

If it be your will
That a voice be true
From this broken hill
I will sing to you
From this broken hill
All your praises they shall ring
If it be your will
To let me sing

- Leonard Cohen

STUDENT VOICES ON INCLUSION, MUSIC IDENTITY
AND THE POWER OF COMPOSITION

by

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ABSTRACT

This Narrative Inquiry examines creative agency in school systems as expressed through the voices of former and current music students. Four stories representing widely varied experiences and cultural capitals are shared and explored. Interviews with current students and personal reflections on classroom practice provide commentary for each story. Initial research is grounded in music identity, inclusion policy and music composition practices. Emergent issues explored include the complexity inherent in teaching creativity in classrooms, the power dynamics involved in assessing creativity and the social implications of identifying as a creative person. The research concludes with implications for inclusion policy, systemic change and creative classroom methodologies.

Keywords: Narrative Inquiry, Creative Agency, Cultural Capital, Music Identity, Inclusion, Composition

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my husband, Jeff Fevens for his unwavering support and belief in my abilities. I would like to dedicate this to my mother, Mary Keating for putting me on the path toward music and therefor many of the extraordinary moments in my life and for her willingness to share her writing expertise, and to my father, Mike Keating for teaching me that dreaming and imagination are as important as breathing.

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I would like to thank all of the students, former and current, who took the time to talk to me and share their stories. Their voices continue to inspire me to reach for new understanding of the power of creativity to transform and to liberate.

PREFACE

Within this thesis there are several keywords that could be subject to multiple interpretations.

Composition represents any type of music making where the students are going beyond replication into interpretation and creation of original material. This includes arranging, composing, reinventing and improvising and it often, but not exclusively, has a performance component.

Cultural capital is defined as the accumulation of aesthetic experiences people have throughout their lives and the impact those experiences have on their sense of identity. Music identity is the impact music and music activities have on a person's sense of self.

Inclusion is also a shifting term that has undergone many transformations over the years. The Government of New Brunswick encourages a system that "puts the individual student at its heart and nurtures and supports his/her learning" (GNB, 2012, p. 4). It is from this philosophical position that I argue for creative students and methodologies.

Agency is simply the "power to act" (Lill, 2014, p. 228) and refers to students' abilities to exercise ownership over the direction of their learning.

The word creativity is used extensively in this thesis and is subject to several interpretations by the interview participants. When I think of creativity, I agree with Robinson's (2015) definition that creativity is, "the ability to generate new ideas and apply them in practice" (p. 136). I also think it is the ability to look at something that everyone else has seen and understand it differently. When discussing creative courses, I am referring to any subjects that place "the ability to generate new ideas" at the heart of

their pedagogy. Any subject can and should be inherently creative. It is possible to have very creative math classes and it is possible to have very uncreative music classes. The difference is not the subject matter, but how it is taught.

The students are not always discussing these subjects from the same frame of reference as I am. Their sense of creativity emerges from their own life experiences and artistic processes. Many spoke of creativity in relation to the creative activities or subjects they were involved in. Some described it as the act of making or doing. Some described it as problem solving, thinking outside of the box or risk-taking. For most, creativity was synonymous with their sense of self and how they interacted with the world around them. It is apparent in their discussions that they are trying to understand the ambiguous nature of creativity.

I believe it is not possible to impose one universal definition of creativity on creative students without disenfranchising some, but you can look at the processes involved in the act of creating to help them gain a deeper understanding of their own creative voices.

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Chapter One: Creativity And Student Voices

Introduction

Music teachers are challenged every day to meet the diverse needs of their inclusionary classrooms, where students' previous experiences can range from none whatsoever to years of private study. If the goal is to inspire all students to engage with music as consumers and producers, careful consideration of diverse and accessible lessons is required. Through my own pedagogical observations, I would argue one way to ensure students are engaged is through projects that allow them to create at their own level of music ability. Through years of experimenting with composition, I have observed that creative work in the music classroom seems to allow students to express themselves and their ideas, and often transcends perceived barriers caused by social identifiers such as race, sexual orientation, intellectual and physical challenges. Group endeavour, in particular, in the creative realm seems to promote a sense of belonging and solidarity.

I am a music specialist and in a Supplementary Position of Responsibility (SPR) for Fine Arts at the high school where I have taught for 17 years. I have been involved in on-line music communities that advocate the inclusion of creativity in the classroom, primarily with teachers that are shifting from an instrumental-based program to technology-driven models. I have been a practitioner of composition in my teaching methodology and a strong advocate for its ability to address issues of social inclusion in the classroom. Students in grade 11 and 12 in my music classes have completed two compilations of digital music where the students were responsible for the creation of the music, the execution of the music for recording, and the final production of all aspects of

the digital formatting. The students in my classes represent all levels of playing ability.

My practice has undergone a gradual shift from teacher-centered methodologies to student-directed experiences. As a young educator, I believed it was my responsibility to prepare my students to attend university for music. My understanding has gradually shifted from that exclusionary attitude toward a more holistic approach. I now believe it is my responsibility to ensure that my students have the requisite skills necessary to have a lifelong relationship with music in whatever capacity to which they aspire, whether it be in formal education settings, popular music culture or for their own personal gratification. My goal has been to remove the barriers that exist between musicians who train solely in the classical realm from those that are self-taught and to open up a mutually beneficial dialogue. As my practice evolved, I noticed that when I asked my students to compose their own music they became deeply engaged in sharing part of themselves in the process. That shared vulnerability had a profound effect on the classroom environment, creating communities of mutual experiences between disparate social circles. I began to question whether the practices associated with composition, mainly those of creative activity, promoted inclusive attitudes amongst its practitioners.

While pursuing my graduate studies, I became interested in examining students' impressions of inclusion as it relates to their own personal agency and creativity in public school systems. In *Creative Schools*, Robinson (2015) defines creativity as, "the ability to generate new ideas and apply them in practice" (p. 136). When I think of creativity, I define it as the ability to look at something that everyone else has seen and understand it differently. I questioned whether students were given opportunities to express their creativity and how they interpreted those experiences? I knew what I believed when it came to creativity in the classroom, but were my observations an

accurate reflection of students' experiences? My practice had become focused on students exploring as many different aspects of music making as possible and although I had come to believe that informal and creative music classrooms centered on composition could subvert traditional power dynamics, I questioned whether creative students felt valued in education settings and whether there were classrooms that allowed students to become part of a creative community where personal agency is valued and critical to group dynamics. It seemed important to challenge my assumptions and attempt to validate my methods as a necessary step before advocacy. I was also curious whether any research existed that supported my suppositions.

Music education is often relegated to accessory status, a nice addition to children's education, but not protected from the mutable views of politicians. When austerity measures are enacted fine arts programs are usually the first programs to be cut. Although I find myself in a very supportive working environment, many New Brunswick music teachers are often faced with trying to provide quality work with shrinking budgets and indifferent support systems. As they work to create equitable environments in their inclusive classrooms, recognizing students' music identity and creative agency could assist teachers in allowing all students to contribute, thus increasing accessibility, relevance and student engagement. From a social justice standpoint, when supportive and safe creative environments are provided, our students' differences become valued for the unique contributions they make to the collective class dynamic instead of being labelled as threats to productive endeavour.

It was important that my research have direct implications for my work. I wanted to implement my understandings in my daily practice. As mentioned, in my classroom experiences are student-led. If a particular subject or project is attracting interest - then

that is the direction the class follows. The thematic material in the final music compilation is generated from those experiences. I rarely begin a project knowing what the end result will be and feel my teaching methodology can be best described as emergent, although initial commencement on any project begins with extensive forethought and planning. I simply recognize the project may end up unfolding in a completely unexpected manner.

My own music education could not be more diametrically opposite to how I teach. My training was traditional. All aspects of music were relegated to separate silos of learning: performance, history, composition and theory. Rarely was I encouraged to pursue my own creative ideas. Pre-service reflection solidified my resolve to provide different experiences for my students. Composition, in particular, represents a synthesis of fundamental music skills, yet remains attainable to any student with any level of music experience. For the purpose of this thesis, I am defining composition as it happens in my classroom. Composition represents any type of music making where the students are going beyond replication into interpretation and creation of original material. This includes arranging, composing, reinventing and improvising and it often, but not exclusively, has a performance component.

When students are asked to compose, particularly in groups, they need to reflect on their own music identity in relation to the cultural capital of their classmates. Their identity is constantly under construction throughout the collaboration while they challenge each other's preconceived notions and experiences. They are contributing to their cultural capital and learning from the capital of their peers. They need to negotiate the inclusion of everyone's contributions to come up with a mutually beneficial result. While observing these interactions happening, I began to question whether the

methodologies used in classrooms labelled as creative could benefit classrooms considered more traditional and perhaps viewed as less inclusive as a result.

Research Questions

Traditionally, music students represent a minority and sometimes marginalized school population. Music students may not function well in environments that do not give them an opportunity to exercise their creativity or they may be discouraged from even trying by inflexible rubrics and prescriptive assignments. I was interested in whether students view classrooms as inclusive to their creative personalities and whether they see inclusive policy as applicable to their own education experiences. Although as a music educator I have strong ideas about the value of music, by listening to the concerns and memories of the students “we can begin to see the world through the eyes of others, to experience empathy, and to move towards an understanding of the ways in which worlds are experienced” (Barrett and Stauffer, 2009, introduction, para. 4).

Recognizing that my initial research was simply a means of gaining understanding beyond my own personal observations, I decided to focus on the following questions:

- A) Do former and current music students perceive school systems as allowing them to direct their learning experiences and express their creativity in a meaningful way?
- B) Does being involved in creative endeavour at school impact students’ music identities and if so, in what way does the impact manifest?
- C) What systemic changes do students propose to meet the needs of creative members of the school community and do their ideas reflect current inclusion ideology?

Reflecting on the students' narratives and my own professional stories, I had hoped to discuss the value of composition as a substantial methodology for delivering music curriculum in an inclusive manner. I was hoping to draw a connection between creative approaches and inclusive classroom environments. What became apparent was that students define creativity by closely linking it to their lived experiences. Often they struggle with the ambiguity of what creativity is and the role it plays in education; however, they continue to value activities that give them the freedom to express a part of themselves in their work. What emerged from the research was an understanding that creative experience is complex, deeply entwined with personal identity, sometimes fragile and fleeting, sometimes all consuming.

Chapter Two: Conceptual Frameworks And Literature Review

Before interviewing my students I had to clarify my questions and situate my thinking in a theoretical context. Engaging in narrative inquiry “requires careful analysis of narrative data against a series of frames including those of research participant, the researcher, and the larger cultural narratives in which these individuals are situated” (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009, chap. 1, sec. 5, para. 2). The larger cultural narrative in my research focused on inclusion policy, but it is the voices of music students sharing their ideas and experiences around high school education systems that affect the interpretation of the framework. When hoping to engage in emergent Narrative Inquiry, where students’ stories will reveal what they value and what experiences have impacted their identity, having a research framework seemed counter intuitive; yet it was important for me to provide context for my own assumptions and observations. My questions were centred on inclusion, music identity and composition so I directed my literature review to those three areas of study. The inclusion research looked at policy globally and locally and examined some case studies involving creative spaces for marginalized students. Research on music identity provided a further frame for discussion and, in tandem with my own teaching experiences, allowed for examination of my ideas for a music curriculum that focuses on composition as a vehicle for inclusion in music classrooms. Looking at research on power dynamics of music classrooms, where students’ engagement and success may depend on whether they see their cultural capital valued, allowed me to examine my perceptions of the relationship between music teacher and student in the creation of creative and inclusive classroom spaces. Looking at informal music research as described by Green (2005, 2006, 2008) allowed me to make comparisons to my own classroom pedagogy. The research allowed me to clarify my

position in the narrative and connect it to larger social implications. Clandinin (2010) explains the importance of moving beyond personal justification to larger context:

The personal justification comes from the importance, in narrative inquiries, of situating yourself in the study. Sometimes narrative inquirers write only a personal justification. While this justification is important, we also need to justify the research practically, that is, how will it be insightful to changing or thinking differently about the inquirer's own and others' practices? The third kind of justification asks the inquirer to think about larger social and educational issues the inquiry might address. Even as a narrative inquiry is being planned, attending closely to practical and social justifications begins to point inquirers toward an inquiry's end point, that is, to being able to answer the "so what?" and "who cares?" questions. (p. 6)

Giving my suppositions a theoretical framework allowed me to move past my personal ideas to examining the larger implications of creative students' experiences in school systems.

Inclusion

I was very interested in examining inclusion as a universal precept that encompasses students' sense of place in the classroom. I believe the ideal of inclusion should apply to all students, as no children come to class without previous influences impacting on their social identity and cultural capital, either positively or negatively. For the purpose of this discussion, cultural capital is defined as the accumulation of aesthetic experiences people have throughout their lives and the impact those experiences have on their sense of identity. The vulnerability and personal commitment required to create and

share music, to give it personal context, also fosters a strong sense of community through collective endeavour. Music teachers have a powerful tool to engage any level of ability; however, creativity can also be a very vulnerable space. Teachers must insist upon an environment of respect and formative self and peer assessment.

The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994) declares:

Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system. (p. 8)

Participating countries have moved to adopt policies that recognize the importance of providing the structures needed for everyone to have equitable access to education and autonomous living. Inclusion policy has been adopted throughout Canada based on the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982) which states, “Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability” (sec. 15:1). In education the implication is that every student has the right to take part in schooling that supports his or her special interests and needs. Students see firsthand the results of policy change in their classrooms, both positive and negative, and have opinions on whether the system, as it is now delivered, is an effective one. Political agendas, special interest lobbyists, parents, big business, curriculum theorists and teachers all contribute to reforms that have a direct impact on the quality of education

that students receive; yet those that are experimented on, the students, are rarely given the opportunity to voice their views on current reform, even though they are the stakeholders most affected by the decisions being made. Hanley and Montgomery (2005) state it precisely; “the curriculum has focused narrowly on classroom practice with the teacher implementing a curriculum that experts have developed. Students are at the bottom of the hierarchy” (p. 18). However, students have valuable and thoughtful ideas about the quality of education they receive and a vested interest in what they would like to see change. In my experience, students are eager to share their stories and ideas around curriculum, but rarely have the opportunity, despite the possibility that as consumers of the education being provided, they may have ideas that could drastically improve how curriculum is delivered.

The New Brunswick education system adopted formalized inclusion built on the foundation of 95 recommendations that were put forth in *The MacKay Report* (2006) although, in theory, inclusion was in the school system for the last 25 years. In his report MacKay (2006) defines inclusion in two ways:

An inclusive school system is one that in both its design and its effect continually strives to ensure that each student has access to and is enabled to participate in the school community. It would also allow each student to be part of the community in positive and reinforcing ways. The diversity of the student body should also be reflected in the daily operations of the school system. This type of inclusion, we refer to as social inclusion. An inclusive education system also strives to continually ensure that each student receives appropriate benefit from the educational services toward the fulfilling of their potential. This we refer to as academic inclusion. (p. 26)

MacKay's recommendations were meant to question the practice of keeping students isolated from mainstream classrooms because of their abilities and physical challenges. It was meant to address discrimination and inequitable learning environments. More recently, *Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools* by Porter and AuCoin (2012) revisited MacKay's original report by examining implementation of the recommendations in schools and outlining a series of further recommendations for moving forward. Porter and AuCoin unequivocally stated that inclusion is not being implemented as originally envisioned. Instead resource teachers are relegated to "accommodating the students with identified special needs" (p. 145). Their practice had them working directly with students, less with classroom teachers. While the work they do is valuable, it is too limited in scope (p. 145). So, despite New Brunswick's long history of advocacy, inclusion still seems to face considerable challenges when it comes to implementation. Schneider and Harkins (2009) offer some insight as to why this may be the case. They suggest:

the universal form of schooling, the structure and set-up of a classroom and the abstract contents taught in it, create barriers to the idea of inclusive education. Our mental representations of how schools look guide our implementation of teaching and learning and therefore create difficulties in overcoming traditional ideas of education. (p. 283)

In other words, the framework on which inclusion is being imposed does not have the flexibility or support systems in place to accommodate the changes in practice that are required for successful implementation. The resultant power struggle between policy and classroom implementation is taking a toll on teachers' stress levels. In her study on teachers coping mechanisms, Brackenreed (2011) points out "the Canadian Teachers'

Federation June 2001 Workplace Survey found that 47% of teachers quit before retirement due to stress and frustration” (Brackenreed, 2011, pp. 3-4) and one of the prevalent “stressors described by teachers is the practice of inclusion in the education of students with special needs (Brackenreed, 2008). While the teachers in the current study supported the philosophy of inclusion in general, they indicated that the lack of support in the classroom was a source of substantial stress” (Brackenreed, 2011, p. 4). Porter and AuCoin’s (2012) recommendations acknowledge that the framework for supporting inclusion needs adjustment and new teaching methodologies need to be explored. There is an opportunity to look at disciplines that seem inherently inclusive to identify practices and approaches that could benefit all classrooms.

