change that has occurred to my thinking and programs, the engagement of the students, and the thinking of others. I then conclude the chapter as the first began – with a focus on the student voice, and I found it fitting that the last encounter in the project involved Liam. Together, we had both moved towards more meaningful music education.
Summary of the Research and Findings

This project was founded on the problematic tensions between music and school music education, and the manner through which such tensions may promote student disengagement. The research questions underpinning the project sought to identify these tensions and investigate ways in which my own practice could be adapted to make school music more meaningful for my students. The research questions posed to investigate this problem were:

1. What are the major tensions in the philosophy and practice of school music education, and how does this impact upon student engagement?

2. What considerations do I need to give to my own practice to ensure meaningful music learning occurs in my Year 8 Music classroom?

The two research questions were structured to move the project through an initial defining of the problem, towards possibilities in its solution. I sought actionable answers to these questions, and was informed by both the literature and action and reflection within each of the research cycles in locating answers. The following sections of the chapter summarise the findings of each of the questions posed.

Locating tensions

The initial research question sought to locate the major tensions facing school music education, and was principally situated in the literature review conducted. This review revealed historical divisions between the dominant philosophical underpinnings of music education – the music education as aesthetic education philosophy (Reimer, 1989) and the praxial music education philosophy (Elliott, 1995). Both philosophies continue to influence music education practice despite unfortunate misconceptions, adversarial positioning, and reductionist views of each. A reductive understanding of these philosophies is to view music education as aesthetic education as exclusively associated with the product of music, and praxial music education as entirely focused on the process of music; however, this is to dismiss the depth of each argument, as well as their similarities and potential connections. The adversarial nature of this debate has been criticised as contributing little to the contextual grounds and realities of music education. It was argued that music education philosophy needs to embrace a more situated and contextual positioning, and work towards the acceptance of a pluralistic stance that acknowledges the potential interactions, and promotes the reconciliation or toleration of different philosophical assumptions as translated in practice. Philosophies need now be lived as practices.
The debate between the dominant philosophical paradigms was found to be echoed in practice. The translations of music education as aesthetic education to the classroom – as the more historically-ingrained philosophical paradigm – have brought with them Western cultural traditions and values that have promoted abstract musical knowledge. These traditions have laid and continue to perpetuate a culturally conservative foundation for music education practice that narrows rather than expands possibilities. Within this approach, musical knowledge can often be atomised and presented as easily transmittable – it is knowledge about music that is reducible so it is manageable in the classroom. When taught this way, musical knowledge is ‘academickised’ – presented as separate, static and compartmentalised fragments of abstract knowledge – and not honoured as an holistic expression of self that is caught through lived engagement in and with music itself. Music taught is, as Ross (1995) notes, ‘pseudo music’, not ‘music proper’, and if approached in this manner can bear little in relation to the musical values and experiences of students, and therefore present a question of relevance. These approaches have contributed to school music education being relegated as a unique and often disconnected musical subculture. It was argued that school music education must essentially honour the ways in which music is used, learnt, and taught in society, and become unbound from the rigid structures and traditions of schooling.

Accessibility to music and musical experience through informal means was located as another contributing factor towards student disengagement from school music education. The indisputable connectedness of music with identity, and its ability to express self and culture, offers students a situated and personally meaningful experience. Within these experiences, students engage in and with music – often popular music – in ways that are often sharp in contrast with the experiences of music presented in school. Despite the inclusion of popular musics in the classroom, reductionist and inauthentic musical processes and approaches remain as barriers. It was argued that informal music practices have challenged schools to change their perspectives on the nature of both music teaching and learning. Though informal approaches offer new considerations for school music, it was proposed that informal experiences be interleaved with more formal experiences that examine conceptual and analytical knowledge about music, in a supportive and complementary relationship. It was also argued that new and emerging technologies have further contributed to the accessibility and uptake of informal music experiences, and have simultaneously reshaped and redefined potentialities within music learning. Considering this, it was proposed that music education use technology in ways that continue to educate students musically (rather than technically) and be considered in ways that enhance and extend current models of musicianship and musical development (Thwaites, 2014).
The initial research question also sought to locate educative – or necessary – tensions within music education. This focused on the nature of musical knowledge and understanding, and identified two forms of musical knowing – the intuitive and analytical (Swanwick, 1994). Intuitive musical knowledge was positioned as central to knowing; it is personal and constructed through acquaintance with music itself, and affords access to all other ways of knowing (ibid.). Analytical knowledge was offered as a dialectic to the intuitive, offering a symbol system that enables us to articulate our understandings and actions. It was argued that school music education invites an initiation into this symbolic world, and that knowledge is constructed when students work in the space between the intuitive and analytical. It was proposed that together these two ways of knowing inform one another developmentally. Further, it was recognised that the space between these two forms of knowing is an uncomfortable place. The constructivist notions of cognitive dissonance (Joyce, Weil & Showers, 1992) and flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) offered a means to frame music learning in valued, accessible and educative ways. Together, these concepts invite the student to experience a degree of cognitive discomfort, which, if carefully stabilised by the teacher, could enable students to reach beyond their present stage.

Finally, central to the investigation of educative tensions was the notion of music as a discourse (Swanwick, 1999b), which was also positioned as a theoretical frame. Three working principles were proposed to inform meaningful music teaching – a) the care for music as a discourse; b) the care for the musical discourse of students; and c) fluency first and last – each framed by the parameters of musical experience. Music as a discourse invites interaction with music as a language of conversation. Within this, it is valued as part of a social process, situated in a space between sense and significance, where musicers use and engage with the materials of music. Overall, the findings from within the literature that addressed the first research question were positioned as considerations to inform the investigation of the main research question.

**Resolving tensions**

An action research methodology was positioned as the most effective way to improve the problem identified in the research questions. This approach focussed on the development of actionable knowledge through inclusive, democratic and collaborative engagement with all participants through shared discourse. The four action research cycles presented cumulative and evolutionary learnings based on action and reflection. The learnings were synthesised – guided by the theoretical frames of constructivism\(^{58}\) and music as a discourse (Swanwick, 1999b) – into overarching conditions. The project located five interrelated and symbiotic conditions – praxis,

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\(^{58}\) A broad conceptual approach based on the work on Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner as detailed in Chapter 3.
agency, authenticity, fluency and social construct – that my practice needed to consider in order to best promote student engagement in meaningful music learning.\(^{59}\) The condition of praxis relates to pedagogies that promote action in music. Pedagogies that consider praxis are focused on allowing students to investigate music through practical experience in and with it. The condition of agency is aligned with pedagogies that foster students’ freedom to explore music and afford a sense of ownership of the pace, progression and structure of learning and the music itself. These two conditions link closely with that of authenticity, which promotes pedagogies that honour authentic educational interaction with music. This definition is focused on the process of music learning itself, less so the context within which it is made. The condition of fluency centres on pedagogies that view music as both an aural and symbolic form, focusing on the interactions between intuitive and analytical musical knowledge and the manner in which they combine to afford deeper levels of understanding and communicative ability. The condition of social construct refers to the manner in which pedagogies value the ways in which musical knowledge and understanding is constructed and transmitted between people. The project found that practice needs to be positioned in a way that considers each condition simultaneously in order to best promote meaningful music education. The evidence supporting the construction of these conditions was based on a gradual increase in the valuing of school music education, and an increase in the engagement of students in meaningful music practice.

### Contributions of the Research

This project offers several contributions to the music education practice and research fields. It provides a model of music education in practice, and both complements and extends the literature and practice through offering five pedagogical conditions that are flexible and responsive to a variety of contexts. Considering the methodological orientation of the project, I claim that there is an appreciable level of generalisability to these conditions; they may underpin and further enhance any methodological approach to music education (such as Kodály, Orff, or more contemporary approaches) and the delivery of any curriculum, given their responsiveness to music as a shared discourse. The conditions offer support to the realisation of the incoming Australian Curriculum, and provide pedagogies that support the delivery of content in musically meaningful and genuinely educative ways. Further, these conditions also contribute to the way in which constructivist principles may be applied in music education practice. This project also invites teachers into research, as I now offer it as a transparent model for others to examine, critique and improve. Through this, the project contributes a tool for reflection for teachers and their pedagogical approaches, and ways we together might rethink music education. Finally, the

\(^{59}\) See Figure 15 in Chapter 6.
project advances the use of the action research methodology and the manner by which it can draw together research and practice in music education. It addresses the concern of Gouzouasis et al. (2014) that researchers speak of democratic ideals and social justice, “yet we expect teachers to implement our research – which is often convoluted, inaccessible, abstract, and not generalisable – without their input or influence”, to promote ideas for their music teaching (p. 3). It is hoped that this project offers a methodological model for teachers to conduct their own research, and to generate findings that are relevant and useful for the issues they face in their own schools.

Limitations of the Study

I have made claims to new knowledge as a result of this project, and I have attempted to clearly define and detail the validity of these claims according to the validity criteria – dialogic, outcome, catalytic, democratic and process – proposed by Herr and Anderson (2005). Though I have confidence in these claims – as they are based on relationships, change and empowerment within a defined context – I acknowledge that they are inevitably value-laden. To challenge this limitation, I have presented the claims to knowledge in this project in a transparent manner; and I now seek further validation to them by making this project public for critical scrutiny. Another perceived limitation of the study may be located in the use of the action research methodology. I acknowledge that the transferability and generalisability of the findings may be perceived as limited; however, the focus of the project was on the transformational effect of my own practice as situated within my own context. In this way, action research has much to offer real change.

Further Research

Arriving at one goal is the starting point to another.

(John Dewey, Art as Experience)

Though the completion of the project has provided actionable answers as to the manner through which my practice can make music education more meaningful for my students, it has also generated many more questions. The end of this project marks the start of a continuous journey of critical reflection on my own action and on theory as applied to music education. The most obvious extension of this project may be in its continuation; a continued implementation of the action research model to my own classroom to further inform my practice and my critical and reflective thought. There is a great deal of merit in this enterprise, as education contexts and
systems undergo constant change from both internal and external pressures, and my own context is far from immune from this. Further study into my own classroom would see the continual generation of new and situated knowledge, and respond to the claimed paucity of critically reflective teacher-based research identified in the literature (Kincheloe, 2012; Regelski, 1995).

From this, I continue to posit action research as a model for powerful social and educational change, and that all good teachers are researchers. Critical reflection and inquiry should are inseparable from good practice, and teachers best know their own contexts. Action research is powerfully educative and has a role in the betterment of both teaching and learning in music education. I strongly encourage other teachers to engage in research into their own classroom contexts, as this will provide a platform for the sharing of knowledge and inform our collective understandings. It is hoped that this study may act as a precursor for other teachers who wish to find answers to their own classroom issues. This study provides an adaptive not adoptive model in such explorations, and further research building from this study will serve to better music education practice as a whole.

There is opportunity for further research to build on the findings of this study, namely the five pedagogical conditions – praxis, agency, authenticity, fluency and social construct – that were located. Further studies could examine these conditions in practice by using them as a starting point for investigation and identifying ways of enacting, practising and modelling them in other contexts. These conditions may also be examined in relation to other recognised music education methodologies, such as the more traditional Kodály method or more contemporary approaches, to see if they can be housed by and further contribute to these approaches. The conditions also offer an informed pedagogical approach to the incoming Australian Curriculum, and support the teaching of music in musical ways. It is envisaged that these conditions could be translated into tangible practices, and further developed within the profession. In this, the study could offer a basis for research into the enactment of music education philosophy to practice.

Given the rapid development, growth and availability of technology, and the manner in which it offers opportunity to engage in musical praxis, further research could examine the ways that it could be harnessed in the classroom. Soon after the conclusion of this research project, Sunshine College implemented an online learning platform, which houses potential to advance new ways of accessing and sharing knowledge. Similarly, many new technologies and pieces of software have been developed since the action research cycles were realised. Further research could explore how such technologies may support and enhance the five pedagogical conditions proposed. The environments created by such technologies also potentially provide greater levels
of access to music making through informal means. There is a need for additional research into how students informally engage with these digital and online environments, as well as ways that students make music informally away from these technologies. An examination of the students situated in these informal learning environments themselves creates the potential to reveal to us an extremely rich space within which we might come to know the ways in which students learn, share and celebrate music. These findings could then further inform actions of and within the formal learning environments of schools.

A Transformation in Context and Self

This project has positioned an enhanced and informed degree of reflective practice and further research as central to the development of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices in Music at Sunshine College. Throughout this project, my belief in the transformative power of action research became more pronounced. Though reflection has always been a part of my own teaching and learning practice, it is now much more critically shaped and informed through my reflection on my actions and how they influence the learning environment of the classroom. The action research process has equipped me with a much more critical lens, as well as a defined reflexive and recursive pathway through the issues that I face. The project demanded I listen to the voices of my students, which enhanced the collaborative and democratic changing of our classroom. Together we worked to shape a learning environment that was more responsive to both of our educative desires; in many ways we diminished concerns of irrelevancy, disconnect and meaninglessness in seeking a way forward. We became research partners in the search for a better situation; we all became more critical, reflective, and aware. For me, action research is now as much a research methodology as it is an approach to teaching.

The completion of this study has seen the start of a new and continuous one. The Year 8 Music program has been modelled from this project, and for the last few years has continued to be reflected upon and refined – in constant consultation with the teachers and students within. There has been a significant change to what the typical lesson looks like, with the students much more active with the materials of music; there is a greater sense of engagement and meaning in the actions of the classroom and a greater sense of connectedness and respect to musical experiences found outside of the school. I have heard Year 7 students talk about how much they are looking forward to the ‘band project’ in Year 8. They see the students working in small groups to write their own song and are excited that they will have this opportunity the following

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60 This refers to a now semester-long group songwriting and performance project based on the activity of the fourth action research cycle of the project.
year. Since this study was completed, we are seeing a significant increase in enrolments into Year 9 Music, with as many as 36 students\(^{61}\) enrol in 2014, and numbers close to 30 in other years. Sadly, I no longer teach Year 8 Music due to the growth of the school and the subject, as well as changes to staffing; however, the curriculum content and pedagogical approach to Year 8 Music continues to be heavily modelled from this action research project. In 2012, the Year 8 Music teacher, Carley\(^{62}\), emailed me excitedly from her classroom:

> The Year 8s are loving this task [the group songwriting project]! It’s so awesome to see them working on lyrics in class and singing little melodies to themselves. Having the electric drum kit in the back of the room is so great. They are able to bash away and there is barely any noise and the students are all able to work away. I think this is going to engage almost all of the students SO well. Even the less well behaved boys are so excited and said: “This is going to be the best assessment ever in Music.” Just wanted to share this little win with you. (email communication, June 7, 2012)

In the weeks that followed, I noticed the engagement in musical activity increase in this class; there were many students coming in at lunchtime to practise their song, and they persisted each week. At the end of the teaching period, I came into the class to listen to the products. Many of the songs were extremely well crafted; each song evidenced a well-informed understanding of the respective style, and some experimented by challenging these boundaries. Of course, some were not as well attended to or crafted, but the former outweighed the later. It has been great to see the project contribute to our practice, and continue to be developed and refined.

I have come to more fully embrace flexibility in the delivery of my programs, and my role and actions as a teacher have been further refined. The project forced me to examine my own practice, and I now feel that it runs closer to focusing on both product and process of music. My teaching style encourages constructivist learning, and I continually reflect on what is happening in the classroom, and ask the same of my students. I let the students explore music, and only interject with meaningful contributions when they are doing so; I carefully balance such experience with analytical insights and investigations, linking it to experience where possible. Our discourse is in music, where possible, and less about it; ultimately, we ‘music’ from experience and to learn in new experiences. This is empowering for us all. The project has extended my professionalism and positions me as a learner from and with my students. I am aware that learning music and learning to teach music are essentially lifelong and positively insurmountable challenges – and this is one of my greatest learnings.

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\(^{61}\) This is approximately 35% of the Year 9 cohort. Of course, there are many factors influencing continued enrolment in Music, and this falls outside the scope of the project – see Hartwig (2009) for a discussion of factors impinging on enrolment in post-compulsory Music classes in the Queensland context.

\(^{62}\) A pseudonym has been used here.
I miss my Year 8 Music students – their enthusiasm, their honesty in our collaboration, and for sharing their visions of what Music should be like. I wrote the following final sentence in my researcher journal immediately after our last lesson ended:

That’s it! Done! I am genuinely really sad to see them go. I will miss them all next year! (researcher journal, November 25, 2011)

How many music teachers say that about their Year 8 Music classes?