Porter and AuCoin (2012) also suggest resource teachers and educational assistants working directly with teachers could be a powerful transformative force and as a team, meaningful education reforms could take place for all students, not just an identified few:

We need educational and school leaders who will see these staff members who work in Student Services and associated areas as a means to raise the quality of education in New Brunswick, not only by dealing with students with challenges, but by working as part of the core school team to ensure the success of every student. (p. 145)

Porter suggests that people and resources dedicated to inclusionary policy are being underutilized and for inclusion to continue to gain momentum, reorganization and repurposing of resources needs to happen. The focus needs to shift from a select group of students to all students.

The government provides its own interpretation of the report in *Government's*

Response to the Recommendations of: Strengthening Inclusion, Strengthening Schools

(GNB, 2012). In it they state:

An inclusive education system puts the individual student at its heart and nurtures and supports his/her learning through pedagogical strategies, methods, accommodations and approaches that are effective and respectful and encourages high expectations and achievement. An inclusive education system is not designed to support the few at the expense of the many; it is designed to support everyone.

(p. 4)

It seems there is a philosophical shift from how inclusion was envisioned in 2006 to a more global all-inclusive approach. This shift echoes the challenges in the Salamanca Statement (1994), which clearly states, “the challenge confronting the inclusive school is that of developing a child-centered pedagogy capable of successfully educating all children, including those who have serious disadvantages and disabilities” (p. 6). It remains to be seen how evolving policy will affect classroom practice in New Brunswick; however, current professional development has focused on Universal Design for Learning, formative assessment and developing co-teaching partnerships with Methods and Resource specialists, all methodologies that are geared toward creating inclusive classrooms. I would argue that the community building and constructivist learning activities that take place when composing music also deserve consideration.

I think most would agree that the vision New Brunswick has for inclusion, where every student has his or her needs met in inclusive classrooms, is a socially worthy one; however, in the current structure of high school in particular, its implementation seems to threaten the removal of quality controls such as prerequisites and educational opportunities like level one (enriched) classes without giving teachers the training and

professional development they need to make sure all students in the room are being appropriately challenged. Porter points out that:

by the very nature of course selection and scheduling, high schools are less likely to be inclusive than are elementary and middle schools. At the high school level, there are courses, such as Science and Mathematics, that tend to be filled with students who are university-bound, and there are other courses that tend to reflect a more diverse class composition. (p. 48)

If the system already makes implementing inclusion a challenge, perhaps the system should be re-examined. A uniform delivery of inclusive education from K to 12, forced into the current framework of schools, will fail to meet the needs of everyone. To reach a true vision of inclusion, significant reform to the underlying structure of the education system needs to take place without dismissing quality work that has taken place before or compromising the programs of one group for another. Regardless of new professional development, high school teachers are still left with making all the pieces fit in a system that is still structured around out-dated ways of operating. How curriculum is delivered needs to be examined to maintain quality experiences for all students.

Truly inclusive environments allow students to have some say in how they want to engage in their own education. In the *Lisbon Declaration (2007)* students with special needs articulated their desire to participate in major decisions affecting their quality of life: “We are the ones to build our future. We need to remove barriers inside ourselves and inside other people without disabilities. We have to grow beyond our disability – then the world will accept us in a better way” (p. 2). Classrooms should be safe environments where differences are celebrated as being integral to a complex and ever evolving environment; yet, differences are a challenge when trying to get everyone to

the same place in their learning at the same time, as is implied by our grading system. In her method, *Teaching to Diversity: The Three-Block Model of Universal Design for Learning*, Katz (2012) elaborates on teachers' responsibilities when addressing inclusion: "Diversity is neurological. Diversity is societal. Diversity is human. Teaching to diversity requires that teachers create a learning climate in the classroom and devise activities that allow all children to feel safe, respected and valued for what they have to contribute" (p. 3). She goes on to point out that it is the school's responsibility to "create programs that accommodate and celebrate this (*student*) diversity. In other words, we fit the program to the kids, not the kids to the program" (*my emphasis*, p. 9). That is a tall order when teachers are seeing 120 students a day, yet not unattainable if classroom methods have equity built into the fabric of everyday practice.

Inclusive practice has become the focal point of many education reforms. In my research, I wanted to stretch the focus to students who may be creatively marginalized in a system that is driven by grades and regulations. Since we are talking about inclusive practice as an organization, can we also discuss whether our classrooms are spaces where creativity can flourish? It is important to note at this point in the discussion that even fine art classes are not necessarily creative spaces. It is possible to teach arts curriculum in very traditional, formulaic manners that are the antithesis of creative endeavour. This is a concept that will be explored further in Lucy's story.

Music Identity: Introduction

There has been a great deal of research on music identity, what factors play a role in its formation and the importance (or lack thereof) of school culture in the formation of this identity. While examining the research around music identity, I was

interested in exploring whether informal music practices provided a sense of autonomy to disenfranchised students and created a culture of inclusion that subverted the traditional delineations of music curriculums. Observations of my own teaching practices supported this idea and Green's (2008) work on informal music classrooms provided a research foundation and offered further support for the supposition that composition is the next logical step in creating relevant and socially inclusive music classrooms.

Teachers today have the advantage of a rich and varied technological environment to which they have instant and often unlimited access. The availability of resources is far greater than that which was possible even twenty years ago. Students also have access to these resources, placing impetus on teachers to stay current in a rapidly changing environment that constantly reinvents students' cultural capital. Presently used curriculum documents are not up to the task of navigating the diverse classroom dynamic when there is no political motivation to revisit and update outcomes on a regular basis. Further exacerbating the situation is the lack of representation for the arts in governing positions. As this is being written, the Department of Education in New Brunswick has no representative for fine arts and a representative juggling multiple portfolios at District level. When priorities for education reform are decided and policy is written, this lack of representation is detrimental to furthering creative interests. As a result, conflict arises between the culture of traditional school systems and outdated curriculum documents and students' idea of self that is informed by a rapidly evolving technological world. The increasingly diverse populations teachers face and the expectations that every student's needs be met amplify the challenges of the situation.

Teachers are constantly attempting to reconcile policy changes, curriculum

documents and resulting practice with students' own cultural capital. In *Informal Learning and Values*, Mans (2009) points out:

A major difference between a cultural musical world and formal education is that formal music education evolves out of national and political needs and policies. It is a system fundamentally embedded in the prevailing political system of a place and time. Musical worlds, on the other hand, have grown organically out of societal values, needs and practices, which may or may not be congruent with prevailing political practices, and conform in very basic ways to traditions. (p. 89)

Mans points out that political organizations concerned with education may not have the same priorities as other stakeholders (the students) and curriculum change happens at a much slower rate than the constantly changing cultural environment. Music faces further challenges, Clandinin (2009) points out, as it is often “marginalised in the dominant story of school in which ‘academic’ subject matter matters most” (chap. 17, sec. 3, para. 4). In New Brunswick, music teachers work from very outdated documents. The most current, *High School Music Guidelines: Grades 9/10 Program and Grades 11/12 Electives* (Department of Education, 2002) was developed in reaction to the *Foundations for the Atlantic Canada Arts Education Curriculum* (FACAEC) published in 2001. The guidelines were developed to adapt existing curriculum to meet the standards proposed by the FACAEC and to further assist teachers in the delivery of a comprehensive music curriculum, yet it did not take long for the suggested methods to feel out-dated. A lot can happen in fourteen years, including an explosion of independent, online music production. Hargreaves, Marshall and North (2003) point out “that being a ‘musician’ in 2003 involves far more than it did only 20 or 30 years ago: it

might now be considered to include some arranging or improvising skills, for example, or a working knowledge of MIDI, and music hardware and software”(p. 149). Lill (2014) elaborates on this idea:

The ubiquity of internet access across the developed world has made unsupervised childhood access to music far easier. The explosion of simple-to-use social websites such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, and the prevalence of smart phones with free apps, means that children in the 21st century have greater access to music than ever before. These new ways of engaging with music have had an understandably large influence on children's transmission of their musical cultures. (p. 227)

In 2015, student agency in music making is further supported by such platforms as YouTube and Bandcamp where creative product can be uploaded and shared, in some cases for monetary gain. This drive to create is often not tied to any institutional study or formal lessons. Instead, students explore their aural landscapes through trial and error, experimenting with instruments and technology until they get the ‘right sound’. Researchers refer to this relationship with music as ‘informal’ (Green, 2005, 2006, 2008; Mans, 2009). When students have individual agency, the methodologies of a traditional classroom may seem largely pointless. If students can produce music on their own, how will music teachers be able to engage everyone in their classroom without sacrificing document outcomes? One answer is to look at process rather than product.

With the emphasis in New Brunswick classrooms for inclusive education, the shift to process seems inevitable. Where product learning suggests all students need to meet a certain standard where some will meet the mark and others will fail, process allows students to be evaluated based on their ability to connect with the learning

experience. Although evaluating music based on process may prove to be more challenging than evaluating specific skills, a holistic approach to music provides its own rewards for both the students and teachers. Moving from product to process is also in line with current political priorities in New Brunswick. Regardless, some teachers may be resistant to changing pedagogy. Process instead of performance represents a disconnect in the training of most music teachers, who receive their training in formal performance-based settings that place emphasis on the canon of Western classical music. New teachers are often faced with classroom situations where students have no connection to the teachers' cultural experiences. For their part, teachers are comfortable teaching from their experiences and may be reluctant to attempt new approaches; however, forcing a hierarchy of musical learning only further disenfranchises music as a worthwhile school subject in the eyes of the students. Saunders (2010) points out that teachers may find connecting to their students through cultural capital challenging. After all "music teachers may feel most comfortable teaching the music that they know, in the way that they were taught and in the way that they were taught to teach it. Music and the teaching of music is a strong part of their professional music identity" (Hargreaves, Purves, Welch & Marshall, 2007 as cited in Saunders, p. 72). The problem is students may not understand or be interested in the cultural practices involved in teachers' musical identities. They do not recognize it as their own and, instead, reject being involved. In turn, "pupil ownership of specific musical genres may have the potential to make teachers feel personally uncomfortable or professionally insecure" and attempts to bridge the divide through engaging in pop culture "may make students feel as though their personal territory has been invaded" (Saunders, 2010, p. 72). The conflicting identities between teacher and student create a power dynamic that can interfere with the

goals of the music classroom. This is not to say teachers should subsume their identities in favour of a completely student driven mandate, but without initial investment and trust from students, teachers' jobs are that much more challenging. Students and teachers both need to feel that their cultural capital and self-identities are acknowledged and respected.

Defining Music Identity

Music is pervasive in our environment. Most people have a relationship with music to varying degrees of depth and personal significance. Hargreaves, Miell and MacDonald (2002) have defined the value of music engagement in the following manner:

Music is a fundamental channel of communication: it provides a means by which people can share emotions, intentions and meanings even though their spoken languages may be mutually incomprehensible. It can also provide a vital lifeline to human interaction for those whose special needs make other means of communication difficult. Music can exert powerful physical effects, can produce deep and profound emotions within us, and can be used to generate infinitely subtle variations of expressiveness by skilled composers and performers. (p. 1)

Involuntary exposure can happen in social situations, while shopping, in transit or while on hold on the telephone. Music is also something people voluntarily expose themselves to, when listening to favourite artists, going to the movies or as background music when at work. People “actively control its use in the home, the car, and other everyday situations in order to create certain mood states” (Hargreaves et al., 2003, p. 150). They use music to mark special occasions in their lives such as birthdays, weddings and

funerals. Music signals to others our pride in nationality, ethnicity, gender and various other cultural identifiers. Green (2005) has discussed this engagement both from a positive and negative position:

At one extreme we have a positive response when we feel the music in some way expresses our feelings, when we identify with the music because it delineates our social class or supports our political values, when it affirms our preferred clothing, hair-style, our age, ethnicity, gender and many other factors. At the other extreme we can have a negative response when we feel the music delineates social or political values of which we disapprove or from which we want to disassociate ourselves, social groups from which we are excluded, and so on. (p. 85)

Regardless of the level of engagement, music plays a role in most people's lives and reflects perceptions of what they value and how they view themselves. Hargreaves et al. (2002) observed "most of us listen to music at varying levels of engagement to regulate our moods in different contexts, and whilst involved in different activities. It seems reasonable to suggest that our broad patterns of preference, and indeed even our transitory likes and dislikes, form part of our musical identities" (p. 12).

Conscious and directed exposure to music is often motivated by a specific identity agenda where, through participation or disconnection, people signal information about their self-concept. Equally important, though, is the role of the unconscious in influencing the preferences people have, through immersion in a particular environment or culture. Often people are not aware of the implications of environmental exposure and the level of unconscious learning that takes place while being exposed to music in their culture. If people are immersed in a particular environment, the formulas, behaviour

norms, and cultural practices all become a part of identity, unless they consciously make a decision to subvert those influences in the choices they make. Even then, the influence is felt as a denial or negation of acceptance from the norm. Mans (2009) describes this process of identity formation as enculturation. From a musical perspective, enculturation could be described as “immersion in the intra-musical sound structures of the culture—the rhythms, tonal patterns and combinations, preferred timbres and performance modes—of that culture” (p. 84). Mans discusses the fact that enculturation is largely an unconscious process that people are exposed to from birth in a similar fashion as language. This unconscious assimilation of “the musical templates of one’s culture is a ... process of which one only becomes fully aware when confronted with music that does not conform to the template” (p. 84). This conflict can call into question preconceived notions of what music should be, forcing the participant to face alternate perceptions. When students are “confronted with music that is perceived as ‘outside’ of what seems culturally acceptable *it* can result in a certain amount of resistance in school classrooms” (*my emphasis*, p. 84). This resistance can take the form of behaviour issues and result in the dreaded question that any teacher hopes not to hear: Why do I have to learn this?

It is a vexing question, particularly because the students asking it probably are passionately engaged in music either as producer or consumer, but often the traditional classical canon plays little role in the students’ sense of music identity, unless they are part of the minority that participate in community or school ensembles or take private lessons. Students who engage in ‘school music’ often risk ridicule from their peers and some even succumb to peer pressure and keep that side of their identity concealed. They keep their tastes carefully demarcated to relate to their chosen peer groups and will

broadcast choices based on the identity the group wishes to convey. Conversely, some students choose music that clearly removes them from the popular group. They use their music engagement, dress codes and behaviours to distinguish themselves as different from the majority. “Musical taste is used to delineate both in and out groups within a population and therefore transcends mere recreational listening to become an important tool in power relations” (Saunders, 2010, p. 71). Students who place such a high value on their musical identity do not want it challenged by a classroom environment that relegates any genre, other than classical, to a secondary position. Such hierarchies are problematic when “people have the choice to listen to more or less any kind of music, at any time, and in many different situations” (MacDonald, Hargreaves & Miell, 2009, p. 150). As a result “it has become ‘demystified’ as well as globalised: it would be impossible to establish any kind of consensus as to which pieces from which styles or genres might be seen as ‘serious’ or ‘popular’, as was hitherto the case” (MacDonald et al., p. 150). Most students would agree with this assessment and they prefer to engage in music that is personally motivated, not dictated by their educational institutions.