Later that afternoon, I was fortunate enough to find myself in conversation with Liam. He said thank you for the year and for trying to make Music better:

Thank you for letting me find out more about guitar. It was good to make my own music. (personal conversation, November 25, 2011)

Considering Liam’s past experiences, it was reassuring to hear that Music did in fact offer him something meaningful – his own musical voice was heard and respected.
APPENDICIES

Appendix A – Information and Consent Form

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Study Title:
Toward meaningful music education in the middle school music classroom:
An action research project

Researcher:
Cade Bonar
Doctor of Education Student, Griffith University
Head of Music, [Sunshine College]

Supervisors:
Dr Kay Hartwig and Professor Bruce Burton
School of Education and Professional Studies, Griffith University

Dear Parents/Guardians,

As part of my Doctor of Education (EdD) research, I will be investigating the experiences of Year 8 Music students through an action research project. My study will investigate the degree to which students engage with the content of Year 8 Music and how we as teachers provide access to meaningful and engaging musical experience. This study has been prompted by the increasing number of young adolescents disengaging from formal music education. This study seeks to discover some of the reasons why young people disengage from music and investigate some possible solutions.

This action research project will be undertaken with students in Year 8[X] Music. Action research consists of systematic procedures done by teachers to gather information and improve their classroom setting, their own teaching, and their students learning. Within this research project students will still work within the normal Music curriculum and complete all theoretical learning and skills defined in the Year 8 Music work program.

This form seeks your consent for the participation of your son/daughter in this action research project. Parental consent for this research study is strictly voluntary without undue influence or penalty. A parent signature below also assumes that the child understands and agrees to participate cooperatively. The action research project will be undertaken from 4 February 2011 until 22 December 2011. Withdraw from involvement in the project may be requested at any time without penalty. The research study will involve surveys, small-group focus interviews, written student reflections observations and the use of audio-visual equipment to capture
interviews and other classroom experiences. All materials will be treated as confidential, participant names will not be used in publication and all materials will be kept in a secure location with access only by the research team. Some of the material may be seen by Dr Kay Hartwig – Principal Supervisor for the EdD research project – to authenticate results. Pseudonyms will be used in all references to the study participants and the College in the research thesis and in any other use of the material in future research publications or conference papers. It should be noted that the research does not involve any harm to individuals.

The conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of identified personal information. The information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements. A de-identified copy of this data may be used for other research purposes. However, your anonymity will at all times be safeguarded. If you have any concerns or complaints about the ethical conduct of the research project, contact the Manager, Research Ethics on (07) 3735 5585 or research-ethics@griffith.edu.au. The project has been assigned ethics protocol number EBL/83/10/HREC by the Office for Research, Griffith University.

For additional information about the research, please contact Mr Cade Bonar on the details below, or Dr Kay Hartwig (Principal Supervisor) at Griffith University on (07) 3735 5733 or kay.hartwig@griffith.edu.au.

It is hoped that this research will contribute to providing greater access to meaningful musical experience for students in the school setting. As such, your participation would be greatly appreciated. A debriefing session for students and parents will be held at the College at the completion of the research and results will be made available to families upon request.

If you consent for your son/daughter to participate in this study, please complete the return reply on the following page.

An additional copy of this information and consent form has been provided for your records.

Thank you,

Cade Bonar
Doctor of Education Student, Griffith University
Head of Music, [Sunshine College]
e | c.bonar@griffith.edu.au
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Student name: ..........................................................

I, ................................................................. (parent/guardian name), provide consent for my son/daughter to participate in the study outlined above.

I understand that:

• parental consent for this research project is strictly voluntary without undue influence or penalty
• singing below assumes that the child understands and agrees to participate cooperatively
• the research will be conducted until the end of the academic year
• the research conducted within this project will still enable all planned theoretical and skill-based learning experiences to take place
• the research project will involve surveys, small-group focus interviews, written student reflections observations and the use of audio-visual equipment to capture interviews and other classroom experiences
• student names will not be used in publication and all materials will be kept in a secure location with access only by the research team
• pseudonyms will be used in all references to the study participants and the College in the research thesis and in any other use of the material in future research publications or conference papers
• this research project does not involve any harm to individuals
• the conduct of this research involves the collection, access and/or use of identified personal information
• information collected is confidential and will not be disclosed to third parties without your consent, except to meet government, legal or other regulatory authority requirements
• anonymity will at all times be safeguarded
• I can withdraw my son/daughter from the project at any time without penalty.

Signed: ................................................................. Date: …../……/……
Signature of Parent/Guardian of participant (as representative for the student)

Signed: ................................................................. Date: …../……/……
Cade Bonar

A copy of this co-signed form will be returned to you.
SURVEY: Year 8 Student Engagement in Musical Activity

The following questions will ask you about your involvement with music both inside and out of the school environment.

Please complete all questions as fully and truthfully as possible. This survey should take about 10 minutes to complete.

Please do not write your name anywhere on this form.

PART A - GENERAL

For each of the following questions tick ONE box.

1. Are you male or female?
   - Male
   - Female

2. How often do you listen to music?
   - More than once a day
   - Once a day
   - Three or four times each week
   - Once or twice each week
   - Almost never

3. How often do you play/sing music?
   - More than once a day
   - Once a day
   - Three or four times each week
   - Once or twice each week
   - Almost never

4. Do you play or sing in any bands or music groups?
   - No
   - Yes

   If ‘yes’, what type of bands/groups?

   …………………………………………………………………………

continued over...
5. a. Do learn/play an instrument/s?
   
   ☐ No (please go to question 4)
   ☐ Yes

   If ‘yes’, what instrument/s do you play?

   …………………………………………………………………………………

   b. Where/how do you have lessons on your instrument/s?
   
   You may tick more than one box
   
   ☐ I have lessons at school
   ☐ I have lessons outside of school
   ☐ I teach myself (YouTube, listen to others etc…)

6. a. Do you learn singing?
   
   ☐ No (please go to question 5)
   ☐ Yes

   b. Where/how do you have voice lessons?
   
   You may tick more than one box
   
   ☐ I have lessons at school
   ☐ I have lessons outside of school
   ☐ I teach myself (YouTube, listen to others etc…)

7. How often do you compose/write your own music?
   
   ☐ Most days
   ☐ Maybe once a week
   ☐ Maybe once a month
   ☐ Not often
   ☐ Never

8. Have you recorded your own music?
   
   ☐ No
   ☐ Yes

   If ‘yes’ – what software did you use?

   …………………………………………………………………………………

   continued over....
Write a brief statement to answer the following 2 questions.

9. What types of music do you like?

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10. What does music mean to you?

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continued over....
PART B – SCHOOL MUSIC

For the following question, place a tick in the box that best describes you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I enjoy Music as a subject at school.</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Write a brief statement to answer the following 2 questions.

2. What do you enjoy about classroom music?

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3. What don’t you enjoy about classroom music?

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continued over ...
For the following questions, place a tick in the boxes that best describes you.

1. Do you make or write music outside of school?
   - Yes (if 'yes', complete 2. and 3. below)
   - No (if 'no', then you have finished the survey)

Write a brief statement to answer the following 2 questions.

2. What types of things do you do with music outside of school?
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3. What do you enjoy about making or creating music outside of school?
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Thank you for your time and responses to this survey.

Please return this survey to Mr Bonar.
Appendix C – Lesson Reflection Report

LESSON REFLECTION REPORT

1. Has your knowledge/skill changed as a result of this lesson? How?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

2. What role did the teacher play in helping you to understand what we did today?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

3. What did you enjoy about class today? Why?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

4. What didn’t you enjoy about class today? Why?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

5. How can you relate what we did in class today to your own musical activities (in and out of school)?
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
Appendix D – Interview Schedules (Focus Groups)

1. Interview Protocol – Commencement of Study

Thank you for joining me to talk about Music and music making. I would like to you to be open and honest about your answers, as your input will help to shape our future classes. Please let each person speak individually, but feel free to add to his or her comment if you feel the same way. There are no right or wrong answers. You do not have to comment on any or all of the questions asked.

1. What does music mean to you?
2. What do you enjoy about Music at school? Why?
3. What don’t you enjoy about Music at school? Why?
4. Do you think you learn things that are useful in Music?
5. If you do music outside of school, what do you enjoy about it?
6. If you do music outside of school, does Music at school help?
7. What types of things do you think we need to do in Music at school?

Thank you for your time.

2. Interview Protocol – Cycle 1, 2 and 3

Thank you for joining me to talk about our classes. I would like to you to be open and honest about your answers, as your input will help to shape our future classes. Please let each person speak individually, but feel free to add to his or her comment if you feel the same way. There are no right or wrong answers. You do not have to comment on any or all of the questions asked.

1. What did you enjoy about what we did in Music over the past [cycle length]?
2. What did you learn? What skills did you gain from class [this cycle]?
3. Do you think what you learnt is useful? How is it useful?
4. What did you find challenging/difficult about class [this cycle]?
5. What did you not enjoy about class [this cycle]?
6. What could we do together in class to make you enjoy Music more?
7. Is there anything else you would like to talk about in relation to our classes?