Many students lead rich and varied musical lives outside of school, but their passions do not translate into the classroom. Within school settings, they become disenfranchised from the curriculum. Green (2005, 2006, 2008) has speculated that the pedagogy of music classrooms is at least partially responsible for this disengagement, but students’ perception of self-worth and personal safety also play a big role. Many are unwilling to commit to publicly sharing their music for fear of judgment. Their music identity is so closely tied to self-worth that for many the risk is not worth the possible result. This situation is further exacerbated when assessment is based on talent. Saunders (2010) describes reasons for the vulnerability:

Engagement in classroom music is not simply linked to musical competency. Musical competency *and* the desire to demonstrate a personal relationship with music or identity in music would seem more likely to foster engagement and through this, creative behaviors, processes and outputs. Displaying a personal relationship with music in the classroom setting involves taking risks, and pupils need the explicit support of peers and teachers in order to achieve this. (*author's emphasis*, Saunders, 2010, p.75)

Unfortunately, research has also shown that a number of students begin to define themselves as unmusical at an early age. Hanley and Montgomery (2005) point out the inherent conflict in music advocacy and reality:

We claim that music education is for all children, yet we have all heard that instrumental programs are elitist, that children start disliking music classes around fifth grade, that only a small percentage of students elect to take music classes once they can choose, and that students are bored with school music. (p. 19)

Lamont's (2011) research focuses on children's and adults' self-definitions as 'musician' or 'non-musician', strongly linking perceptions to early school experiences. Young identities can be subject to reinterpretation as a result of an off-hand remark or when subjected to a set of standards that delineates success exclusively by skill. Children are not born believing they are unmusical. Rather they have an egalitarian view of music production, "with many primary children believing that they can succeed in music if they put effort into the activity, and that successful musicians develop their skills through a combination of motivation and hard work" (Lamont, 2011, p. 371). Music classes that value technical performance skill acquisition to the exclusion of other

music making skills [like composition] may cause some students to question their abilities. Success becomes comparative and if some students are not the most proficient in their social group, they begin to define themselves as ‘unmusical’. MacDonald et al. (2009) have described how easily harm can result from causal remarks made by authority figures. They state “some children may get the idea that they are ‘unmusical’, perhaps because of an unwitting remark by a teacher, parent or another pupil, and this perception could correspondingly lead on to a downward spiral of not trying, therefore becoming less able, therefore trying even less, and so on” (p. 468). I have experienced this phenomenon both personally and professionally. The former when an offhand comment from a music teacher convinced me not to try singing for twenty years despite my passion for music making, the latter from students who feel their creativity or skills do not measure up to their classmates. Green (2005) also points out that other social groups can be devalued in a classroom, for “large-scale religions to small-scale local scenes can be similarly affirmed or denied by the music classroom, forming themselves not only through its purview, but precisely, in contradistinction to the music and musical experiences that the classroom offers” (p. 89). Students whose cultural capital and passions in music are so closely tied to their sense of self will recognize when their interests are not being valued in a classroom. The environments created between teachers and students should be a reflection of all participants, not just the people with power.

Lill (2014) explores power relationships between student and teacher, looking at the creation of different ‘spaces’. She draws lines between teacher-mediated spaces, like a traditional classroom, and student mediated spaces, like the playground. She points out that there are “also liminal spaces within schools where the relationship of power

between teachers and students is not so clear cut, or where power is actively and dynamically negotiated from moment to moment” (p. 230). She suggested a school production or play might represent this space, where students are there voluntarily and the task has investment from all stakeholders involved.

Hendricks, Smith and Stanuch (2014) describe what a safe space should look like, “safe spaces are created when teachers adapt the learning environment and repertoire to the students’ social, emotional, and physical needs. This includes developing individualized teaching approaches and activities that relate to a student’s age, interests, or particular abilities” (p. 38). Their explanation is in agreement with current New Brunswick inclusion policy and suggests the need for a music classroom that is more conscious of students’ cultural capital. I would challenge that a classroom that incorporates student composition is another example of a ‘liminal space’ where the teacher can supply the experiential motivations for creativity and the students are free to express their music identities and invest their own cultural capital in the resulting product. Would it not be a worthy endeavour to create this negotiated space in all music classrooms? Would it not be a worthy endeavour to create safe liminal spaces in any classrooms? Intuitively, I suspect many teachers would agree. With political pressure to make all classrooms inclusive in New Brunswick, teaching methods focused exclusively on product and summative assessment are no longer sufficient to the task. We will need to foster ‘negotiated spaces’ that recognize the cultural capital of our students. After all, as music teachers, it should be our job to create spaces where students’ creativity is nurtured, regardless of their skill in comparison to others.

Faced with the prospect that music classrooms may alienate self-taught musicians or professed non-musicians and only apply to an increasingly minority representation of

music students, it is urgent that educators reconsider the methods used. They should be open to exploring new possibilities and to implementing a variety of approaches.

Saunders (2010) notes:

Pupils who described themselves as self taught musicians, repeatedly used negative language to highlight ‘code cracking’, disengagement, and peer teaching when asked about music in the classroom. When discussing the same subject, pupils who received formal music tuition outside the classroom context more often made reference to issues such as experimentation, creativity and understanding in positive terms. (p. 73)

It seems some students who engage in creative and process-based music making on a regular basis dismiss the classroom experience. How can concerned teachers change their practices to create an environment where all students are willing to engage?

Composition in the Classroom

Connelly and Clandinin (1988) highlight the importance of teachers’ roles in the culture of their classrooms. They place the responsibility firmly in the possession of the teacher, regardless of political or special interest group agendas. They state “curriculum development and curriculum planning are fundamentally questions of teacher thinking and teacher doing. We believe that it is teachers’ ‘personal knowledge’ that determines all matters of significance relative to the planned conduct of the classroom” (p. 4). This declaration creates some interesting questions around power if music teachers are not interested in exploring the cultural capital and musical identities of their students, only in promoting their own; however, a more powerful message can be gleaned from the statement. Regardless of the challenges faced by teachers, internal or external, we have

the power to create a safe and inclusive environment for our students if we are willing to listen to their voices. Policy that seems to challenge the status quo could in fact be a catalyst for new and exciting approaches, giving music teachers the opportunity to argue the value of creativity in music classrooms.

The current high school curriculum was developed in 2002 and is organized into three strands that remain throughout grade level. The strands include a) Creating, Making, Presenting, b) Understanding and Connecting Contexts of Time, Place and Community, and c) Perceiving, Reflecting and Responding (DOE, 2002). Technology is not well represented in the document, mainly because it was only just beginning to gain momentum in music classrooms at the time, and inclusion is not discussed at all. This leaves conscientious teachers with little guidance in implementing technology or inclusion practices from the document that is mandated to inform their practice.

Under Creating, Making and Presenting, the following general outcomes are stated:

Creating, making and presenting involves students' creative and technical development; that is, their ability to use and manipulate media – images and words, sound and movement, to create art forms that express and communicate their ideas and feelings. Through these art works students provide evidence of achievement, both as the work is being developed and in its final form. Students will be expected to explore, challenge, develop, and express ideas, using the skills, language, techniques, and processes of the arts and create and/or present, collaboratively and independently, expressive products in the arts for a range of audiences and purposes. (DOE, 2002, p. 2)

Composition represents a synthesis of several elements of music learning. Engaged in authentically, it challenges students to apply their knowledge, performance skill, and listening abilities to an activity where they have to create something from their own experiences. As a result, any student can engage in composition. Their first experiments with sound on any instrument or object is the beginning of creating. Inflexible music teaching methods may smother that instinct to create by narrowing music making activity down to learning lines and rhythms on a staff; thus, music making becomes a reading activity instead of a making [performance and composition] activity. I am not suggesting music reading is not important, but emphasis on reading has pushed out other types of music making in classrooms. Students can disengage from classroom music delivered in this manner simply because there is no perceived connection to their own lives.

Instead, music making should be intensely personal. Regardless of students' experience, "we need to look at each individual as a musician so that he or she too will recognize the musician within" (Bell, 2008, p. 21). Carefully constructed composition lessons can also address the other two strands indicated in the curriculum document, Understanding and Connecting Contexts of Time, Place and Community - where students focus on evidence, knowledge, understanding, and valuing the arts in a variety of contexts - and Perceiving, Reflecting and Responding - the strand concerned with students' ability to respond critically to art works through increasing knowledge and understanding of, and appropriate responses to, the expressive qualities of art works (DOE, 2002, p. 2). Students' music can be situated in relevant issues and community concerns. They are not just learning music, they are learning through music. Using assessment for learning techniques, self and peer assessment can become critical

motivation for all students to reach to greater accomplishments and it can direct teachers toward what each student needs to move to the next level of their understanding. In echo of Katz's (2012) sentiments, I would like to explore whether creative endeavour such as composition allows teachers to fit the program to their students and also allows the students to fit the program to themselves. Through the discovery of their creative voices, are students able to directly connect curriculum to their life experiences, giving them agency in the events happening in the classroom? Does students' ownership allow the teacher to become the observer, guiding formative assessment, while the students travel paths of discovery and collaboration?

In a case study involving the lived experiences of a transgendered youth (Rie/Ryan), Nichols (2013) shares the critical role music played in helping Rie navigate the daily strain of school:

It was a nightmare. I wished I was [sic] dead every day because I didn't want to go. The only thing that kept me going was knowing that I would be able to go and play [in band] and I would be able to go and sing [in choir], because that was the one thing that no one could take away from me was my music. I could express myself the most freely through music. So that, to me, was my safe zone because it was my outlet. (author's emphasis, p. 267)

Rie's teachers helped her to find a safe space where she could focus on making music and escape from the trials of the discriminatory school environment. Even so, Rie did not see her teachers as allies because of their inability to truly understand her experiences. "Rie decided to create her own songs by combining her poetry with tunes she composed playing by ear. A whole new world of composition opened to her. She confided that songwriting 'made me feel like I wasn't crazy'" (p. 270). Only when she

began writing her own music did she feel agency in her music-making as a vehicle to explore her gender expression. Music composition became an outlet to share her experiences with a larger audience.

The experience of writing a piece of music, taking the time to work through the logistics and then performing it, can be a very personal one. Self-taught musicians engage in this music making process all the time without external pressures forcing them to stay on task. If they wish to be successful, they need to be intrinsically motivated to learn the piece and perform it in a public setting. They are not subject to a rigidly structured set of activities geared to provide the technical skill to perform pieces from a proscribed canon. Instead, they approach the learning process holistically, either on their own or with peers, but without the interference of authority figures. Green (2005, 2006, 2008) describes this as informal learning and she has dedicated much of her research to determining whether informal learning techniques could be applied in a traditional classroom. At first glance informal music learning looks like a complete relinquishment of control; however, many students spend hours engaged in informal music making outside of the regular school day without any prompting from authority figures. Approaching music informally seems to be part of the enculturation process (Mans, 2009) discussed earlier. In his work with Tim, an adolescent with Down syndrome, Bell (2008) notes the holistic approach his student takes to music making: “Tim did not appear to make distinctions between playing, improvising, or composing music. When using the computer independently he appeared to make these distinctions, but when we played music together it seemed that he saw all three of these processes as one: making music” (Bell, p. 18). In traditional music classrooms playing, composing and improvising can often be taught as separate entities, but in certain informal settings they

are fundamentally linked.

Mans (2009) articulates the importance of informal learning which is “a general approach by which humans engage the surrounding world and its meaning as the curriculum *and* where an individual exercises certain choices about what to learn, but is guided by the needs and constraints of society” (*my emphasis*, p. 81). In a musical context, young children engage in informal learning all the time, through rhymes and games, usually with kinaesthetic content that is socially constructed. Key to informal learning is the autonomy of the participant. Relationships and understanding evolve organically through the engagement of all parties involved and power dynamics are minimized. Mans (2009) describes children’s informal learning in other cultures:

In Africa and elsewhere, peer-directed learning remains an important medium for children developing their musical knowledge and skills. Their musical games, often involving clapping, singing, and moving, are usually learnt from older children and passed along in the same manner by inclusion in the games. Quite often children create their own songs in the rhythms required by the game. When children come together to play musical games, they choose their games by negotiation. They organize themselves to play under supervision of their peers, who are quick to express opinions about the quality and correctness (or not) of what the players are doing. Within the context of peers, music created by adults or other children is selected for play, but new music can also be improvised and later memorized. (p. 83)

Although informal learning may be integral to some cultures, it seems to have been mostly forgotten in others. Green (2008) highlights this difference when she laments the removal of informal practices from school systems:

...there is something almost natural about informal music learning practices, our society has for decades or even centuries, alienated us from them by removing them from the realm of everyday life, as well as from formal education, so that we are now in the position of having to teach them back to ourselves! (Green, 2008, p. 21)

To explore her ideas around informal learning, Green studied the methods of popular musicians to identify the processes they engaged in while creating through composition and performance. Her reasoning was that unless teachers employed similar methods when engaging in popular music with students, their efforts would be disingenuous. She argues, “we have focused mainly on the music itself – the product – and have largely failed to notice the processes by which this product is transmitted in the world outside the school. Thus the changes we have made in our curriculum content lacked any corresponding change in our teaching strategies” (Green, 2006, p. 107). This is problematic because students cannot reconcile traditional teaching methods with their perception of popular culture and music production. They do not recognize teachers’ attempts at incorporating popular music as being culturally appropriate. Hargreaves et al. (2007) highlight the importance of teachers’ roles in student perceptions of music and themselves:

Children’s self- perceptions of the extent to which they are ‘good at music’ and see themselves as actual, potential or aspiring musicians, can exert a significant influence upon whether or not they do indeed develop as such... these issues are vitally important not only because teachers can exert such a powerful influence upon pupils’ developing musical identities, but also because their own musical identities are formed within exactly the same social and educational contexts. In other words,

the perceptions of informal and formal music making, the nature of music in and out of school, pupil or teacher control, and expertise in different genres, shape the musical identities of teachers as well as of pupils. (Hargreaves et. al., 2007, p. 667)

Green (2008) shifts power dynamics between teachers and students with her work on informal classrooms. She states her position clearly, “we need to invoke a notion of ‘critical musicality’ as an education aim, and address it to pupils’ own music as any other” (p. 14). Green’s (2006) research focuses on five fundamental changes to how students access music knowledge in the classroom: “(1) allowing learners to choose the music; (2) learning by listening and copying recordings; (3) learning in friendship groups with minimum adult guidance; (4) learning in personal, often haphazard ways; (5) integrating listening, playing, singing, improvising and composing” (p. 107). Green’s approach is student-driven rather than teacher-led. In comparison, the formal training of many music educators: (1) dictates the music to be learned from age and skill appropriate materials as determined by classical culture; (2) begins with reading notation systems; (3) situates learning within a teacher/student relationship, usually in private or small group settings; (4) directs learning in systematic, sequential steps toward further skill acquisition as determined by the teacher; and (5) usually separate different aspects of music engagement into isolated areas of study. Green’s methods are significantly different from the formal background teachers may have experienced. Teachers’ cultural capital may be significantly different from most of their students. I would argue one method does not negate the value of the other. Even though on the surface, formal and informal music making seem diametrically opposite, the end result is the same for students who are engaged: the power of expression through art.

Benefits of allowing students to approach music from an informal framework

include: inclusive social relationships formed through making music together, activities that require negotiations and solutions, exposure to new ideas and techniques that students receive from their peers, and student agency. Teachers who participated in her studies also recognized several advantages to Green's informal methods. They noted increased student engagement for longer periods of time, development of listening skills, and new abilities manifesting themselves in their students. Teachers were impressed at the successful negotiations taking place in the groups and were often surprised at the students who emerged as leaders (Green, 2006). As Lill (2014) points out, "informal learnings (both sanctioned by teachers and occurring 'naturally') appear to facilitate a greater degree of musical agency" (p. 228). Lill defines agency as the "power to act" (Laurence, 2010, as cited in Lill, 2014, p. 228). It is when students are given the power to express who they are through their artistic expression without interference from authority figures telling them how they should.

In addition, teachers felt that the greatest benefit of an informal approach was how inclusive the activity was for all identities in the classroom. Regardless of previous experience, all students could contribute to the process. Assessment was differentiated by students' contributions and ability, not by assigning different tasks, thus preventing anyone from being singled out or excluded. Because of the autonomy of the process, even students that had self-identified as non-musicians were willing to participate and contribute to the final outcome, sometimes discovering hidden ability. "This suggests that informal learnings could provide an opportunity to more fully democratize education, by accepting a form of knowing that is valued by the majority" (Lill, 2014, p. 237). Students gain powerful agency over their own identity and are able to redefine their relationship with music.

Green's (2006) early work, focusing on students copying popular music by rote within group settings using informal methodologies has since expanded into a national initiative called Musical Futures (Green & Walmsley, n.d.). In this initiative, which is comprised of seven stages, composition takes place at stage four and five of the learning process. It is this aspect of Green's work that I find most intriguing, as I have employed group compositions in my classroom for many years. The reason for this pedagogical choice was a growing awareness that students were not only interested in sharing their connections to their cultural capital, they also wanted to express their own ideas about who they were and how they fit into society. Composition, where they could create their own music of any genre, provided that outlet and in the process created a classroom culture of inclusiveness and diversity.

Lill's (2014) discussion on liminal spaces resonates with what I have witnessed in my classroom. Students who experience marginalizing attitudes in other spaces were able to find acceptance in our negotiated space and were able to share their personal stories with their peers in promotion of further understanding for everyone. In a composition classroom, as the teacher, I am able to share my cultural capital as material for inspiration for the students' works. For example, I can discuss twentieth century techniques and assign a project to encourage students to try some of the concepts. How they choose to do that, what devices, instruments or technological tools they use, is completely up to them. The students are engaged in problem-solving the task I have given them while maintaining their own agency. Guderian (2012) reports that including composition assignments "has expanded *students'* development of skills and understanding in music, added layers of meaning and depth to their studies and reinforced and helped *the teacher* in achieving the desired outcomes of instruction as

stated in the curriculum” (Guderian, *my emphasis*, p.8). Bell (2008) points out that “despite having little previous musical training and cognitive barriers to learning, Tim was able to compose music that is now engrained in my memory. This is a testament to the universality and power of music” (Bell, 2008, p. 21-22). Composition in an informal classroom setting has the potential to engage all students regardless of their cultural capital and previous music experience, yet still provide the teacher the means to cover the curriculum in a rigorous fashion.

Bolden (2013) describes this type of music methodology as constructivist. He states “a key premise of constructivism is that learners can only construct knowledge on a foundation already in place; people develop knowledge by connecting new experiences to old ones, building on previous knowledge constructs” (p. 76). Not only does a constructivist approach engage students in doing instead passively learning, it also engages students’ cultural capital. Consider, for instance, asking the students to create a mash-up. Mash-ups are very current in popular culture right now, so students are already motivated to be engaged; however, teachers can move the assignment beyond simply mashing together two songs to charging the students with producing an entirely different meaning in the resulting piece. Not only do students need to learn the music associated with their choices, they also need to be fully aware of the lyricists’ intentions and then subvert those meanings for their own use. Over the years of my practice, this assignment has produced some very clever results. Bolden points out that:

if students recognize specifically how music has been, is, or might be meaningful to them, they are in a better position to focus their musical learning on those things that matter most, find success where it is most individually meaningful to do so, and so sustain personal motivation and engagement. (p. 77)

Students can individualize their own progress and set meaningful goals for themselves and their playing. As Guderian (2012) expresses, “what is important lies not in the possibility that they will someday be a composer, but in the applied creative music making process, and the joys of problem solving, self-expression, and learning in music that this kind of creative work in the classroom room can provide” (p. 13). Applying an aspect of composing to informal engagement with pop music moves the activity from imitation to creation and synthesis. Teachers can create an environment predicated on formative assessment and inclusionary principles.

Social constructionists suggest that the self “is formed and developed continuously through conversation and interaction with others. In other words, we are not just influenced by others, but are in effect made up of interactions with others—we are ultimately social and not personal beings” (Hargreaves et al. 2002, p. 10). In an informal music classroom that includes composition, students can more truly discover themselves. They have agency to question their assumptions and the ability to experience other points of view from their peers. Their cultural capital is not marginalized. On the contrary, their life experiences are integral to the creative process, informing its product.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Qualitative Research and Narrative Inquiry

I was not interested in a causal approach to research. My worldview strongly rests in an interpretivist model. I do not believe I can separate myself from what I know and I interpret my experiences and how I see others through my experiential lens. I wanted my research to uncover meaning directed by the issues the students wished to explore. I required the flexibility of an inductive qualitative approach to the research, but did not wish the end result to be reductionist. Merriam and Simpson (1984) state: “ The key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based, is the view that reality is constructed by individuals in interactions with their social worlds. Thus there are many ‘realities’ rather than one, observable, measurable reality...”(p. 97). My perceptions of events in my classroom are predicated on my own personal experiences with music education, my aspirations as an educator, my biases and my own cultural contexts. My students’ perceptions are impacted by their personal experiences, their emotional and social well-being, their perceived relationship with me and their cultural backgrounds. Our ‘realities’ may be significantly different despite engaging in similar activities.

I did not want to limit my data collection to a few assumptions. I wanted to explore the varied stories of my students and learn from them. I wanted to examine them for the questions they inspired and the insights they provided. I then wanted to examine them in relation to my own lived experiences through my lenses involving inclusive policy, music identity, and composition. As Barrett and Stauffer (2009) describe, “narrative inquiry becomes to varying degrees a study of self, of self alongside others, as

well as of the inquiry participants and their experience of the world” (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009, chap. 1, sec. 6, para. 2). I believe storytelling is fundamental to engaging with our life experiences and the sharing of cultural capital. Critical to teaching and learning, it allows both the storyteller and the listener to place themselves in their world context. The philosophical underpinnings of Narrative Inquiry resonate strongly with my worldview and my teaching methodology. As Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain:

The main claim for the use of narrative in educational research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives. The study of narrative, therefore, is the study of the ways humans experience the world. This general notion translates into the view that education is the construction and reconstruction of personal and social stories; teachers and learners are storytellers and characters in their own and other's stories. (p. 2)

The stories I valued most in my classroom were associated with students demonstrating understanding of themselves and their classmates through their music artefacts. Hearing what the students valued would allow me to construct a deeper understanding of how my practice was impacting classroom dynamics.

Barrett and Stauffer’s (2009) description of the motivation for engaging in narrative inquiry resonates with my own thinking:

It is to provide alternative accounts of why, when, where, and how people engage in music experience and learning and, in that process, to prompt our readers (music education practitioners and theorists in school, tertiary education, and community settings) to consider other ways of engaging with people in and through music. In doing so, we hope to make a space in the discourse of inquiry in music education, one in which “troubling” may give pause for thought and

prompt the community to consider the many ways in which we know and come to know. (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009, introduction, para. 4)

My own “troubling” came from the formality of my music training background and the perception I had that my training was not enough to address the complex relationships my students had with music. Were I to teach as I was taught, I would be appealing to a very small percentage of students; yet, I knew there were many students in the school population who had strong musical skills and wanted to be in a music class that focused on their interests. This gradual realization began to inform my practice and a series of events solidified my resolve to continue on the path I had chosen. I will speak further on this in Chapter Four. What became apparent, as my research evolved was that the questions I had were going to be impacted by my relationship with music, my relationship with the students, and my pride in my own methodology. Clandinin (2010) explains the researcher’s relationship to his/her research in a chapter contributed to *Issues of Identity in Music Education: Narratives and Practices*: “We are not objective inquirers. We are relational inquirers, attentive to the intersubjective, to the relational, embedded spaces in which lives are lived out. We do not stand metaphorically outside but are part of the phenomenon under study”(p. 3). Narrative Inquiry provided the means for me to acknowledge my relationship to the research, but still honour the individual voices of the students. Using Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) terms of “*personal and social* (interaction); *past, present, and future* (continuity); combined with the notion of *place* (situation)”, I aimed to work within the resultant “*metaphorical three dimensional narrative inquiry space*” (*authors’ emphasis*, p. 50). Within that space, I would need to examine my own assumptions

and listen to the words of my students without preconceived notions of what they were going to say.

Having come to the conclusion that Narrative Inquiry would allow me to explore the complexities of my topic, I set about considering appropriate data collection methods. I decided to start with a general exploration of students' impressions of the school system as it relates to their creative voices, then moving to specific case studies generated from interviews of four former students. By working in an emergent narrative inquiry framework, I aimed to honour the voices of the students as integral stakeholders in the institutions being explored. Green (2008) highlights the value student voices added to her own research:

By taking the time out to talk to pupils, or asking them to write down their views, we and their teachers were granted fascinating and often unexpected insights, not only into their opinions about teaching and learning strategies, but into how perceptive, analytical and constructive young teenagers can be if given the opportunity to show it. (p. 17)

Instead of focusing on my own agenda of the value of composition in creating inclusive classrooms, I needed to get a sense of music students' ideas of personal agency and creativity in public school systems. I would examine their life experience in engaging with the arts and would reflect on the insights their experiences provided. Connelly and Clandinin in *Teachers as Curriculum Planners* (1988) highlight the importance of life experience, creativity and self-awareness:

Our experiences, and therefore our personal practical knowledge that makes up our narratives, are never devoid of these affective matters. To know something is

to feel something. To know something is to value something. To know something is to respond aesthetically. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p. 26)

As we navigate through life, constantly recreating ourselves in relation to our experiences and environments, communicating through the arts can be one of the most powerful ways to reach out and connect. By examining the students' perceptions of creativity and choice through their own voices and sharing their stories within the context of their schooling experiences, I hoped to gain an understanding of how systemic policies impact student inclusivity; however, should student stories focus on other things I would honour the direction the research took. I gave myself permission to explore the ideas that attracted my attention even if they were not in agreement with my initial research plan developed when I began my studies. As a result, this is a very different document from the one I initially envisioned. As my research progressed, I came to realize just how complex our relationship to creativity could be. Positive or negative, those who engage with the arts are deeply impacted and a thesis based on preconceived themes would fail to reflect the diversity of experiences students were willing to share.

Research Design

The first stage of my research took place in a high school of an Anglophone school district and involved music students, grades 9 to 12 from programs delivered in those settings. Students were asked to participate in focus groups by grade level on a voluntary basis. They were contacted directly via a recruitment letter (see appendix A). The first efforts at focus groups did not include the number of students hoped for so a later series of smaller interview groups also took place. The second stage of the inquiry involved

interviewing five former students to gain a historical perspective on the questions around creativity. Interest to participate was extensive and in the end fifteen former students took part. Four of those interviews were chosen to appear in detail. Entwined throughout the students' narratives when appropriate, my professional observations as they relate to the students' stories were added.

In an effort to honour Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) "metaphorical *three dimensional narrative inquiry space*" and their concept of asking participants to look inward, outward, backward, and forward in order to more deeply understand lived experiences (*author's emphasis*, p. 50), I had a set of guiding questions meant to generate discussion and ideas (see appendix B), but not dictate the direction of the interview. I often asked follow up questions that were in response to what the participants had to say and the interviews were more like conversations in their structure. The same guiding questions were used in the focus groups. Throughout the interviews participants were given the opportunity to discuss what they felt was relevant to the topic and introduce new ideas should they wish. Where appropriate, I made connections to my initial research around inclusion, music identity and composition, but I focused on how the students chose to frame their own experiences.

Data Collection

Once the proposal was accepted and approved by the Ethics Review Board, I presented the proposal to the principal of the school in which the research took place. With his permission in place, I spoke to the District Subject Coordinator who advised me on my research. There was no significant risk to the participants so the research was allowed to continue as planned with the appropriate parental permissions in place.

For the first phase, all interviews took place at the school. For the second phase of data collection, I initiated contact with former students through email and Facebook using a letter of introduction. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face in local coffee shops. Four interviews were conducted over the phone. All interviews were recorded. The amount of interview data was significant, so I concentrated on the focus group responses in the discussions following the stories that were included.

At the start of the interviews, I assured the students of my intentions for the data collected and discussed any issues around anonymity. I clarified my desire to give them the opportunity to share their visions of what a school system should be. I wanted to impress on them the genuine sincerity of my interest in their ideas and my ambition for sharing their ideas with a global audience. Transcripts of the interviews for the four stories in this text were sent to the participants for final approval. Five participants were actually approached, but one declined to participate any further. All identifying information was removed from the transcripts and pseudonyms were employed to protect anonymity. All participants signed consent forms (see appendix C) and those under the age of majority had a parent sign as well.

The letters of consent for both focus group and interview participants began with a formal introduction of who I am and the associations of which I am involved. It outlined the concept behind the research proposal in straightforward, accessible terminology and attempted to clarify any power relationships. Disclosure of any intentions for the research was included, such as conference presentations and publication in scholarly journals. A paragraph discussing the procedures for protecting participants' personal information and outlining data storage plans concluded the information section. Before the salutation, an exiting comment emphasizing the

collaborative nature of the research and discussing my enthusiasm for sharing ideas around inclusion and composition finished the letter. The signature section included a statement that if any time in the process the participant did not want to continue in the research, he or she may withdraw.

Participants could have been publically acknowledged for their contributions; however, no one expressed interest in this happening. Anonymity of participants' responses was maintained and my gratitude for their participation is reflected in the acknowledgments.

Ethical Considerations

Working with human subjects in research requires a clear understanding of the ethical issues involved. Perceived power relationships between the subjects and myself, the possible emotional concerns that may arise with students during the focus groups and interviews, the protection of my subjects' identity if they wish to remain anonymous, and the procedures for storing confidential information are all ethical issues that I needed to address. My research was developed with respect for all persons involved. The students I worked with were not a means to an end, but crucial to the actual development of ideas and context. Consent from parents and students was sought and an open and transparent dialogue was maintained with the principal of the school.

I knew students should feel safe in their sharing of information and trust that the material would be used for the stated purpose and no other. The student's feelings and understanding of the process were monitored throughout. The intimate nature of the questions required an established trust between the participants and myself; however, the open nature of the questions allowed the participants to control the level of sharing in

which they engaged. Many revealed information I was not anticipating. One of the advantages of face-to-face focus groups was that participants could immediately make it clear if the direction of the inquiry was uncomfortable. Some of the discussions did elicit strong emotional responses. Those who did share their stories all expressed gratitude at having the opportunity, leaving me as researcher and mentor feeling very humbled by the experience.

Transcripts

The interviews were transcribed by myself. I recorded what the participants said verbatim with the following exceptions. Colloquial use of words such as ‘like’ and ‘you know’ were removed from the transcripts where they were repetitious and obscured what the interviewee was trying to articulate. Any repeated statements that were used when interviewees were trying to formulate their responses were also removed. Obvious grammatical errors were changed. Participants were given final approval of the transcripts and could suggest any changes that they wanted. Some minor adjustments were made by two of the participants. The four stories featured were edited for continuity.

Analyzing the Data

I believed I was immersed in a setting I was very familiar with except now the students’ narratives would take precedence. The reality was that the students’ stories were more complex than that. Their experiences with me represented only one facet of their creative lives. Their family, friends, community groups, social media and entertainment industries all conspired to impact their experience with creativity. In the relationship of interviewer/interviewee they were willing to share parts of themselves

that our previous relationship of teacher/student did not casually permit. These new insights into their lives not only challenged me to question my own assumptions, but also caused me to reconsider the complexity of the area I was exploring. What questions arose from the stories they shared? What assumptions did their stories dispel? How had having a relationship with creativity impacted their lives? Listening to their stories to critically examine the transformative nature of creativity and its perceived power to remove social barriers in the classroom turned my reflection inward to examine my own practice. It also strengthened my resolve to share these stories with my colleagues.

The interview questions were meant as a starting point for the stories that students decided to share. Although each story was unique there were some common themes that consistently were represented in the dialogues. When reviewing the transcripts, I made note of the themes, color coded each one and labelled the transcripts accordingly. The intention was not to subsume the student voices in my assumptions, but to honour the direction in which their contributions took the research. In considering the students' stories, I looked at the questions I began with, at the research and experiences I used to ground my inquiry and at the new questions that were suggested by what they shared.

Chapter Four: My Story

Between One Note and the Next

Early in my high school music teaching career I experienced a moment that would forever change how I taught music. I was ill and needed a lesson plan that would challenge the students, required no technology that could go wrong and still be an activity a non-specialist could handle facilitating. I settled on something I had never tried before. I found a melody from my childhood, steeped in the nostalgia and atmosphere of my island home. Carefully, I divided the students into groups and asked them to come up with their own unique version of the song. I told them of my love for the song and what it represented to me. I told them about my home and the meditative sound of the sea and then left them to complete the task. My expectations were low. It was a filler lesson meant to keep everyone occupied while I was recovering.

When I returned to class two days later I had the students share their creations with me. The following hour profoundly impacted my preconceived notions of what music education could or should be. The first performers had turned the simple Celtic melody into what they affectionately termed ‘a Hindu cowboy song’ meant to represent the cultures that were present in their group. The next performers were a duet, bass and alto saxophone. The bassist played his instrument like a guitar, using harmonics to create the desired atmosphere while the saxophone droned a mournful solo. Both students sang in harmony to finish the piece. Two of the groups recognized that they were not able to achieve what they wanted on their own so they paired together to create a full scale Celtic hoedown complete with step dancing and wild fiddles. The final group turned the melody into a complex round played by three people on one piano.

I found myself deeply moved by the students' efforts and thanked them for the obvious care they had put into the assignment. Something had happened in that class that I had not experienced before. I had relinquished control of the outcome and allowed the students to pursue their ideas to their own conclusions. Now those activities are commonplace in my classroom, but then it was a revelation. Here was an aspect of creativity that tapped into musical places I had yet to reach with them and included everyone in the room regardless of their experience. This was the first step on my journey as an educator to make creativity integral to the classroom experience. More music writing activities followed. Performances of original material were arranged for parents and friends. As my knowledge became more sophisticated, digital compilations of original student work were recorded.