Thank you for your time.
3. Interview Protocol – Cycle 4

Thank you for joining me to talk about our classes. I encourage you to be open and honest about your experiences. Please let each person speak individually, but feel free to add to his or her comment if you feel the same way. There are no right or wrong answers. You do not have to comment on any or all of the questions asked.

1. What did you enjoy about what we did in Music over the past [cycle length]?  
2. What did you learn? What skills did you gain from class [this cycle]?  
3. Do you think what you learnt is useful? How is it useful?  
4. What did you find challenging/difficult about class [this cycle]?  
5. What did you not enjoy about class [this cycle]?  
6. What could we do together in class to make you enjoy Music more?  
7. Is there anything else you would like to talk about in relation to our classes?  

Post-cycle questions

8. What do you enjoy about Music at school? Why?  
9. What don’t you enjoy about Music at school? Why?  

Thank you for your time.
Appendix E – Class List (alias) and Focus Group Organisation

Alias/De-identified Names
This list provides the alias identifiers of the students involved in the research project (the list order has been randomised).

1. Jasmine
2. Cassie
3. Tammy
4. Cameron
5. Thomas
6. Liam
7. Nelson
8. Victoria
9. James
10. Carter
11. Travis
12. Lance
13. Julie
14. Hayley
15. Lucas
16. Michael
17. Rachael
18. Paige
19. Mia
20. Daisy
21. Ian
22. Leigh
23. Amy
24. Celeste
25. Gabby

Focus Group Interview Groups
The groupings for the focus group interviews have also been included below. Students self-selected their groups for interviews (pseudonyms used).

Focus Group 1
• Jasmine, Travis, Hayley, Daisy, Amy and Rachael

Focus Group 2
• Cassie, Tammy, Victoria, Julie, Paige and Mia

Focus Group 3
• Cameron, Liam, Lance, Michael, Leigh, Gabby and Celeste

Focus Group 4
• Thomas, Nelson, James, Carter, Lucas and Ian
Appendix F – Composition Task in Cycle One

Attached below is a reformatted and de-identified (school) task sheet for the composition in the first cycle of the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 8 Music Composition Task 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Composition Folio</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Year:** 8  
**Unit:** Understanding Music

**Student:** ______________________________

**Date Given:** Week 3  
**Term:** One

**Task:**
This task takes the form of a composition folio in which you will compose three short pieces. Each piece will highlight one of the studied musical elements – duration, melody and harmony – that you have investigated this term. The composition folio is due in class in Week 9; however, you will work on the composition for each element as you work with them in class.

Each task is explained in greater detail on the following pages. Ensure that you refer to the worksheets and practical activities completed in class to assist you with your compositional ideas.

Some of the compositions require you to handwrite a score, others require you to notate using software called *Sibelius*, which is available on the school computers. You will be given enough class time to complete these tasks; however, you may also need to work at home.

**Areas Assessed:**

- Composition (see attached schema for details)

**Due Date:** Week 9

**Conditions:**
- In-class time will be provided.
- Refer to the examples and help sheets provided in class.
- The composition will require individual work with some teacher instruction on the required techniques and processes of the task.
- Out of class time will be required (you may request an interview with the teacher).
- You will be assessed on the criteria attached to each task.
Task 1: Polyrhythm Composition
You are to compose a 4-bar polyrhythmic composition for 4 clapping parts. Your work is to be notated using staff notation on the lines below. Ensure that you use the appropriate time signature (of your choice) and rhythms, and that you align beats between these parts.

Composition Schema:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You composed with a very secure</td>
<td>You composed with a secure</td>
<td>You generally composed within a secure</td>
<td>You used the identified music</td>
<td>You used the identified music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding of the identified</td>
<td>understanding of the identified</td>
<td>framework of understanding of the</td>
<td>element/s with some success, but</td>
<td>element/s with limited success;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music element/s, skilfully</td>
<td>music element/s, manipulating the</td>
<td>identified music element/s, generally</td>
<td>within an assisted framework; your work</td>
<td>your work was not cohesive and/or it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manipulating the element/s in a</td>
<td>element/s in a cohesive manner.</td>
<td>manipulating the element/s cohesively.</td>
<td>was not cohesive and/or it was</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cohesive and stylistic manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>incomplete.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Comments/Feedback:
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
Task 2: Melody Composition
You are to compose an 8-bar melody in C major, F major, or G major, for piano. Please refer to the worksheets provided in class to ensure you consider the features of a good melody. Your melody is to be written here, then transferred to Sibelius.

Scale: ________________________________

Once you have completed your draft above, you are to present this to your teacher. You may wish to modify your melody once you have put it into Sibelius. What notes work well? What notes don’t? If you make any changes, add them to the handwritten score above.

Composition Schema:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You composed with a very secure understanding of the identified music element/s, skillfully manipulating the element/s in a cohesive and stylistic manner.</td>
<td>You composed with a secure understanding of the identified music element/s, manipulating the element/s in a cohesive manner.</td>
<td>You generally composed within a secure framework of understanding of the identified music element/s, generally manipulating the element/s cohesively.</td>
<td>You used the identified music element/s with some success, but within an assisted framework; your work was not always cohesive.</td>
<td>You used the identified music element/s with limited success; your work was not cohesive and/or it was incomplete.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teacher Comments/Feedback:

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Print and attach your final copy to the end of this document.
Task 3: Harmony Composition
You are to add a harmony part to your finalised melody composition (from Task 2). Your harmony should support and enhance the melody and use diatonic (notes that belong to the key) chords as investigated in class. You are to add your harmony to the bass hand on your Sibelius piano score.

Write the scale your melody is based on in the shaded row before building chords.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Once you have completed your draft above, you are to present this to your teacher. You may wish to modify your chords once you have put it into Sibelius. What chords work well? What chords don’t? If you make any changes, add them to the handwritten score above.

Composition Schema:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You composed</td>
<td>You composed</td>
<td>You generally composed within</td>
<td>You used the identified music</td>
<td>You used the identified music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with a very secure</td>
<td>with a secure understanding</td>
<td>a secure framework of understanding</td>
<td>element/s with some success, but</td>
<td>element/s with limited success; your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>understanding of the</td>
<td>of the identified music</td>
<td>of the identified music</td>
<td>within an assisted framework; your</td>
<td>work was not cohesive and/or it was</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>identified music element/s</td>
<td>element/s, manipulating</td>
<td>element/s, generally manipulating the</td>
<td>work was not always cohesive.</td>
<td>incomplete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>element/s, skilfully</td>
<td>the element/s in a</td>
<td>the element/s cohesively.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>manipulating the</td>
<td>cohesive manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>element/s in a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cohesive and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stylistic manner.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher Comments/Feedback:

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Print and attach your final copy to the end of this document.

Signed: ___________________________ (teacher)

Date: ____/____/2011
Appendix G – Duration Worksheet (Cycle One)

This is a reformatted version of the worksheet on duration used in Cycle One.

The Music Elements: Duration

Duration refers to the lengths of sounds and silences in music.

Duration includes rhythm, beat, time signature/meter, tempo and pulse (yes, they are all different things, but often the terms are used interchangeably), along with rhythmic devices such as ostinato, syncopation and polyrhythms.

/smile With your teacher, discuss and define the differences between these durational terms. Add these terms to your music book.

1. Rhythm

Construct a rhythm tree starting from a semibreve and moving down to a semiquaver. Your teacher will help you to start.

2. Polyrhythms

Polyrhythm literally means ‘many rhythms’ and forms the basis of music around the world – polyrhythms are common in the musics of Africa and Indonesia, and are used also in many forms of classical and contemporary Western music. These ‘many rhythms’ occur at the same time, with the multiple rhythms interlocking with each other to form more complex parts.