There are several stories I could tell of the impact my students have had on my teaching practice. They have inspired me to explore my own creative abilities and they have challenged me to continually change the experiences I offer them. They cure ennui. They triumph over their fears and take risks in front of their peers because they know they are safe from judgement. They celebrate each other's talents and help each other to grow. Every day has the potential for revelation. Their stories are uniquely their own and their creative identities are tied closely to how they interact with the world. I am constantly learning from what they are willing to share.

The four stories in the following chapters were chosen for the spectrum of creative experiences they represent, but they are not meant to be read as representative of all creative experiences. Any one definition of creativity does not necessarily represent how the students are viewing creativity. Rather their ideas and sense of creativity seem to emerge from their life experiences and artistic processes. Each person

I interviewed had a unique relationship with creativity. As Lucy explains later in her chapter, “there’s this huge hunger to define ourselves and something that I had to come to terms with is that instead of defining everything I need to have a relationship with everything”. Their definitions of their creative identities were not bounded by their musical identities; rather their discussions encompassed all aspects of their creative selves. Their life experiences greatly impacted their relationship with their creative selves providing unique subtexts. Each person brought their own cultural capital to the story they shared. In the interviews, it is also clear they are trying to understand the ambiguous nature of creativity, particularly amongst the younger students. Despite what was just outlined, there are common themes that surface: Pivotal Moments, Creative/Safe Spaces, Community, Inclusion, Identity, Faith, Crisis, and Teacher Identity. These themes provide unifying threads throughout the discourse and suggest further directions of inquiry. The stories are told in their voices with their words with minimal editorial adjustments from me to create continuity. In the interest of clarity, my interjections will be in *[italics]*.

The title of this section ‘Between One Note and the Next’ holds particular meaning for me. It is inspired by a poem one of my students wrote that in turn inspired me to compose a music piece based on a phrase of text I wrote. The phrase perfectly captured how I feel about teaching and is as follows: “For me it is the space between one note and the next, the breathless chance of a new idea”. That is how teaching in a room that places students’ creativity at the center of the curriculum feels. The experience does not have a preordained end. Beadle (2011) sums it up well in his book *Dancing About Architecture*: “Perhaps, we also learn that sometimes the outcome should not be defined at all. If we define the outcome we get what we expect. Getting what we expect often

comes with accompanying disappointment” (p. 7). Had I more strictly defined the outcome of the assignment that fateful day the results would have been drastically different. These interviews should be read in the same manner. There is no destination at the end. The information is not confined to my theoretical framework of music-identity, inclusion and composition, but explores what the students valued and the direction they wanted the discussions to travel. The words presented here are just a snapshot of relationships with creativity that will last lifetimes, constantly evolving into new and fascinating configurations.

Chapter Five: Simon's Story

Introduction

Simon is 24 years old and heavily involved in the art and music scene in his community. He is the founding member of a local art collective and performs in two and a half bands. He has become involved in the local 'maker' movement. His work often has him doing art outreach both at schools and in the community. Simon attended university for a year, but found his attention and energies were always drawn to making music and art of his own. Simon's support systems are complex and strong. His family are very creative people in art, music and woodworking. The art collective provides a place for his friends to gather and offer each other support. The 'pop up' art shows they have been creating are redefining the way the public engages with art in his community.

Simon was my student at a time in my career where my interest in teaching was beginning to flag. I had stopped listening to music and stopped playing for myself. I felt I had nothing new to give and was considering a career change. The group I taught that year changed how I was feeling. The class engaged in a semester long debate on twentieth century music techniques. The spark was John Cage's 4'33". The debate moved into the significance of leading a musical life, societal perceptions of studying music and what was 'good' music. The diversity of experience in the class made for some interesting contrasting views. I had not really wandered into this cerebral territory with previous classes and the resultant sense of shared exploration, discovery and debate made an indelible impact on my teaching practice. As I talk with Simon I cannot help but notice how confidently he presents his views. Being self-aware and reflective is an import part of how he interacts with his life experiences.

I'm Addicted to Creativity

I feel creativity is an impulse to do something new in small or big ways within systems or to create new systems. Everyone can be creative but creativity looks very different in different people. There probably are some people who don't feel comfortable trying their own version of creativity in almost any circumstance, but I think for most people there is an aspect of their lives where they are creative, even if they might not recognize it. I think that some people need the right impetus, the right person maybe or the right circumstance to show them, help them realize they can be creative, whether a teacher or a friend. I think that everybody has the capacity to create as far as I can tell.

I'm addicted to creativity. I feel a compulsion to be creating all the time, in as many different ways as possible. I have a studio, which I create my own work out of, but I also share with other people, which for me is very important to have. I had it on my own for a while and it was awful. I didn't do anything. Creativity definitely involves other people for me. If I don't have creative activity going on in my vicinity I kind of flat line. I'm not self-powered, I guess. I need to be continuously inspired by other people to actually go beyond just thinking about what I want to do. To actually start a project or to follow through with a project I have started, there needs to be people to bounce ideas off of, people to come and say that looks awful or that looks great, or just to be in the other corner of the room not saying anything, working on something and I can just sense something going on over there. As long as there is some activity around me I can latch on to the energy, I guess. I need that to create anything.

I'm always trying to find new ways to do things, just always trying to find time to create something, music or art. I love the community, the scene in [city] downtown. I've gotten a lot from it, huge amounts of inspiration, connections and friendships. I feel

driven to improve it, to give back to it and to create more opportunities for the things I have experienced, for others to experience just because I have gotten so much, I want other people to get that. I am less comfortable extolling it because there are hard parts about it too. Even if it works for me, other people are going to feel very lost in the same situation.

I guess I don't get exposed to a lot of people who actively think art is wrong or that the creative persona is bad, but I do see a lot of people who don't understand what makes somebody want to make a painting or what makes somebody want to play music. Creativity is quite often misunderstood. One of the best things about the Collective is that, the shows that we put on, the pop up art shows, they don't feel like gallery openings. They feel enough like a party, they feel casual enough that people who would never feel comfortable stepping into a gallery, who are not in the art world, who do not interact with it on a more than surface level, they feel comfortable going and then they see the artist hanging out having a beer too and they feel comfortable chatting with them about the art work. Seeing that happen is huge because there's not a lot of avenue for that I think. The atmosphere in a gallery is very elite and so I guess what I am trying to say is often people don't get the chance to understand the art world and creativity by extension, unless they have an 'in'. I'm always looking for ways to bring more people comfortably into an art setting, but I don't feel that people resist it. It's just more of a "don't understand or feel comfortable". For me, getting art out of the art world is really important because otherwise it keeps shrinking.

My grandmother was an art teacher so I don't remember a time before I had drawing materials. I could draw; all my friends knew I could draw so I always thought of myself as someone who did art. I didn't really embrace it until high school. I never

thought I would be an artist as a kid. I'm pretty sure it was the day that my art teacher brought India ink into the classroom. I don't remember what we were painting. I just remember the ink. That is one of the pivotal moments that made me realize, "oh yeah, I could actually dedicate myself to this". I guess I have always thought of myself as somebody creative. I've always had creativity around me, but until high school I didn't define myself as an artist.

I spent the first nine years or ten years of my school life in a small rural school and there was virtually no support simply by the fact it was a small school and there was no money. So at my new high school, I did feel very encouraged by the system as it were. Maybe I would have felt a little differently if I had been in [city] the whole time, but it felt very supportive and I was very encouraged to be creative. There were times when you could tell where it was maybe not the highest priority for administration, but I always felt there was a good team leading the charge and I felt good about the opportunities I had. I think in general in high school, you have to figure out ways you can access the things that you want. If you just sign up for your classes to go to you are going to miss out on things. I think everybody had the same opportunities, but maybe not the ability or drive to find good ways to use those resources.

The negative parts of my high school experience have more to do with...I mean I had major insomnia at the end...so were more about my own difficulties I guess. I never felt targeted as a creative person or uncared for I guess. I think the universal truth of Western education is that putting everybody on the same track is not going to work. So having options for the creative people, artistic people, and music people, people in sports or technology, having avenues for them to enrich themselves in those different paths is critically important. There could certainly be more systems in place where people are

searching out and identifying kids that need help finding whether they are creative, or finding any outlet. A big thing I think, is realizing that there are some people who just aren't going to flourish in a classroom. I think there are people that need to get out of the classroom, that won't feel able to create or feel free in a classroom. It's context. The nature of a classroom is to be for a specific purpose and that purpose involves books and figures and processes and this is built up. It's a societal understanding of what the classroom is. It's what it is in pop culture. It is what it is when you are reading about it. A classroom is a certain thing. The best classrooms break down those ideas. The best classrooms don't feel like classrooms in a rigid "desks in a row, figures on a chalkboard" kind of way. Most of the most valuable things I learned were not in a classroom or at least not in a classroom that was being used in the traditional sense. It's cliché, but standing on the desk. Seeing everything from a different perspective. If a classroom is always rigid it doesn't work, it doesn't make an impression. There are people who do go through it very well in the traditional way, but I wouldn't have if that were all I had.

I really benefitted from enrichment programs. It felt like I was an adult. I'm very independent by nature so being free to make my own way there and having the mentors who talked to me as an equal was a hugely positive experience. I got the taste for having an audience. In music too, being able to not only do a show at the end of class, but also basically create it, top to bottom. Everything about it was our initiative. That was defining for high school and showed me that you could do these things with a group of people, make an art show or make a music show or anything else. Showing people what we were doing and doing it well was incredibly positive.

The opportunity to show something of your self through art, music and theatre,

the opportunity to put something internal out there is so personal. When people see other people doing that, it's a huge way to understand others, to walk in someone else's shoes. When you are hearing music that somebody else wrote in one of those classes or just looking at a drawing they did - that's a personal thing and it does give you a glimpse into their head. When you get that, I think it enables you to also let some of yourself be free because you are seeing others lower their barriers. That makes you able to connect with them. It's probably not that clear to the people, to me in the classroom. That is not what I realized was happening, opening myself up and seeing other people opening themselves up. I maybe never consciously noticed that at the time, but it enabled me to connect with them and enabled me to think about where people were coming from in that circumstance and in every other circumstance and envision more of what was going on at the time behind the scenes if you will, and that is hugely important when connecting.

Creative classes for most people, I would say, build up a community, build up a network of people in the school that you can have a common ground with much more so than in other subjects, unless you have a really exceptional teacher, but even in those classes that are all based around projects there are people that don't feel included. So I don't know what the line is between just the nature of the class creating the inclusion or the people in it. Looking back I do remember people in some of those classes that probably didn't feel all that involved and I wish I had been more involving.

Mentorship and the teacher in the room is still probably the most important part. The creative classes need somebody in charge that is creative - that is able to connect and bring in the outliers and inspire the classroom to become an inspirational place. Credit should be given to those people that are able to do that. I've seen some amazing

teachers doing exercises that connect to the classroom and I have seen other teachers maybe not really understand the point and trying to do the same exercise and failing. A little bit of creativity training or a little bit of guidance on why they are doing it is important because some teachers don't agree with meeting those creativity things. I would say teachers are hugely important in that, to guide that happening. Training is needed on how to do that, how to run the creative, inclusive community classroom.

The realization that people do look down on alternative or a non-traditional university track made me incredibly angry. Realizing that, for some, it's not seen as valid or as worthwhile was pretty devastating at the time. I'm not opposed to going to school again, although it becomes less and less likely because I am becoming comfortable with the fact that I don't excel in routine. It was the same in high school, even in classes that I loved. By the end of the semester, getting stuff done was nearly impossible because I was on to something else. I still seek education. I take workshops and classes that are offered by artists or offered by companies that we work with and I passionately pursue any writings about art materials and about other things too. The routine just destroys my drive. It is a personal thing that I have realized. I am lucky to have a family that's into doing your own thing. I'm sure that mom would like to see me get a degree. She probably worries about the fact that I don't have one or that I am not pursuing that path, but I guarantee she is also mad at herself for feeling that way and understands that you can find your own way. If I was not going to school, just working and not doing anything it would be different too, but they see that I'm working really hard so it works for them and right now anyway, it works for me.

Reaching Out and Making Connections

Simon's creativity hinges on building community and making connections. His creative drive is powered by interaction with others, and his vision of art experiences 'for the people' transcends traditional art dissemination paradigms, a trend that has been gaining momentum worldwide. When Simon reflects on his high school experiences, his recollections are centered on the moments where creativity impacted his life, whether it is in the art room, music room or at enrichment opportunities. A common thread throughout his discussion is the ability of creativity to collectively make something happen, "In music too, being able to not only do a show at the end of class, but also basically create it, top to bottom...Showing people what we were doing and doing it well was incredibly positive". Several students involved in the focus groups also commented on the community they were a part of because of being involved in the arts. They defined any group involved in artistic endeavour as creative and valued the social interaction provided by the experience. When Erin and Marion were asked whether taking part in creative activities gave them access to different social groups their answer was quite emphatic:

Marion: Yes for sure.

Erin: Definitely.

Marion: There are the coffeehouse people. I love the coffeehouse people. I can rant about the coffeehouse people for the longest time because those people are the people that go and respect, but also enjoy. It's such an open and...

Erin: Really supportive...

Marion: Easy, I love coffeehouse people.

They go on to elaborate on the sense of community created by shared vulnerability

during a performance:

Erin: I like singing. It feels nice. I like sharing that kind of stuff with people. It's always been something that I've wanted to do. In grade 9, I went to a lot of the coffeehouses and I would watch the people in grade 12 singing and I was like: "I want to do that someday. I want to do it", and then I did. There's a connectedness I guess, through music especially - when you share that. You've picked it and you've practiced it many times. It's something that's important to you and you get to share that with people and when they react nicely it makes you feel really good.

Marion: It's really rewarding. I just enjoy seeing other people present what they have and letting themselves be vulnerable because they are up in front and everyone else is watching. Even if they mess up, the community is so supportive. I love the people there and the environment is really nice and the tone, everything.

Erin and Marion are involved with several of the opportunities available to them at school and they consistently reflected on community as the reason for being involved.

Marion, who also spent time in competitive cheerleading, shared what being involved in Production [annual musical theatre show] has meant for her:

I ended up trying out and just falling in love with the environment. The people there, they are so supportive... I found my love there and I met so many nice people... they are all my best friends and they're really good role models. I really found a creative outlet there, which I never thought I would have. [*There is a lot of correlation between cheerleading and what happens in Production.*] Yeah, it's really theatrical. I guess I did see that. It's all about that performance. That two

minutes and thirty seconds you are on stage for cheerleading, which when you hit the mat you have to put on a show and you get marked on that show unlike production, but what I liked about production is there's just that family sense and you have your good shows and you have your bad shows, but you are in it together. That's what I really enjoy. [*So it sounds like when you're talking about creativity for you, it provides for you a community that you might not have necessarily had access to otherwise?*] Yes, I definitely love the sense of family; I love the sense of group bonding.

Joseph talked about how creative people find each other and stick together. "I find all the creative people all know each other. They stick together because they meet through these creative means, like they know each other through band or through art shows and things like that. They are not like a subculture, but they're like a community". In a later chapter, Lucy describes creative people as being part of a subculture, but one that is very accepting of others. Cory shared how wandering into the music room when he first moved to the school changed the trajectory of his social life:

That's definitely been one of the highlights of my high school just being in band because that's one thing I have done every year so far. It's been one thing that I focus on a lot and I don't know if I would be a different person. I feel like my friend group would probably be completely different because I had none coming to this school so I could've gravitated toward any of these influences and it might not have been the positive one that I have, but yeah I think that has definitely shaped me as a person, definitely very positive.

Joseph points out that creative groups like music ensembles and art clubs in the school bring together people from all school demographics: "I feel like it's is a good way to

bring people together from all corners of the school”. Garrett discussed how creative groups within the school circumvent barriers of age:

I’d say being within the different music programs, I’ve met a lot of new people who are friends now who I probably wouldn’t have met because say they’re in different grades like Joel, for example. I probably wouldn’t have gotten to know him very well if we weren’t both in band.

Kantz’s (2012) framework for teaching to diversity begins with building a sense of community in the classroom. She points out that students who are worried about being bullied are unlikely to focus on their learning in a meaningful way, and when students do not feel like they belong their attendance suffers (p. 27). Conversely, if students feel ownership for the work that is happening, if they have a clear role in its production and acceptance from their peers, they will be motivated to be in class. She states:

Students can be taught that every member of their learning community brings different skills, perspectives, and background knowledge to the community, and all members can help the team reach the goal of mastering the concepts and skills through the problem solving required by the content that teachers present to them. (p.28)

I would argue that many students involved in the arts already understand these precepts, as illustrated in their comments above. Imagine the possibilities of finding that sense of community in other classroom settings if the concepts were introduced universally across the curriculum. It is happening. I remember observing a science classroom where students were completing a test at timed group-stations while their teacher stood in the middle of the room making pancakes for every group that helped each other find the

solutions. That class not only connected with their teacher, they connected with each other both inside and outside of the classroom. Unfortunately, that type of community building would not be found in the ‘desks in a row’ methodology present in some rooms.

When I challenge students to work in groups to write a piece of music, there are many negotiations that need to happen. What skill set does each member of the group bring to the project? How will the task be handled? Will there be a clearly defined leader? All of these discussions involve the students’ extoling their own strengths, celebrating the strengths of their peers and combining their skills for a final product. When they share their work with their classmates and elicit feedback, everyone being in that vulnerable place adds to the sense of community. Like Marion’s love for the coffee house people, students in the music class make connections that circumvent social hierarchies.

Although community is identified as an important motivation for being involved in arts based activities, it is not the sole motivation. Tommy talked about how creativity, as he defines it, is both a community and solitary activity:

If somebody needs me to make up a guitar part, I can just try to figure that out or being creative with other people to make a total overall piece of music or just to make the song better. [*Is creativity more of a solitary thing or more of a group thing?*] I would say both because the more creative minds the better. You can get even more creative and there’s more to do, but also if you’re by yourself being creative you can accomplish a lot to because you don’t have to, “well I don’t want to do that, but I want to do that” and you don’t have to combine the creativity. It’s less time you could say.

Being part of several bands impacted how Tommy spoke about creativity. He felt that

part of how creativity defines him rests in the opinion of others and how willing he is to collaborate with them:

It may be the outlook of how to be creative on that part [of the song] and just being willing to understand other people's creativity and just all working together in it. [*Yes, it's a good skill to have. Not everyone is willing to have that dialogue.*] If you're going to be creative it's not all just about you. You are not always the center of attention or the star of the show. You have to all work together.

Ben also discussed the reciprocal relationship involved in creativity and how it reflects the give and take of personal relationships:

Give and receive. It's like very much an exchange. It's like a verbal conversation: "hey I'll play this" then you'll be like "oh I'll play this for you".

Being able to relate to one another - that's even how you form friendships. Cory and me became best friends because of band. That speaks a lot to him and me.

Simon discussed the understanding that comes from being involved in creative endeavours and how it allows students to develop empathy and understanding for each other's life experiences, although he admits that he came to that conclusion in retrospect. "That is not what I realized was happening, opening myself up and seeing other people opening themselves up". Cory, however has realized that empathy early in his schooling: "I think for me being creative helps me, not only express myself in different ways, but also appreciate how other people express themselves. I think it makes me a more open-minded person and also more accepting".

Despite the ability of artistic endeavour to build community, no matter how hard teachers may work to connect with their students, there will always be those who do not

feel connected to what is happening in the classroom. Either they do not feel comfortable in allowing themselves to be vulnerable or they feel their work does not measure up to the work produced by their classmates. Simon admitted: “I don’t know what the line is between just the nature of the class creating the inclusion or the people in it”. Maggie and April have an interesting discussion around this phenomenon:

Maggie: I think a lot of people give up because they don’t think that, I mean I didn’t think of myself as creative until about a year ago when my mom said, “hey you’re a creative person”. I was like, “I am”? I never thought that I was, ever. [*You didn’t get a clue when you wrote an entire song in grade 10?*]
(laughter) I guess I didn’t because all the other students were doing the same thing and so, I don’t know, I felt, and especially when you hear other students work and then you listen to yours and you’re like, “I can’t do this whole creativity thing”. I don’t know, I never thought of it that way. I guess maybe I am creative (laughter).

April: Do you think that maybe it stems from there being so many people and it seems hard, as if there’s nothing creative that is left to be done.

Maggie: It’s like when you’re sitting in art class and you look over and someone has got this masterpiece and yours is totally different. It’s like: “Oh. I drew a tree”. [*I always draw a tree*] (laughter). It’s the go-to and then you don’t feel creative for it.

April: When you’re looking at, especially with art, when you’re looking at what’s defined as good art, it’s hard to appreciate how there are other things that can be good, like when your own work is good when you are comparing it to that one standard because there are all sorts of different standards when you get into

it.

Maggie: There is one art teacher that I had for three years in a row and I won't name names, but they bothered me so much because I would make something that I thought was awesome for myself, like I was: "Wow I can't believe I created this" and everything. To them, art was based on a rubric and I know they are a teacher, but it was like if it resembled theirs, then it was good, which bothered me so much because some people would make the most amazing things, but if it didn't have all the criteria, which it is a class and I totally understand that. I don't know - it's kind of hard to explain. It's just that if it wasn't pin perfect to what that teacher wanted, then they made you feel like it wasn't art and it hurt, honestly even though it was just an art class. [*There is a difference between sitting and drilling technique and taking that technique and applying it to something that's yours.*]

Maggie: And it's almost as if when you tried to apply that technique to your own thing it still just wasn't good enough for that person and it's hard because, to me, art should have no boundaries because it's art and as long as you have, because it's a class, as long as you have met the requirements, I don't see what the problem should be.

April: I guess that's one of the issues of trying to incorporate creativity into a classroom, is trying to find those rubrics for it.

Maggie's observations highlight one of the biggest challenges when teaching creativity in a classroom. How can it be assessed in an authentic manner? In the present system, numerical grades are still required and although formative assessment is experiencing resurgence in popularity, there is still the challenge of reconciling formative practice

with summative report cards. As Lucy points out later, when students are assigned a number and are valued or devalued accordingly, they can automatically become disenfranchised. Marion also touches on this idea by suggesting teachers allow for creativity, but really have no idea how to value it so they treat it as subsidiary to other modes of assessment. Despite this, Marion still values the experience because of the opportunity to construct knowledge with her friends:

I can write a song, but I don't think it's weighted the same because teachers don't know how to grade a song. They don't really have a rubric for it and if we have enough courage to do that, I think you're just given a decent mark and thrown to the side, because I don't think teachers know how to grade creative pieces because it's just not conventional. It's not right or wrong. It's just not used and I think it should be, most definitely. I really enjoy those creative pieces because it lets me and my friends come into the music room. You bring a bunch of different melodies that were in our heads and we can make it into a song.

In depth discussion on assessment in creativity is outside the purview of this paper; however, it is an important issue to explore when looking at the impact inappropriate assessment methods have on students' perceptions of their abilities. Also important to those perceptions are the experiential or pivotal moments many of the interviewees shared. Positive or negative, each experience had an undeniable impact on how the storyteller chose to move forward from that moment. Simon's story of experiencing India ink and having a revelation leading him toward pursuing art as a lifestyle resonated with my own personal experiences. I will share two. The first pivotal experience happened in my junior high art class and unfortunately had a negative impact on how I engaged with art. I have the type of personality that does not take criticism

lightly, so when my art teacher called me a baby for drawing a face on the sun in my illustration, I vowed to never take an art class again. Her assessment of my juvenile art attempts may have been correct, but because of her careless dismissal of my exertions without any effort at formative development, I did not even attempt art making until much later in my adult life.

The second story has a much more positive impact on my relationship to creativity. When I was in grade 11, my mother returned to school to get her Bachelor of Education. This involved her living away from home for a year while she studied. As a special treat, she invited me to come visit and attend a performance of renowned trombone artist, Alain Trudel. At this point in my life I was unsure of what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to do something creative; I just did not know how to get there. While sitting in the concert hall watching the performance, it suddenly occurred to me that music could be my vehicle of choice. If I was willing to work hard, there was a chance I could go to music school. I am not sure if I would have come to that realization without the experience my mother provided for me. Each of these pivotal moments had an impact on how I engaged with creativity later in life and defined where I chose to place my energies.

Paul also shared positive and negative experiences throughout his interview that deeply impacted his relationship with creativity. In his first recollection, his teacher took a mundane memorization task and turned it into something extraordinary:

In grade 5 you learned your division, you learned your multiplication, you have all that, but now you needed ways to get good at it. You needed ways to remember so my teacher, she taught us how to remember all these things with song. She also did this with grammar as well, but she taught them to us with

song, but not only that, she made us write songs that helped us remember. So like as a group we took pop songs from the time and we turned them into, because they are always catchy - that's how pop songs work, so we turned them into ways to remember, like how to quickly multiply your 12's or whatever. It really worked. I remember when I was in grade 4, the grade 5 class they did the same thing and they presented their project to the whole school. They actually had [famous opera singer] come and sing with them. It was just really cool because they just took something as simple as doing mental math, just things to remember, just things that you had to go over and over in your head and they turned it into a song, turned it into something fun and creative. It really helped.

Unfortunately not all of Paul's experiences were as affirming. In the following excerpt he describes how his enthusiasm for perspective gets him into difficulty:

Paul: I would not say I'm a good artist, but in grade 8 we learned how to draw in perspective. One point perspective, how to make things look almost three-dimensional while on the paper and I really liked that, so actually throughout that whole art class, I went home and I took that and I learned how to do two point perspective and three point perspective and I drew that a lot. I was really interested in that and then we came to grade 9 Art, I remember we had to draw a cup I think.

Zander: -with the shadow.

Paul: The shadow, I wanted to take it that way because I had always been drawing perspectives. I drew the shadow in a point perspective and the teacher didn't like that because it didn't prove that I knew how to shadow an object on a flat surface properly, because I was trying to make it look like more realistic than

the picture and that didn't turn out very well on that mark.

Ryan talked about a disagreement over what a creative writing project should be with his grade 3 teacher:

In grade 3 though, my teacher and I, we really got into it with one another for the first half of the year because I was trying to be creative and original. I was trying to write something different than what the rest of the class was doing, and according to her, I was going off-topic or I was putting stuff in there that didn't belong. I was trying new ideas... [*Why didn't it belong?*] She would tell us write about your weekend. There is one particular example I remember - you saw something in the woods. You're walking home one night. It's dusk and you saw something in the woods, so you had to go investigate it. You didn't quite see it, but you saw the shadow. You have the shadow and you wanted to try to figure out what it was, so you are going to compare to something, do a bit of research and find out what it was. At the time I was into Bionicles [name of children's toy] so I had a big story written about a Bionicle robot... I like to take something I've learned and something I've seen and implement it into my work, so I did that... but it was really short and it was really awkward to read and she was like, "this doesn't work". I remember asking her, "well why doesn't it work". There was a reason for it, "it's not what I was expecting" and so we were really at odds for it.

Marion shares a story of someone she cares for who was encouraged away from the arts by their parents and how she feels that has impacted his life:

I taught him how [to play saxophone], the embouchure and everything. I taught him how to move his fingers on the keys and he really enjoyed it but his father

was like: ‘No, no, no, sports, sports, sports’ and if you look at him now and I think he really regrets that decision because [name] is in a world of trouble right now and he picked the wrong path and I think his father should be regretting that decision because if he encouraged his son to do music, go into music, do art and different means of expression, he wouldn’t have to pick up that cigarette. He wouldn’t have to do things, other ways to express himself or relieve stress and I think that if I could go back in time I would definitely make [name] encourage his son.

Kayla shares a story of her experience of moving from a small town festival to a larger city. She highlights the change in atmosphere from supportive to competitive. Feelings about the competitive atmosphere impacted her willingness to be involved. The same could be said of several of the students I interviewed, but the sentiment is not universal. Many thrive in that environment:

The only time I’ve ever had a negative experience was actually when I went to do the [city] music festival because I had been used to the [town] music festival, which is fiddling and in between every song it’s like, “I know that wasn’t your best thing, but you’re really good” kind of thing, “that was really good, but you can tweak such and such”, but when I went to the [city] music festival it’s like, “oh no you cannot look at me. Do not look at me when I am practicing. You can’t know exactly what I’m playing”. [*It’s a different culture?*] Yes, it’s a different culture because everything was closed up and I was used to [town] so I felt like a fish out of water. [*And is this the participants?*] The participants and teachers. [*What about the adjudication itself, was that positive?*] Not really, basically. There was a girl and I. We were pretty on par, but then this other girl

who kept making mistakes, she was all smiley and she won. And then my mom was like, “what, what’s up with that”? It’s probably just social politics.

All four of the featured former students shared the pivotal impact that being involved in enrichment programs had on their sense of self. Janice and Susan faced significant moments connected to their personal preservation. Lucy discussed searching for the crucial moment when she felt she truly belonged. Whether it is a pivotal moment that changes the trajectory of a life or the quiet, personal moments where creative work soothes a troubled mind, there is no denying the impact creative activity has on students’ lives and the role teachers and mentors play in promoting or dissuading students from growth through creative activity. Finding ways to have students build community in a classroom where shared work and success values everyone’s contributions and supports creative solutions to problems would better support an inclusive classroom environment. Regardless, creativity in the class impacts students’ learning for the most prosaic reason possible, as Tommy explains:

I think fun would be a good word. It’s just fun to play my music with other people and that people are getting something out of it. Maybe they’re in a tough time and that music helped them or directed them to somebody that helped. It’s hard to put into words the feeling I get. It’s fun and you know you are accomplishing something...

Having students feel that sense of accomplishment while they are enjoying themselves is powerful motivation to consider providing more creative experiences in classrooms.

Chapter Six: Janice's Story

Introduction

Janice is a 23 year old new mother and piano teacher. She views creativity as a way of authentically living and engaging with the world. Her teaching is empathetic and student driven. She believes creativity has the power to transform lives and resists associating it with negativity and judgement. She met her husband through music and it is a bond they continue to share as they seek opportunities to perform together.

Growing up in a patriarchy, Janice lived under fairly strict rule. At the age of ten, she was struck by a deep depression and anxiety that profoundly affected her personality. She attributes her recovery to her mother's insistence that she engage in the creative arts and writing to navigate through her fears and stay in communication with God. For Janice, creativity and faith are inseparable because creativity is not something you do, it is something you are.

Janice represents the student whom I want to encourage to pursue music later in life, but I know will not be comfortable in traditional music school settings. When she spoke to me about studying music after high school, I was reluctant to advocate that path. She is someone who is passionate about music, but because of coming to that understanding late in her high school career, she did not possess the rigorous foundations required to study at university level. Luckily, there are now programs that attempt to provide a place for students who are interested in music, but do not aspire to be classical performers. Several universities in the province now offer a Bachelor of Arts with a concentration in Music. Still, options can be limited and in my experience, I have had a few students go on to study music and realize it is not what they thought they

wanted. One of the challenges I face as an educator is creating a space where everyone is included, while clearly presenting the expectations of further institutions of study for those that see it as their future. Finding a balance to avoid alienating or devaluing people's relationship with music is an ongoing preoccupation.

Janice found her path, and her evident joy in her family and creative life is apparent as we speak.

When You Feel Free to be Who You Are

I think creativity is freedom and it's not just generic freedom - it's freedom of your self. Then, with freedom, comes love because I think that's the truest form of being able to love yourself and another person, when you feel free to be who you are no matter what. Creativity comes in because that's the outlet you can use to express that true self and that freedom of self. What's the point of pretending or having masks? Those are chains and I think creativity is a tool to break away from that. Personally, for myself, whenever I've tried to get to that deeper place, I tend to start thinking about what others will think of it and that has made it hard for me to do some of the things I would have done - but it's a journey too. So maybe in high school, as you probably know, I wasn't as outgoing. I was a little more shy and reserved and had my group of friends, but through different events in life it's brought me to a place where I - I have failed in some - not failed, but I've experienced what it feels like to be vulnerable. But I've seen through some of the hard times to realize how wonderful the good times are and how much that brings me to life. So, I would say it's always worth the risk.

I don't think creativity is only doing creative projects. I think it's a way of being. So, to me, when I am walking down the street on a nice day I think the creative part of

myself, which I love about myself, sees not only what is there, but wonders why it is there. Enjoys it being there. Takes joy from small things. Sees people and trees and stories or wonders why that person is that way. That is just who I am. For me, it's just a part of my life.