Steve Reich is a famous American minimalist composer. His piece Clapping Music uses polyrhythm exclusively; in fact, it employs only one rhythmic pattern that is overlayed and forms a type of polyrhythm. Look at the music over the page.
**Clapping Music** (Steve Reich):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Clapping Music} & \text{ could also be notated as:} \\
1 & 2 & 3 & . & 5 & 6 & . & 8 & . & 10 & 11 & . \\
\text{Line 1:} & 1 & 2 & 3 & . & 5 & 6 & . & 8 & . & 10 & 11 & . \\
\text{Line 2:} & 1 & 2 & . & 4 & 5 & . & 7 & . & 9 & 10 & . & 12 \\
\end{align*}
\]

*Can you see how the two different ways of writing this match up?*

The rhythm of **Clapping Music** is clapped by performers grouped into two parts. They start clapping the same thing at the same time, but then something interesting happens: Reich creates what is known as a **phase shift**, where the rhythm of one part shifts to fall earlier (or later) than that of the other – in this case by a quaver pulse. Both groups play the same part several times, but then the first group continues playing that rhythm whilst the first note for the second group is taken from the beginning and placed on the end. In number notation it would look like this:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Line 1:} & 1 & 2 & 3 & . & 5 & 6 & . & 8 & . & 10 & 11 & . \\
\text{Line 2:} & 1 & 2 & . & 4 & 5 & . & 7 & . & 9 & 10 & . & 12 \\
\end{align*}
\]

This continues many times until both players end up with the same rhythm again.

*You may like to try performing Clapping Music with the class. Ensure you keep a steady quaver pulse.*

**3. Activity**

In a group of four, learn the following rhythm:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Line 1:} & 1 & 2 & 3 & . & 5 & . & 7 & . \\
\end{align*}
\]

Once you have this right, have other group members add these rhythms:

\[
\begin{align*}
\begin{array}{cccccc}
1 & 2 & . & 4 & . & 6 & . & 8 \\
1 & . & 3 & . & 5 & . & 7 & 8 \\
. & 2 & 3 & 4 & . & 6 & 7 & . \\
\end{array}
\end{align*}
\]

*Write each line from above in notated form in your books. Use a 4/4 meter. Don’t forget the original one!*
Appendix H – Melody Worksheet (Cycle One)

This is a reformatted version of the worksheet on melody used in Cycle One.

The Music Elements: Melody

The music elements do not work in isolation. In the case of the elements we have covered so far – duration and melody – they work together. You can’t really have a melody without duration.

Melody is the horizontal arrangement of sound.

Melodies are not just random placements of notes; as our definition above says, melodies are an ‘arrangement’ of sounds. One way we arrange sounds in music is through scales.

Scales consist of arrangements of tone and semitones (the building blocks of melodies). If you look at your paper piano keyboard, a tone is two steps away from your starting note (think tone – two steps), and a semitone is a single step from your starting note (think semitone – single step).

One of the most common types of scales is the major scale.

Major Scales

The major scale is arranged in the following order (ascending):

```
T  T  S  T  T  T  S
```

Remember that these are the spaces between the notes.

şi With the help of your teacher, use your paper keyboard to help you understand these arrangements. As a class, work out C major and write it below.

C Major

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

No matter what note you begin on, this pattern of tones and semitones must stay the same. You may be thinking: “How is this possible if the starting notes are different?” We use accidentals – sharps (#), flats (b) – to ensure that the arrangement of tones and semitones remain the same between scales.
Remember:

- When writing scales each letter name should only be used once (except for the start and end note). It is a good idea to write each letter name/note in first, then check – using your tone/semitone pattern – if you need to employ accidentals.
- The accidental goes before the note not after it.
- You should end on the same note you started on – if not, check your tone/semitone arrangement.

Using your paper keyboard, write the following scales:

**F Major**

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

**G Major**

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

*Have your teacher check your work.*

**From Scale to Melody…**
The scales you have just created form the foundations of melodies. Some of the notes in these scales are more important than others.

- The *first* note is called the *tonic* and anchors the piece in that key – it is a good idea to start and end with this note. Think of them as bookends.
- The *fifth* note is called the *dominant* and is the second most important note.
- The third most important note is the *fourth* note of the scale – this is called the *sub-dominant*.

*Circle the tonic, sub-dominant and dominant in the scales above.*
Features of a Good Melody

The following list will help you write a good melody.

1. Start and end with the tonic (first note of the scale).
2. Aim to make a climax – aim for a high point – in your melody around 3/4 of the way through.
3. Think in musical sentences – break your melody into even sections. If you do this, it is a good idea to use the dominant to end your first sentence and the tonic to end your second sentence.
4. Generally, move in a smooth motion up or down the scale. Don’t use too many leaps – they are difficult to sing and play and can make your melody sound fragmented.
5. Don’t be afraid to use a sequence – same material from an earlier bar at a different pitch.
6. Lastly – but most importantly – sing or play through your melody. It should be pleasing to listen to – if it isn’t, try changing some of the notes!

Hallelujah – Features of a Good Melody

Adagio \( \frac{1}{4} = 72 \)

I've heard there was a secret chord... that

David played and it pleased the Lord. But you don’t... really care for music

do you... It goes like this... the fourth, the fifth, the

minor fall, the major lift; the highest king composing Hallelujah...
Questions to ask and features to note of *Hallelujah*

1. What features of a ‘good melody’ does this piece use?
2. Where is the climax of this piece?
3. Find a melodic sequence.
4. Based on the notes you see used, what key do you think the piece is in?
5. Circle all of the tonic, subdominant and dominant notes. What do you notice about their use?
6. What do you notice about the melodic contour of this piece?
7. What do you notice about the end of the phrases? (The words ‘you’ in bar 5; and the last note?)

*Begin to construct your melody for your composition folio!*

*Remember to consider the information above.*

**THIS SPACE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK**
Appendix I – Harmony Worksheet (Cycle One)

This is a reformatted version of the worksheet on harmony used in Cycle One.

The Music Elements: Harmony

Harmony is the VERTICAL arrangement of sound.  
Think of it as notes stacked on top of each other that sound at the same time – a chord!

_Harmony_ (more specifically, chords) provide a framework to almost all forms of music. Chords are formed when two or more notes are sounded at the same time. Chords accompany melodies to place music in a specific key.

Scales provide us with the basis for forming _diatonic chords_ (chords belonging to the key). The three most important diatonic chords of any key signature are called the _primary chords_ and are _chords I, IV_ and _V_. This may sound familiar….

гаджет You may remember that when we wrote our melodies, we based them on scales. Some of the notes in these scales were more important than others. The same is true for harmony (this is because these important notes for the basis of these chords)!

гаджет Does this sound familiar?

- The _first_ chord is called the _tonic chord_ and anchors the piece in that key.
- The _fifth_ chord is called the _dominant chord_ and is the second most important chord.
- The third most important chord is the _fourth chord_ – this is called the sub-dominant chord.

These chords usually form a framework, or basis, for a piece of music.

So, how do I write harmony and use chords? Let’s have a look below…

1. Activity

Follow this example of constructing the diatonic chords of _C major_ with your teacher. An outline of the steps is given.

1. Write the scale your harmony will be based on in the bottom row of the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (scale)</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>IV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Take the first note (C) and then **add the third** note and the **fifth** note above it in the first column named I.

3. Once you have done this you can fill across the table according to the musical alphabet of that scale.

4. Then, transfer these chords to the stave.

2. **Activity**
   Complete the following table for the diatonic harmony of **G major**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>III</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>VI</th>
<th>VII</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 (scale)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>VII</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have your teacher check your work.

**Applying your Harmony to a Melody**
Your melody requires a harmony (or sequence of chords) to support it. Your melody will guide your harmony into certain combinations. That said, you can change either the melody or the harmony to make the aural effect more pleasing – but do this once you have a completed example.

To set chords to your melody:

1. Look at what note you have in the melody.

2. Find the occurrences of this note in your table for that scale; the column that you locate them in will tell you which chords are options for you to use. Yes, there are options, the information in the box on the last page may assist you choose the best one.

3. In 4/4 or 12/8, chords most often change every bar or every two beats – what notes you use in your melody will shape this decision.

4. Write your chord below your melody – don’t forget to line up the chord with the notes of the melody.
What harmony could you put to the following melody? The piece is in G major. Use the table you constructed above to assist you; also, look a the information below.

Have your teacher play your harmony.

Writing a ‘Good’ (or functional) Harmony
The following table will assist you write functional harmony – it is designed, not with the only way of structuring harmony, but as guidelines for you to form a good sequence (series of chords).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chord</th>
<th>Followed by</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>IV or V, sometimes VI, less often II or III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>V, sometimes IV or VI, less often I or III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>VI, sometimes IV or VI, less often I or II or V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV</td>
<td>V, sometimes I or II, less often III or VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V</td>
<td>I, sometimes IV or VI, less often II or III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VI</td>
<td>II or V, sometimes III or IV, less often I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VII</td>
<td>III, sometimes I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most important thing is that your harmony (chord progression) sounds good. If it doesn’t – then change it!

Begin to construct your harmony for your composition folio! Remember to consider the information above.