My family, in general, has a hard time with anxiety and my father was a [profession] so there were a lot of rules and expectations and ways that you were, maybe, supposed to be and think. One of my brothers is diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. So it runs deep and it wasn't really affecting me until I was the age of ten. Grade 5 I started showing signs of having anxiety. It was so weird because I remember wondering, "what is wrong with me"? I went from this happy child to just not wanting to go out anywhere. I had headaches and I kept thinking I was going to die, that I had cancer in my brain. You're young so you don't - I went to the worst possible place you can think of. I remember sitting in the bathtub at age 10 and thinking, "I could just go under the water and..." which was the lowest point. It was strange because I was so young. I didn't understand and I didn't really know how to express that to anybody. I would be a whole different person if it wasn't for the fact that I had, first of all, my mother who always encouraged my music and for me to write, for me to read, to do all of the things that stand out to me as creative outlets. Not only that, but it did go deeper too. It was a very spiritual time for me as well and I think they are linked. That's just my personal belief that they are linked very strongly to each other. Using some of those creative things allowed me to write out my feelings and to write to God, who at the time I remember I was confused and angry with, just asking, "please help me. I don't want to be this way". I was so scared. One day it was just gone and I was free. I was freed from that which would have made me a whole different person. So to me, I think that is

probably why I relate creativity so much to personal freedom because it helps me. I don't even know exactly what happened. Who knows? It could have been something greater than; it could have just been the combination of having encouraging people and writing. You know, being able to express it and get it out, but all I know is that through my years ever since then, I have used creativity to say no to all the bad stuff that wants to get in.

I think we want creativity to be valued in society and we try, truly, for it to be, but I don't think it's quite gotten to a place where it is as real as I would like it to be. People do certain things because that is supposed to be creative. That is supposed to make you unique. You do these certain things and that makes you an individual, whereas I would love for it to be more completely self-based. Not going with any trends of what creativity should be, but feeling the freedom to just be whoever you feel you are - and to not be worried of being judged on that. It's probably fear of being judged. If everyone else judged me, at least I had friends who I knew wouldn't judge me, and who were understanding of how I viewed things because they had the same ideas. I can think of people who wanted so badly to connect, but they just couldn't quite get there and maybe it's just because they didn't feel like they would be loved for who they are - or understood, which is really sad. It might've brought vulnerability at times, where maybe I felt misunderstood, that no one gets what I'm trying to say. I feel lonely because I feel these things and I want to express them and show them and not everyone gets it, but then one person does get it. That's all that matters.

I think it's important because of how I've seen it change people's lives. I've had students come in, who have suffered from anxiety and depression, and they come into the space that I have for them. I try to make it very creative and open, not structured and

not a place where they feel they have to be one way. They can be any way. They can be who they are. And to see creativity allow that person to escape from even anxious, depressing thoughts. They come into the room - there's this one girl of mine, I love her so much and she comes into the room and you can see things falling off of her. I can see it. All of a sudden - her hands when she starts are always really tense and then when we get going - the first thing we do is I let her play a song that she already knows so that she can just let it out and she just goes for it. You can see the day fade away. I think that's one of the most important things that creativity gives. It gives people a chance to beat things like anxiety and depression.

I had a wonderful piano teacher growing up. She allowed me to have fun with playing and then she went away and I had a teacher who did not allow me to have fun with it and it made me feel sick to my stomach. I didn't enjoy it and that instance changed who I was going to be as a piano teacher because I now know how important it is to have fun, to allow people to be themselves. I was lucky because my later teachers always stressed wanting people to really dig deep inside themselves and bring forth to the table what we had, but I don't think that's the norm. I think there's an effort put in, but it's probably very individually based. If you're not a creative person yourself - if you are a teacher and you don't value creativity then it's not going to hit the mark. If the curriculum tells you where you have to make them try to be creative, if you don't know what that means yourself, I don't think it's going to work. Grade 12 English was one of my favourite courses because he let us do our projects and do whatever we wanted to show that we understood the material. So I made a song and I wrote lyrics that had to do with how I interpreted Hamlet and there was another one where I did a one-person play. I got great marks because he noticed I put in great effort and I just did - you know. [*You*

were able to use creativity as a tool to show your understanding.] Exactly! I could use my strengths because everyone's strengths are different. So I think my experience was positive, but I just don't know if that is the norm.

I think about this every day because that's my job too. How can I get students to just feel comfortable to express themselves? I don't know if there's a quick fix. It's hard because you don't have time. You have so many students, but I think it's a very relational thing. Going back again to people feeling comfortable being free to be themselves. I don't think you are going to do that unless you have a few players in your life that will encourage you to do that. A lot of students don't have that in their life and a teacher can try their best to be that person, but sometimes - I can tell with some that I am playing that role and that blesses me. That's what it's all about for me, but then there is a handful that I'm still desperately trying to figure out what's the magic thing that I can do. It goes back again to love. If you want someone to have the freedom to be creative and be himself or herself you have to love them from a very real place within yourself too. You can't fake it.

You need to learn certain things, but that doesn't mean you need to learn them a certain way. I look at each student and try to figure out their strengths and what are their weaknesses and go with that. If it is working then you know right away because they are learning and if it's not you just have to reevaluate what you were doing and try to do a different path. It's a big journey and I see it being that way for a long time.

I want, in the future, to work at home because I strongly believe your environment completely changes your level of 'comfortability'. If you are sitting in a stale room you are not going to be inspired as easily. You are not going to feel as relaxed, but if you are in a space that has things that you can take inspiration from and

that makes you feel at home, that's going to help.

I'm not a believer in saying that they do things wrong. I try to use my words so it's more like how can we do this better, differently. "Why don't we try this" instead of "don't do that" because creativity is so vulnerable. As soon as you say something they climb back into their shell and it's like, "no"! You can see it happening too - all of a sudden they feel nervous. So I try my best to be really encouraging and I let them lead, especially the older teenagers and definitely the adults. I ask: "What do you want to do? What is your goal with this? How are you feeling today? Did you have a good day"? Because it's not just - you come and sit down and do your thing. They are carrying whatever their day was with them and if we can just briefly talk about it and throw in some humour and positive thoughts - I find that it creates that safe space for them for sure.

It is important for the school system to evaluate us [creative people] on what we know, not on how we know how to put it into a certain way. I know it's hard because I see people get afraid that if there is too much flexibility, people are not going to work hard, but I think it would be worth the risk. What's wrong with an option? I think people, bosses and teachers might give an illusion of, "okay here's your chance to be creative and to be yourself", but perhaps if students really went for what they thought it [creativity] was, there might still be backlash on them and, "oh that's weird" and "that's too far away from what I think a creative environment should be", - and that's not good.

I think sometimes the challenging students are the creative ones too or the ones who need it most. It just makes me sad to think that there are so many out there, who if only something was different in the curriculum, if only the teacher was more understanding of that being an important thing, their lives would be changed for the

better. That is what it needs to be about. Changing the lives of the students, whether it's one student or however many. I don't know why, but I'm just visualizing it right now and I can see a person just sitting there and inside you can almost hear them saying, "if only it could be this way, I could be myself and I could excel", but then it just never happens for them. You're cutting something before it even grows - before it's given the chance to grow. I understand how hard it is being a teacher and that you're already thinking about one million other things and here's another responsibility that you have to think about, "now I have to be more creative". That's the job that you signed up for. It's not supposed to be super easy. You are supposed to care and want to do everything that you can. I just want to stress caring. And to make sure that creativity is authentic and not just surface based. Going back to the same person I have in mind - at her high school she is always so anxious and stressed out. Some of that is everyone has their different ways of coping and being, but I feel if the environment was more allowing of creative ways to do things, she wouldn't carry that with her. She wouldn't dread going to school. Maybe it's not that it's discouraged, it's just not encouraged enough. It's just not valued enough. You had asked before how it's valued, it's probably not in the real way that it should be valued.

It's making me so happy, talking about this. That's just a wonderful thing and it's really important. People inspire me a lot because of relational things in life. Having one another is what I think life is about. Being connected, not only being connected, but also loving one another. Truly loving one another. When I see people and I hear their stories and I - or if I see them and I don't hear their stories, my mind starts thinking, "who are they", and that really inspires me a lot. I love nature. I find that very inspiring. Our new house is surrounded by trees and I can notice a difference when I have to get up

early in the morning with my son. I'm not as cranky anymore because I have the birds in the trees and it reminds me there are things bigger than myself. It's a new day. I think the other thing that would be inspiring to me - its not so much just God, but I love philosophy. I love thought. I love 'whys' and the universe. It doesn't have to be one specific thing. I love that it could be so many things, but in the end, whatever it is, for me it's love and that is so inspiring because even in the darkest times there is inspiration. There is the light.

You Can't Fake It

Janice's understanding of creativity is connected to her sense of self, her faith and the way she chooses to engage with the environment around her. As she explained, "I don't think creativity is only doing creative projects. I think it's a way of being". Her holistic attitude values creativity in mind, body and spirit. Her personal experiences inform the empathy she has for her students. Her practice is reflective and formatively driven.

When discussing with the students how creativity impacted their identities, the answers reflected a variety of attitudes. Some preferred to think of creativity as a tool or means to expressive ends. Others saw it as being indelibly entwined with how they presented themselves to the world. Maggie and April discussed their different interpretations of the word:

Maggie: Creativity is what you're feeling on the inside and how you give it to the world.

April: I guess I would agree in a lot of senses, but I would define it more objectively. It does have to be something that is different than what you see

typically. I mean lots of people can write a short story, but to have something creative it has to have some sort of defining feature that makes it unique.

Maggie: That's a good way to put it. Creativity is being unique.

Marion also thought creativity should be tied to originality, "I think creativity is staying outside the box. Not doing what they ask, but doing a little bit more and doing it in a different way than the normal". Erin felt that creativity is, "expressing yourself through whatever means you find best". April extended the discussion beyond the personal, to a worldview that attributes all of humanity's major accomplishments to creativity, identifying how deeply she feels it is ingrained in the way people navigate life:

It's not just necessarily the fine arts where we see creativity, but in other places too, like innovative solutions to problems between friends or between social interactions in the workplace. We just don't really appreciate it so much because it's so prevalent and it's just what we do as people. We try and find creative solutions to problems and we just don't really appreciate how often we do that. She goes on to say, "Humans are known for their tool making. I mean if you talk to an anthropologist, we define ourselves from other creatures because we make tools and that's creativity in a sense, so we've built our whole society on that". Despite sharing April's viewpoint, Janice believes society does not value creativity nearly enough, a stance she feels is reflected in the school system as it presently operates. She supports her position with anecdotes of her students. Certainly, whenever austerity measures are needed in school systems, the creative arts courses are often the first to be sacrificed.

Janice does not have very much patience for teachers who are not willing to make an effort to reach vulnerable students with whatever means necessary, including

creativity:

I understand how hard it is being a teacher and that you're already thinking about one million other things and here's another responsibility that you have to think about, "now I have to be more creative". That's the job that you signed up for.

It's not supposed to be super easy.

Janice is not unsympathetic. She just has the unique perspective of a private teacher who sees the effect rigid systems have on her more sensitive students. She understands that teachers may be uncomfortable with allowing students to work outside of parameters, that they fear too much choice may lead to failure and chaos. Marion also felt creativity was not recognized enough, but at least teachers were willing to make an effort:

I think the teachers are trying to incorporate that because they do see the importance, but I think it's not recognized enough because for something to be enjoyable, all people have to find it enjoyable. The problem solvers that just want to do calculations might not find the creative aspect as important, but it will help them in the end ultimately, I believe.

April and Maggie point out that even those that are willing to allow creativity in their classroom are careful to regulate the outcomes:

April: The school system and teachers generally, especially English and art teachers, they'll appreciate creativity if it's appropriate and it fits within the guidelines of their projects. I know in grade 10 I tried to write a memoir, but I was really, really stuck for ideas so I tried to write a memoir about writing a memoir. It was fun to do. It wasn't very well done because it didn't meet the criteria of the project. The moment you were writing about had to be significant in some sense and writing a memoir, it wasn't. It fell flat. So I mean it was an

interesting creative way to take the project, but I didn't get a good mark on it because it didn't meet the criteria and that's understandable.

Maggie: No matter how creative you were, it wasn't the right kind (laughter).

Maggie and April talked lightly about their experiences of trying to find the boundaries between what is acceptable creativity and what goes too far. Their discussion serves to highlight the power dynamics that can take place when teachers allow students to chart their own course. When is an idea truly unique or just a gimmick? Is it possible for students and teachers to co-construct boundaries on creative work? Because the end results of such projects are not always clearly defined, preconceived notions could impact how students choose to engage in the activity or how teachers view the final work. What is the balance between creative freedom and controlled outcomes? How flexible is too flexible? Students have to anticipate how far they can take an idea before it is deemed unworthy. Teachers need to determine how much freedom to give. April states it clearly, "I mean it's important to experience or experiment with those limits so you can find them and know how to manipulate them later". Jiwong, Sun and Nari get into a small argument over how students treat creative options in the classroom and what should be defined as creative:

Sun: Even though they require lots of, like I heard [teacher name] is a really awesome teacher and he wants students to do those creativity projects, but some students will not like it because it requires actual time and effort to do, to get marks. (Some disagreement) Yeah it does!

Nari: It's the same amount.

Sun: No

Nari: Doing the PowerPoint and the video.

Sun: Okay, I'm not done! So students might - even though they want creativity they will want to take the old school way like my current English teacher. I think it depends on the teacher. (Inaudible disagreement) Yes you do, don't lie.

Jiwong: Some teachers, they do like creativity because whenever you do something artistic and you bring something - they just give marks. They love it and they give you full marks. When you actually put time into it you can tell. I think they like colours and they like lots of fancy stuff.

Nari: If you put the colours it's +5 marks, literally.

Sun: If you put in effort, they will see it. They will know.

Jiwong: I think it's because not a lot of students actually take time to do that and then be creative. So they seek to get more of that and they like it.

Nari: But I have to - putting colour is not creative. Just saying.

Sun: It looks good.

Nari: It looks good, but it's not creative. I don't know.

Sun: Well it depends on the product. I'll say that.

Nari believes that schools are not creative at all. She feels the limitations that are put on assignments and the expectations of assessment make it impossible for a student to be truly creative. She is also very sceptical and rightly so of how some teachers define creativity. Attractive PowerPoint and liberal use of color often gets equated with creativity, rather than unique applications of knowledge and skills to a particular problem. The former interpretation relegates creativity to the realm of decoration.

Erin worried about the power dynamics between teacher and student when it came to assessing creative work:

If they liked the idea, if they actually went with the idea - I don't know how -

like you said they don't know how to grade a song because it's different. There isn't a right or wrong answer really. It's very opinion based so I don't know how exactly they would do that so that it would be more even - so that if a teacher just had a certain grudge against you or you had a grudge against the teacher things wouldn't go terribly wrong. I think if it went smoothly that would be amazing. It would be lovely to be able to do creative options for projects.

Erin also questioned the value placed on creative work and felt that even if teachers were willing to allow creative options its inclusion was often superficial.

There are always certain projects, like in chemistry where you have the option to do something creative, but it's not really the most important part of it. Normally it's just: "This is how it works". You follow whatever steps they tell you to follow and then you're good, which is unfortunate. I think it would be better if you could explore it on your own a little bit more. I think some people would learn better in that way. If they were able to test it by themselves and try to figure out on their own how it works instead of just being told exactly... There are several options. You could write a big long biography. You could write a slightly shorter biography and you could do a portrait of who you were doing, which is what I ended up doing. It was fun, I liked doing it, but it's just kind of a side thing. It's like this is the main part. If you want to get out of doing a little bit of it you can throw this in as well.

Steven, Constance and Bradley talked about how some activities in classrooms are very creative, but maybe are not recognized as such by the teacher or students:

Steven: My L.A. [language arts] teacher this year, he really values creativity.

[How has that changed the classroom experience for you?] We can do more

stuff. We can create. Some people, for example, they built models...

Bradley: We can do more of creative things instead of - like the teacher gives us an outline to do something and we have to follow those.

Steven: ...it's more creative.

However, they do not feel that way about all their subjects. They consider some to be very structured, although the interviewees were not sure it had to be that way:

Constance: It's very strict.

Bradley: For example math is all about strict, strict.

Constance: Yeah, I guess in some ways we are not able to freely express our creativity in the classroom. In music classes, like guitar or instrumental I'm sure it's different, but then just your regular science classes, you can't really do that.

Bradley: I might say some people would say math is not creative, but people can make a way to be more creative in math. Just like in graphs, make an equation to make a shape that you like, like a star. *[I loved graphing in high school. It was one of my favourite parts, but that's because it feels creative. I agree with you there and I think any higher order thinking in any subject has to be creative.]*

Bradley: Also when you get a real job in those things, I think creativity is the most important part. Anybody can do math if they study. Creativity is your own talent and skill.

Constance: And if you don't express your creativity in a classroom then you're less likely to enjoy it. If you have to follow guidelines then you probably won't enjoy the class, as much than if you were able to express your creativity.