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Appendix J – Composition/Performance Task (Cycle Two)

Attached below is a reformatted and de-identified (school) task sheet for the summative assessment item used in Cycle Two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 8 Music Composition Task 2/Performance Task 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I-V-vi-IV Composition and Performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Year:** 8  
**Unit:** Understanding Music

**Student:** __________________________

**Date Given:** Week 5  
**Term:** Two

**Task:**
For this task you are to compose a melody that fits over the I-V-vi-IV progression in **G major**. You are to work this melody out aurally with the use of a **keyboard** or **guitar**. You do not have to write this melody down in staff notation form, but you should write the melody down in some way so you can practise it (letter names, tablature etc.).

Your melody is to be **8-bars long**. This means it will cycle over the chord progression **two times**. You should experiment with your melody aurally; you may also like to consider the advice given in class/on worksheets.

You are to **work in pairs** to generate your own melody (one melody per person). One person is to play the chord sequence and you are to play your melody over this sequence. You must ensure that you can play this sequence accurately for your partner (as they will for you!). You may use the backing track provided to help you both. The backing track is available at: R:/Music/Year 8 Music/Term 2.

Once you have made up your melody you need to practise it ready for sharing it as a **performance** in Week 9 (10 June). You may choose to use the backing track in this performance if you need to.

If your partner is absent on the day of performance, then you must still perform. This should not impact your grade, as the performance is assessed individually.

You will be assessed on the quality of your composition and your performance.

**Conditions:**
- In-class time will be provided.
- Refer to the examples and help sheets provided in class.
- You may play keyboard or guitar.
- You may use the backing track provided if you wish (no penalty)
- You will be assessed individually on the criteria attached.

**Date Due:** Week 9 (in class)  
**Standards:** (attached over page)
Standards Assessed:

Composition

1. **Application of scale** – your use of and experimentation with the notes of the scale

2. **Structure of ideas** – how you combine duration, harmony and melody to give structure to your musical idea/s

3. **Cohesion and style** – the way in which you form a cohesive, well-phrased piece of music that reflects a particular musical style

Performance

1. **Accurarcy and fluency of chord progression** – the way in which you combine your knowledge of the chords with your technique and the resulting fluency of the progression

2. **Technique** on chosen instrument – the way in which you hold the instrument, and strum/form chords

3. **Style** – the way you consistently and musically communicate the work

THIS SPACE HAS BEEN INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK
Composition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application of scale</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You applied and experimented with the scale in a musically appropriate way, strongly supporting the tonality of the work.</td>
<td>You applied the scale well and supported the tonality of the work.</td>
<td>You used the scale as a basis to your melody and generally supported the tonality of the work.</td>
<td>You used parts of the scale, but did it did not support the tonality of the work.</td>
<td>You did not use the scale as appropriate and it did not support the tonality of the work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure of ideas</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your melody combined very well with other music elements to give good structure to your idea/s.</td>
<td>Your melody combined well with other music elements and mostly gave good structure to your idea/s.</td>
<td>Your melody generally combined with other music elements and mostly supported the structure of your ideas.</td>
<td>Your melody did not always combine well with other music elements and impacted on the structuring of your ideas.</td>
<td>Your melody was not supported by the other music elements and there was a lack of structure to your ideas.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohesion and style</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your melody was musical, very cohesive, and communicated an excellent sense of style.</td>
<td>Your melody was mostly cohesive and communicated a sense of style.</td>
<td>Your melody was not always cohesive and reflected some style.</td>
<td>Your melody was not always cohesive, and it did not communicate style.</td>
<td>Your melody was not cohesive and did not reflect any style.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Composition Standard Awarded: ______

Performance:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accuracy and Fluency</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your performance was accurate and fluent, and well-communicated.</td>
<td>Your performance was mostly accurate and generally fluent.</td>
<td>Your performance was generally secure with minor issues surrounding fluency and accuracy.</td>
<td>Your performance contained issues in communication with regards to fluency and/or accuracy.</td>
<td>Your performance lacked accuracy and/or was not fluent.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technique</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your technique and skills supported the performance to a high level.</td>
<td>There were some minor issues with regard to your technique and skills, which did not significantly affect the performance.</td>
<td>Your technique and skills provided a basic level of support to the performance.</td>
<td>Your technique and skills did not consistently support the performance.</td>
<td>Your technique and skills inhibited the communication of the performance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Style</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your performance was stylistically accurate and musically approached.</td>
<td>Your performance was mostly accurate and fluent (only a few minor inconsistencies).</td>
<td>Style is apparent, but your performance contained some inconsistencies in accuracy and fluency.</td>
<td>Your performance conveyed some style, but many inconsistencies prevented fluency and accuracy.</td>
<td>There was no style evident in your performance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance Standard Awarded: ______

Signed: __________________     (teacher)     Date: ____/____/2011
Appendix K – Aural Skills Task (Cycle Two)
Attached below is a reformatted and de-identified (school) task sheet for the aural skills assessment item used in Cycle Two.

| Year 8 Music Aural Skills Task 1 |
| Aural Skills Examination |

**Year:** 8  
**Unit:** Understanding Music

**Student:** ____________________________

**Date:** Week 8 (in class)  
**Term:** Two

**Examination Outline:**
You are to complete the two melodic dictation questions in the space provided. Both are based on the I-V-vi-IV progression.

In the first question, you need to identify the pitch only. The starting note has been given. Be sure to use the rhythms provided above the stave. You will have 6 hearings.

In the second question, you are to notate both rhythm and pitch. The starting note and rhythm value has been given. You will have 8 hearings.

**Conditions:**
- □ Attempt all questions in the space provided.
- □ 30 minutes class time allowed.
- □ Writing implements only to be used. Please use pencil.
- □ Notes, irrespective of whether they are relevant to the context, are not allowed.
- □ You will be assessed according to the attached criteria.
- □ Supervised exam conditions.

**Standards:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aural Skills</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>You identified and notated with no/very few inaccuracies, consistently maintaining the overall shape and function of the music.</td>
<td>You identified and notated with few inaccuracies, that did not affect overall shape or function of the music.</td>
<td>You identified and notated, but with some inaccuracies that altered the shape and function of the music in a minor way.</td>
<td>You identified and notated with many inaccuracies, which altered the overall shape and function of the music.</td>
<td>You did not identify and notate with accuracy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Standard Awarded:** _______
Question 1

Complete the following melodic dictation in the space provided. It is based on the I-V-vi-IV progression. You are to identify the pitch only. The starting note has been given. Be sure to use the rhythms provided above the stave. You will have 6 hearings.

\[
\begin{align*}
   \text{I} & \quad \text{V} & \quad \text{vi} & \quad \text{IV} \\
   \text{I} & \quad \text{V} & \quad \text{vi} & \quad \text{IV} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Question 2

Complete the following melodic dictation in the space provided. It is based on the I-V-vi-IV progression. You are to identify the rhythm and pitch. The starting note and rhythm value has been given. You will have 8 hearings.

\[
\begin{align*}
   \text{I} & \quad \text{V} & \quad \text{vi} & \quad \text{IV} \\
   \text{I} & \quad \text{V} & \quad \text{vi} & \quad \text{IV} \\
\end{align*}
\]

END OF EXAMINATION

Check your answers and make sure your name is on the top sheet.
Appendix L – Keyboard Chords Help Sheet (Cycle Two)

This is a reformatted version of the keyboard chords help sheet used in Cycle Two.

I, V, vi and IV Chords on Keyboard

Use this sheet to help you play chords I, V, vi, IV in G major on the keyboard.

G (I)

\[
\begin{align*}
C & \quad D & \quad E & \quad F & \quad G & \quad A & \quad B \\
C & \quad D & \quad E
\end{align*}
\]

D (V)

\[
\begin{align*}
C & \quad D & \quad E & \quad F & \quad G & \quad A & \quad B \\
C & \quad D & \quad E
\end{align*}
\]

Em (vi)

\[
\begin{align*}
C & \quad D & \quad E & \quad F & \quad G & \quad A & \quad B \\
C & \quad D & \quad E
\end{align*}
\]

C (IV)

\[
\begin{align*}
C & \quad D & \quad E & \quad F & \quad G & \quad A & \quad B \\
C & \quad D & \quad E
\end{align*}
\]

All of these chords are in root position – that is, the bottom note of the chords is the name of the chord.

The notes in these chords can be ‘re-arranged’ to make them easier to play – when this occurs, they are called inversions.

Inversions contain the same notes arranged in a different order. They might sound a little bit different and they also make playing chords a little easier by minimising shifts.

Try experimenting with some to see if they are easier to play and if they sound better.
Appendix M – Guitar Chords Help Sheet (Cycle Two)

This is a reformatted version of the guitar chords help sheet used in Cycle Two.

I, IV, V and VI Chords on Guitar

Use this sheet to play chords I, IV, V and VI in G major on guitar.

💡 The string to the left of each chord frame represents the low E-string, the lowest/thickest note. This will be at the top of the guitar when you are holding it in playing position (looking down across the strings).

```
I  V  vi  IV
```

The following scale will assist you when you begin working on your melody.

```
Remember, the bottom line on the TAB stave is the THICKEST/LOWEST string on your guitar (which we be on TOP when you look down at it!)
Appendix N – Harmony/Melody in Practice Worksheet (Cycle Two)
This is a reformatted version of the worksheet used in Cycle Two.

Combining Melody and Harmony

Just to revise….
Harmony often refers to chords in music – vertical arrangement of notes, or notes played together at the same time. Chords often support a melody and ’cement’ music in a particular key.

You will remember that our primary chords are: I, IV and V.

- I is called the tonic chord as it is based on the tonic, or first note, of the scale
- IV is called the subdominant chord as it is based on the subdominant, or fourth note of the scale
- V is called the dominant chord as it is based on the dominant, or fifth note, of the scale

Chords I, IV and V are called the primary chords as the notes they use cover all of the notes of the scale – think of the primary colours in art, combined they can make all of the colours.

Chord vi is also a chord that is often used. It is known as the submediant, as it is based on the sixth note of the scale. This chord uses a small Roman numeral because it is a minor chord.

Together the chords I, IV, V and vi form the harmonic basis to many popular songs. Remember the Axis of Awesome video we watched – all of these songs were based on the same chords in the following progression (or series/sequence of chords):

I V vi IV

Listen to your teacher play these chords.

Activity
Complete the chord table for G major.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I</th>
<th>II</th>
<th>iii</th>
<th>IV</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>vi</th>
<th>vii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I (scale)</td>
<td>G</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>F#</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>iii</td>
<td>IV</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>vi</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fill in the 3rd and 5th above to work out the diatonic chords of G major. Chord I, IV, V and vi are highlighted in red.

The notes shaded in red are possible melody notes that will ‘belong’ (sound good) to the chord they are part of.
As you may notice, you have some options. If you are playing the chord G major, a good place to start with a melody note would be G, B or D. It is always good to have this note on the strong beats of the bar (beat 1 and 3, if in 4/4); between these notes, you can use whatever note you wish – these notes that fill in gaps between chordal notes are called passing notes.

Also, consider the following list to help you write a good melody.

1. Start and end with the tonic (first note of the scale).
2. Aim to make a climax – aim for a high point – in your melody around three-quarters of the way through.
3. Think in musical sentences – break your melody into even sections. If you do this, it is a good idea to use the dominant to end your first sentence and the tonic to end your second sentence.
4. Generally, move in a smooth motion up or down the scale. Don’t use too many leaps – they are difficult to sing and play and can make your melody sound fragmented.
5. Don’t be afraid to use a sequence – same material from an earlier bar at a different pitch.
6. Lastly – but most importantly – sing or play through your melody. It should be pleasing to listen to – if it isn’t, try changing some of the notes…!

Activity
In pairs, play this chord progression and have the one person start to construct a melody that ‘sits’ above it. Let each person try this.

Space for ideas and reflection…
Appendix O – Performance Task Sheet (Cycle Three)

Attached below is a reformatted and de-identified (school) task sheet for the performance task in the third cycle of the project.

**Year 8 Music Performance Task 2**
Steal My Kisses

**Year:** 8  
**Unit:** Understanding Music

**Student:** ________________________________

**Date Given:** Week 2  
**Term:** Three

**Task:**
You are to perform ‘Steal My Kisses’ as part of a whole-class ensemble. You may choose to:

- play the chords on **guitar** (G, C, D)
- play the chords on **keyboard** (G, C, D)
- play **bass guitar** (notated part)
- **sing** the melody
- play the melody on **keyboard** (melody, or both hands)
- play the **drum-kit** (due to the importance of this part, the drum-kit will be reserved for students who have lessons already)
- play the melody on an **instrument of your choice** that you already learn e.g. trumpet, violin, saxophone etc…

You will be given the opportunity to rehearse each week – initially individually and in small, like-section groups (e.g. all the guitarists), then as a whole class group.

A backing track will be provided (as an .mp3) should you wish to practise at home; however, the performance by the class for assessment will not use this – the performance will be completely consist of your input/playing.

You will be assessed on the quality of your performance – the **accuracy and fluency of your part**; the **skills and techniques** you use to convey the music; and the **musicality** with which you do this. You will be assessed **individually**.

If you are absent on the day of performance, then you will be required to play your part for the teacher with the backing track in your own time. This will not impact your grade, as the performance is assessed individually.

**Conditions:**
- □ You may sing or you may play any instrument as listed above
- □ You will be assessed individually

**Date Due:** Week 7 (in class)  
**Standards:** (attached over page)
Standards Assessed:

1. **Accuracy and fluency** – the way in which you demonstrate knowledge of the score and the fluency with which you present it.

2. **Skills and techniques** – your demonstration of the skills and techniques (such as knowledge of chords, finger positioning, voice projection etc…) use to convey the music.

3. **Musicality** – the combination of your knowledge of the music and your skills used to convey it through performance.

Standard Schema:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accuracy and fluency</strong></td>
<td>You played the music competently with a high degree of accuracy and fluency.</td>
<td>You played the music generally with accuracy and fluency, with some minor inconsistencies that did not greatly affect the product.</td>
<td>You played the music with some accuracy; however, your performance was not always presented fluently and/or there were gaps in the progression/melody.</td>
<td>You played the music inaccurately and/or your performance was incomplete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Skills and technique</strong></td>
<td>Your technique and skill supported the performance to a high level.</td>
<td>There were some minor issues with regard to your technique and skill, which did not significantly affect the performance.</td>
<td>Your technique and skill provided a basic level of support to the performance.</td>
<td>Your technique and skill did not consistently support the performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Musicality</strong></td>
<td>Your performance was highly musical performance and effectively conveyed the style of the work.</td>
<td>Your performance was musical and generally conveyed the style of the work.</td>
<td>Your performance showed evidence of the style of the work.</td>
<td>Your performance showed limited evidence of the style of the work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall Standard Awarded: ______

**Signed:** ___________________________  **Date:** ___/___/2011

_(teacher)_
Appendix P – Aural Skills Task Sheet (Cycle Three)
Attached below is a reformatted and de-identified (school) task sheet for the aural skills task in the third cycle of the project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 8 Music Aural Skills Task 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aural Realisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Year:** 8  
**Unit:** Understanding Music

**Student:** __________________________

**Date Given:** Week 2  
**Term:** Three

**Task:**
This task contains two sections – aural realisation and transcription.

1. **Aural realisation**
   Reproducing a heard sound

2. **Transcription**
   Notating what is heard with repeated hearings

**1. Aural realisation**
Using your computer you are to video record yourself singing the melody that is on R:/Year 8 Music/Term Three/Aural with the filename is *Aural Realisation 1 – Year 8 Music*. This melody is a recording (no notation is attached) and you are to replicate this melody with your voice. You need to video record yourself and be clearly identifiable in the picture.

**2. Transcription**
You are to write out the melody that is on R:/Year 8 Music/Term Three/Aural with the filename *Transcription 1 – Year 8 Music*. You are to attach a handwritten copy of your transcription to this task sheet.

For both of these tasks you are to work independently. The teacher will not be able to assist you prepare for these specific tasks, but will work through exercises in class that will assist you prepare. Of course, you can ask questions about the task though!

On the due date (Week 7) you are to attach your handwritten transcription (2.) to this task sheet and place your video file of your aural realisation (1.) onto the USB provided in class. You must label your file as SURNAME_First name_Class_Aural, eg. CLARKE, Ben_8X_Aural.

**Conditions:**
- This task is to be completed individually
- Your aural realisation (1.) must be videoed (for purposes of authenticity). You can use your College laptop to do this easily (please see your teacher if you need help).
- Ensure to label your electronic file as described above

**Due Date:** Week 7 (in class)  
**Standards:** (attached over page)
Standard Schema:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aural Realisation</td>
<td>Your ability to reproduce sound heard aurally</td>
<td>You realised the phrase with a very high degree of accuracy, with no (+), or one or two minor, flaws that impacted the musical intentions of the phrase.</td>
<td>You realised the phrase mostly accurately, with some flaws that did not significantly impact the musical intentions of the phrase.</td>
<td>You realised the phrase mostly accurately, with some flaws that impacted the musical intentions of the phrase.</td>
<td>Your realisation of the phrase was fragmented and incomplete.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>Your ability to notate what is heard</td>
<td>You notated with a very high degree of accuracy, with no (+) or minor, flaws that still maintained contour, shape and melodic intent.</td>
<td>You notated mostly accurately, with some flaws that slightly affected the contour, shape and melodic intent.</td>
<td>You notated in part, with some flaws that affected the contour, shape and melodic intent.</td>
<td>You notated parts of the music, but flaws impact the contour, shape and melodic intent.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Standards Achieved:

Aural Realisation: ______

Transcription: ______

Comments:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ___/___/2011

(teacher)
Appendix Q – Songwriting Task Booklet (Cycle Four)

Attached below is a reformatted and de-identified (school) task sheet for the composition in the fourth cycle of the project.

Year 8 Music Composition Task 3/Performance Task 3
Songwriting Folio

Year: 8  Unit: Songwriting
Student: ________________________________________________

Date Given: Week 2  Term: Four

Task:
Songwriting closely integrates composition and performance and is often done with help of the skills and ideas of other musicians. In a group of no more than 5, you are to collectively write a song in a popular style. You are to use the instruments accessible to you in class – keyboard and guitar – or, you may use an instrument you have lessons on if you wish (e.g. violin, saxophone etc…), though you should check this with the teacher first. Your song will be supported by a backing track that your group will also create. There is no set time for the length of your song.

As a group, you are to use GarageBand to create a backing track to support your song. The backing track is to show a clear structure (verse, chorus, bridge etc…) and is to use percussion and drums ONLY. Refer back to the listening examples and our discussion on song structure – remember that most sections will use bar lengths that are multiples of 4. You may re-edit your backing track as you progress through the development of your song.

Above your backing track you are to compose a melody (for instrument or voice) and a harmonic framework (chords). Refer back to the work from class about constructing a melody and your practical experience of chords (guitar and keyboard last term) as well as the work completed in your composition folio (Term One and Two). As a starting point, you may wish to use the I-VI-IV-V progression from last term. You can use this as a basis and add more chords in too if you wish.

Given the nature of songwriting, you are to share (perform) your song for the class. You do not have to write your song down in any specified format (or at all) – the composition will be assessed aurally.

Your completed song will be performed to the class in Week 9.

Areas Assessed:

**Composition**
- Structure
- Melody
- Harmony
- Cohesion
- Reflections

**Performance**
- Accuracy and fluency
- Skills and technique
- Musicality
Conditions:
• In-class time will be provided.
• You must use GarageBand to create an appropriate backing (drums and percussion only).
• Refer to the examples and help sheets provided in class.
• The composition will require individual work with some teacher instruction on the required techniques and processes of the task.
• You will be assessed on the criteria attached.

Due Date: Week 9 (performed in class)
YEAR 8 MUSIC – SONGWRITING REFLECTIONS

Week 2 Reflection

How do you think your song is progressing?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What did you enjoy about today’s lesson?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What didn’t you enjoy about today’s lesson?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
Week 3 Reflection

How do you think your song is progressing?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Are you happy with the sound of your backing track? Why/why not?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

What did you enjoy about today’s lesson?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

What didn’t you enjoy about today’s lesson?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Over the past 2 lessons, how would you rate working in groups?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

Any other comments?

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________
Week 4 Reflection

How do you think your song is progressing?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Does your backing track make it easier to songwrite? Why/why not?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What did you enjoy about today’s lesson?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What didn’t you enjoy about today’s lesson?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

How do you think your song is progressing?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
**Week 5 Reflection**

How do you think your song is progressing?
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What are you finding hard/easy about the songwriting process?
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What did you enjoy about today’s lesson?
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What didn’t you enjoy about today’s lesson?
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments?
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
**Week 6 Reflection**

How do you think your song is progressing?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

What are you finding hard/easy about the songwriting process?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

What did you enjoy about today’s lesson?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

What didn’t you enjoy about today’s lesson?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________
**Week 7 Reflection**

How do you think your song is progressing?

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

What are you finding hard/easy about the songwriting process?

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

What did you enjoy about today’s lesson?

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

What didn’t you enjoy about today’s lesson?

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

Any other comments?

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________
Final Reflection – (to be completed in week of performance)

Please rate the quality of your song?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>OK</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What did you find easy about the songwriting process?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What was challenging about the song writing process?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Explain any difficulties of group work you may have experienced?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

How did you solve any issues in your group?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
## Standards:

### Composition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your structure</td>
<td>Your structure was clear and effectively</td>
<td>Your structure was clear and generally</td>
<td>Your structure was mostly clear and</td>
<td>Your structure was sometimes unclear and/or</td>
<td>Your structure was unclear or incomplete,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was clear and</td>
<td>employed components (verse, chorus etc…)</td>
<td>employed components (verse, chorus etc…)</td>
<td>components (verse, chorus etc…) generally</td>
<td>did not employ components (verse, chorus</td>
<td>or did not employ components (verse, chorus</td>
</tr>
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<td>effectively</td>
<td>that supported the genre.</td>
<td>that supported the genre.</td>
<td>supported the genre.</td>
<td>etc…) that supported the genre.</td>
<td>etc…) that supported the genre.</td>
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<td>employed</td>
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<td>components</td>
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<td>(verse, chorus</td>
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<td>etc…) that</td>
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<td>supported the</td>
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<td>genre.</td>
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| Melody             | Your melodic content was very well-crafted  | Your melodic content was generally secure,  | Your melodic content generally showed a      | Your melodic content was problematic and/or |
|                    | and attentive to contour and phrasing, and  | showing good attention to contour and        | sound knowledge of contour and phrasing, and  | phrasing was not consistent with            |
|                    | supported the style and genre.             | phrasing, and supported the style and genre. | mostly supported the style and genre.        | harmony/ backing.                           |
|                    |                                             |                                             |                                             |                                             |                                             |

| Harmony            | Your harmony was functional and inventive,  | Your harmony was generally functional, and   | Your harmony was present, and sometimes      | No harmony evident and/or limited           |
|                    | and effective supported the style and genre.| supported the style and genre.              | supported the style and genre.               | application of harmony, which did not       |
|                    |                                             |                                             |                                             | support the style.                           |

| Cohesion           | There was excellent cohesion of music      | There was good cohesion of music elements.  | There were problematic issues with regards   | The piece was not cohesive.                 |
|                    | elements.                                  |                                             | to cohesion of music elements.              |                                             |
|                    |                                             |                                             |                                             |                                             |

| Reflections        | You gave thoughtful, insightful and        | You gave thoughtful reflections.            | You showed some reflection on practice.      | You showed minimal reflection on practice.  |
|                    | complete reflections.                      |                                             |                                             |                                             |
|                    |                                             |                                             |                                             |                                             |

**Composition Standard: __________**

Signed: ______________________ (teacher) Date: ___/___/2011
Performance:

<table>
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<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accuracy and fluency</strong></td>
<td>You played the music competently with a high degree of accuracy and fluency.</td>
<td>You played the music generally with accuracy and fluency, with some minor inconsistencies that did not greatly affect the product.</td>
<td>You played the music with some accuracy; however, your performance was not always presented fluently and/or there were gaps in the progression/ melody.</td>
<td>You played the music with some inaccuracies, with lapses in fluency.</td>
<td>You played the music inaccurately and/or your performance was incomplete.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Skills and technique</strong></td>
<td>Your technique and skill supported the performance to a high level.</td>
<td>There were some minor issues with regard to your technique and skill, which did not significantly affect the performance.</td>
<td>Your technique and skill provided a basic level of support to the performance.</td>
<td>Your technique and skill did not consistently support the performance.</td>
<td>You technique and skill inhibited the communication of the performance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Musicality</strong></td>
<td>Your performance was highly musical performance and effectively conveyed the style of the work.</td>
<td>Your performance was musical and generally conveyed the style of the work.</td>
<td>Your performance showed evidence of the style of the work.</td>
<td>Your performance showed limited evidence of the style of the work.</td>
<td>Your performance did not communicate the style of the work.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Performance Standard: ________

Signed: __________________________ (teacher) Date: ___/___/2011
REFERENCES


Homan, R. (2002). The principle of assumed consent: the ethics of gatekeeping. In M. McNamee & D. Bridges (Eds.), The ethics of educational research (pp. 21-40). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.