Constance's assertion that expressing creativity will lead to students enjoying class more was supported by most of the students interviewed; however, several also

argued that taking creative risks also made students vulnerable to ridicule and rejection. Janice alluded to this when she speaks of her friends understanding and supporting her creative decisions, thus providing her with a safe place to express herself. Tommy expressed the fear students may have of being shut down when trying something new:

Yes, they just might not use it or they just might not want to or they may not feel comfortable creating, “well somebody might judge me on that or somebody might not agree with me” - or maybe they have been creative once and somebody shut them down and they just don’t want to do it again. I think everybody has that thing of being creative. It might be in an area that people care about or it might be in an area that people don’t care about. It might be something that you’re creative at that other people don’t see as mattering, but I think everybody has creativity. It’s just if other people see it and how they view it.

Like Tommy, several students equated their creativity with risk taking and questioned where the limits might be. Maggie and April wondered, “how far is too far out of the box”? Sometimes creative approaches are accepted and celebrated. In other instances, creative people are ostracized for being too different. Where is the line drawn? They admitted judgement could stop creative people from continuing in their pursuits:

Maggie: People who are actually trying to do something different, singing in a different way or dancing in a different way and it takes one person to not like it and they just stop.

April: It’s intimidating and it’s daunting too because in this sea of people, with everyone trying to be creative it’s like, “oh, what if you’re trying to do something different” and then what if you’re not being different in a cool way?

What if you're just being different in a weird way? It's trying to find that balance too.

Maggie: There is a whole thing about whether being different is cool or whether being different is weird and strange and turns people off totally, and that's hard.

April: It's kind of hard too because do we label it all as being creative, or is some of it just weird?

Maggie: Yeah, it's hard to define what actually being strange is because, really, when you're talking about the subject, what if someone is being very out of the ordinary? You can't just say that's creative, especially if it's something that is not good, like having outbursts in class or something. You can't just call that creativity...

[So society still expects social norms to be placed on your creative activity?]

Maggie: For sure

April: Yeah, it's almost coming back to how in school, when they're marking something creative there is still a rubric and there are still guidelines you have to follow. So I mean you can still be creative and you can still find ways to push those guidelines, but you can't just step right outside of them.

All of the participants felt teachers had ultimate control over whether a classroom experience was creative or not. Janice's sharing of the two entirely different experiences with her piano teachers points to an oft-recurring theme throughout the interviews, the importance of teachers in how students develop relationships with creativity. As Simon stated earlier, "mentorship and the teacher in the room is still probably the most important part. The creative classes need somebody in charge that is creative". Cory stated it bluntly, "the teacher makes the curriculum". Teachers that

create safe environments where failure and restarting are part of the learning process allow students to take the necessary risks needed to push creative boundaries. Tommy described the thrill of teachers relinquishing control and letting students decide:

I love language arts. You can be creative in that because if you have a project the teacher usually gives you a list of ten things to do and then you can have the freedom to do whatever you want. So it depends on the class. In classes that you're being told what to do, like gym, it's hard to be creative in because any class that you have a set way of doing something or a set formula - that might not be the right wording - then it's hard to be creative. But when the teacher says, "I'll let you decide", that's an opportunity to be creative all of a sudden.

Janice argued: "It is important for the school system to evaluate us [creative people] on what we know, not on how we know how to put it into a certain way". She believes limitations on how knowledge is represented may impact how creative students can communicate their understanding. However, increased choices lead to the possibility of increased problems and the reality is that some teachers are not comfortable with diverging from their controlled environment. Dedicating time to exploratory projects can be challenging when curriculums are already overly complicated. Teachers may feel changing how something is taught is wasted effort when the lesson already suffices. When the interviewees were asked whether teachers should receive creativity training most of them agreed, but were unsure of what that would entail and whether it was a practical aspiration. Marion and Erin had their doubts:

Marion: I think they would be very skeptical. One of their professional development days, they are going to be like: "Oh my god. I'm going somewhere to learn how to be creative". I can definitely hear some of my teachers saying

that because they already complain about their teacher development days. I don't know how that would look.

If teachers do not value creativity it is not very likely they will implement creative methods. Sun's remarks placed onus on who was at the front of the room in determining whether creativity was happening or not:

When I was in grade 9 or 10 they had lots of opportunities if I read a book - like multi-genre projects. That can be very creative, but at the same time I'm in grade 12 and my English teacher is a very old-school teacher. I think in that class they don't require much creativity. So I think it really depends on teachers, how they teach.

Students' perception of the importance of teachers in determining whether a room is creative suggests how critical it is to examine systemic attitudes toward creativity. How do teachers define creativity in their classrooms and what are the implications to their practice? If there is no effort put into planning environments where creativity is given agency, what impact is that having on student engagement?

Earlier, Simon talked about how his best experiences at school were in classrooms that were not used in a traditional sense. Janice's discussion on environment focused on creating a creative and welcoming environment in which her students could feel comfortable. Later, Lucy will discuss subverting traditional classroom spaces and trying to find that one place where education operated the way she needed. In all of these examples, the environment was cited as having significant influence over how comfortable students were while engaging in creative endeavour. Maggie and April felt creating safe spaces was critical and teachers had a very important role to play:

Maggie: I think that a lot of people coming to high school are really

uncomfortable so I think it is important that they feel secure with who they are sharing their ideas with and everything, because a lot of students coming to school is just that - it's just coming to school and they don't think that they have the space or the time to explore more creative areas of their life. So I think that if they know that they can, I think a lot more people would open up.

April: An open environment like that in the school - it's just important for a lot of different senses so I don't really think anything bad could really come of that - just to have that type of environment.

Devin and Paul talked about the establishment of workspaces to promote creativity and the business trend of allowing spaces where divergent activity stimulates creative thought.

Paul: I think creativity in our society is probably becoming - I don't know, it's changing I guess. For 'Take Your Kids to Work' day last year we went to [business] and we went to see how people work when they develop software and computer programs. It's a lot different than what I thought it was. It used to always be working in a cubicle all day just typing code and stuff, but nowadays they can work outside. They can expose themselves to new things. They had couches in there and they had the bouncy yoga balls - things that helped develop, not develop, but use their creativity to work on the things they were designing. I think that kind of thing is happening more often.

Devin: ... the actual set that they use in the movie is actually what Google looks like. They have a casual setting where everything is open and very loosey-goosey. You can kind of do whatever. So just playing off of what you said there, really in work environments and stuff, creativity is definitely changing.

[Do you think it needs to be that type of space to foster creativity?]

Devin: It doesn't need to be, but I think having a relaxed open environment where there is a lot less pressure - I feel in an environment like that creativity can flourish. I don't remember where I heard this, but I think it was an artist or a genius or something. I don't know, some quote where he said that on days where he worked, whatever it was that he did he would get no creative inspiration and then on days off he would get creative inspiration, so while he was working he would treat it like a day off to try to get inspiration - something along those lines.

[I get my best ideas when I'm not thinking about anything.] - Yeah, exactly.

When handled properly, group creativity results in shared safe spaces, but reaching that point takes careful preparation and clear expectations of social empathy. Both students and teachers need to engage in the process. The students need to trust that neither their teachers nor their classmates will judge them for taking risks. Teachers need to trust that students will complete assignments with an appropriate level of rigor without rigid guidelines to follow. Lill's (2014) 'liminal spaces' and the negotiations that take place within may be a good place to start. Looking at the methodologies used in fine arts rooms, like Green's informal learning, could inform the structures and negotiations happening in other classrooms.

As mentioned earlier, my students have worked on their own recordings and they produce a show for the public at the end of every semester. During one of those performances, a student performed a song that she had written about finding her way back to faith after a particularly challenging time in her life. At the end of the show, my partner let me know that there was a parent in the audience who looked affronted that she would be singing about her faith, presumably because it was in a school setting. I

highlight this particular instance because allowing students to explore their own experiences through their art is critical to creating those safe spaces and may lead to some difficult and emotionally charged moments. Had Janice shared her story about depression and finding a way out of it through faith while she was my student, I believe it would be imperative to give her a forum for that expression despite what an audience member's personal views may be. Empathy and acceptance of differences will be important ingredients in any classroom where identity and creative exploration are happening.

Faith was also a re-occurring theme in the interviews. Janice was not the only interviewee to connect their creativity to their faith. Some students mentioned music making at their church and the sense of community that engendered. Others expressed the belief that their gifts were from their creator and were in service to their faith. Tommy shared how having faith pulled him out of negative spirals when he was being too hard on himself:

Maybe I'm over-exaggerating because I'm a perfectionist. I want everything to go perfect, but I think a lot of the time maybe I wasn't humble enough or I did it for the wrong reasons. Or sometimes maybe I didn't play that part right and I got negative about it. I think it comes from me most of the times. I haven't had many people just come up to me and say, "wow, that wasn't" (laughter)... [*that's so rude...*] well it happens all the time though, so I'm glad that that has never happened. It's more myself. You're your worst critic. [*How do you pull yourself out of that?*] Okay, I'll go here. I don't. I think God does for me because the music that I play isn't for myself, usually it's for him. So I just talk to him and ask him...My dad, he's not very musical. He loves music, but he doesn't play any

instruments or anything so he usually helps me with the negativity side - 'well that's not as bad as you think it was', kind of thing ...and then they just encourage me and that usually gets me back on the right track.

Referring back to Green's (2005) assertion that the music classroom has the power to affirm or deny students' cultural capital simply by what the music teachers choose to value (p. 89), it becomes the teacher's responsibility to create a space where students can express what they value. Providing open-ended composition projects is one way to allow this to happen in a music classroom.

Several challenging questions are raised by the comments in this chapter. What exactly is creativity and is it truly accessible by everyone, as the students seem to believe? Is it possible to assess creativity in meaningful ways that are not detrimental to students' perception of their creative selves? Is it legitimate to think creativity can be assessed if it is tied so closely to personal identity? Are there ways that teachers can define assessment within creative work more effectively for students? Would it be possible to guarantee teacher buy-in should creative methodologies become part of professional development? How does a school system, which is largely a secular space, allow for other forms of spirituality without negatively impacting others when, for some, it is so deeply connected to their art? All of these questions suggest it is not as simple as saying there should be more creativity in schools. Any systemic change will take careful consideration and planning. How does creativity function in a system that is controlled by schedules, numbers, and linear pathways to success? For some students, it does not.

Chapter Seven: Lucy's Story

Introduction

No matter how conscientious teachers are there will always be students they struggle to reach. Ask any educator and they would agree with Janice that, “sometimes the challenging students are the creative ones.” Most educators could name students from their own experience who fit that description. For me, that student was Lucy.

Lucy is a 19-year-old transgender youth who is a self-employed audio engineer and visual artist. Lucy's account of her experiences with the education system is fraught with conflict. She views her relationship with creativity as another aspect of her life that marginalizes her from ‘main stream’ society. Unlike other participants in the study, Lucy does not feel she has any real support systems, but does identify the arts community as a place to find some sense of belonging.

Lucy is not someone who is willing to accept the status quo. She is not afraid to challenge authority and for that reason she has often had confrontational relationships with her teachers, myself included. She is whom I think of when speaking of students who get labelled as being detrimental to the classroom environment, despite having so much to contribute to the learning experience. Her views on education systems, on the surface, seem contradictory, but essentially they are not. She can acknowledge what is positive about education, but only as a self-identified observer unable to participate in what she is observing. My relationship with Lucy was one of the more challenging ones I have faced as an educator, but it is one of mutual respect. What she has to say is not always comfortable to listen to, but it is an important reminder that for some, the education system as it currently exists fails to meet their needs.

As we spoke, Lucy was still transitioning. She was still trying to figure out how to exist - something she readily admitted to me during our discussion, pointing out her purposely chosen non-descript clothing. Since the time of this interview, Lucy has become an activist for transgender rights and is gradually becoming a visible and prominent member of the community. In high school, Lucy was still outwardly living as her birth gender. In an effort to reflect her choice and transition, whatever gender language she used in the following story was maintained.

Try Not to Define It

I think the most important thing about defining creativity is not to try to define it. That is something that we chase after. Everybody will find this one sentence, “oh it’s so beautiful. It explains creativity perfectly” and then it doesn’t work for anyone, and the people who struggle with creativity and have creativity impact their lives in a way that can be damaging - they suffer from that because that one sentence does not define who they are. I believe that people are the sum of their experiences. There are some people who have a stronger desire to make something out of their experiences. Creativity is a desire, I think, more than it is a thing that you can go ahead and choose to do. I think it feels really good when you do it, so people think it’s like this romantic thing, but I also think I would compare it more to hunger than I would to a tree.

Creativity is the biggest part of my life. It’s hard to say where it pushes me because it’s the relationship that I have with creativity. I have to figure out how to exist with it and how to exist as a person who is mainly creatively driven. I would say there’s this huge hunger to define ourselves and something that I had to come to terms with is that instead of defining everything, I need to have a relationship with everything. So my

relationship in understanding creativity is similar to my relationship with people. Knowing creativity does not mean knowing everything it will do, can do and has done. It forces me to have relationship with many things I would not otherwise have a relationship with and because of that I'm a person who is different, in a lot of ways that align with a lot of other people who are creatively driven like I am. It's like a trait. It's a general understanding. It's something that you can feel that's common between people who have been through this. Language will fall short on that front, but it's important to know that there is a consistent effect on humans through creativity. When I found a more creative subculture, it was like the only time I ever felt like, "okay this makes sense. These are the people I'm supposed to be with".

I'm a very, very creative person and so I have to make creative limitations that suppress this raw creative energy and I have to impose technical skill on top of that. I was talking to my friend the other day and he's the exact opposite. He's way, way too technical and he's unbelievably skilled to the point where he can make these works of art that are just too sterile. He feels like they don't have any value, so he makes technical limitations, imposes them on himself so that he can push creativity.

I find inspiration from being a minority and, I think, from the people who struggle with me. I find a lot of inspiration through my relationship with mental health, a lot of it through this weird idea of the fact that it is more difficult for me to exist in certain circumstances and ways than other people. I find inspiration through poverty, but also [name of local beer]. My relationship with everything is where I get my inspiration from, because my inspiration is how I'm drawing from my pool of experiences.

I would say creativity is demonized, largely. Any artistic venture worth doing is most often not celebrated, or not met with something that allows the person who went on

this venture to exist - to survive. It is difficult to exist as someone who is creatively driven and anyone who is creatively driven knows that you exist outside of society. Existing as someone who is creative is all about creating a business plan for yourself in order to twist your art's arm into being something that someone will consume and it's so scary. If you exist as an artist and you exist as someone who lives in poverty and you exist as someone who lives in a slum apartment and you exist as a gender minority, there's no hope for you. No one is going to be like, "I understand that". It's really tough because at a certain point, some people will not be digested by a capitalistic society, ever. It took a long time for me to realize that I'm one of those people. That may change. My relationship with society and other people is dynamic and that's a big part of being a big person, when you don't hold on to these things too seriously.

I feel victimized by education, so it's hard for me to be accurate about my perception of the education system when it so emotional for me. It was largely because of not being able to exist within that culture, where it's basically trying to make people not have to worry about their existence. Others just had to work with their grades, work with growing up and becoming a member of society and I had to worry about how to exist within the place where there wasn't anything for me. I disappointed so many people going through the education system and it was a really awful thing for me to have to go through, and no one won. The teachers didn't win. They were frustrated. They wanted the best from me and I couldn't give it to them and they couldn't help me. I don't have an easy time faking enthusiasm for something that I don't want to do. It's something that I could try to mask, and try to mask, but there's a certain point when you have to be okay with yourself. There is a certain point when you realize not everything is going to change. I'm not going to be able to change this part of myself.

I feel like that's why creativity is demonized in the school system. It's just because creativity doesn't work within our society, largely, and we can fight that here, but in the school system everyone has a job, so nobody can help people fight it. It would require an entire revolution over the way we teach in order to make it so that the school system didn't reflect our social structure. There are people in our social structure that are failing - that can't exist, period, so there will be people within our education systems that are not able to exist. That's what happens when people mirror their existence onto you. And that's what the education system does a lot, right. You have the people at the top of the ladder mirroring their existences onto these children. They will never be able to understand those children, ever. They can only understand themselves.

Because of the school environment, the space that I was performing in, I would never feel right about it and I couldn't explain it. I didn't have any answers, but it would often happen. Somehow nothing worked out for me. Even if I did a fantastic performance for someone my age or that skill level, I would feel waves of anxiety months following the performance. [*Why afterwards?*] Because I went there and I would say to myself, "okay this is where I can exist, this makes sense. I'm finally being recognized" and then I go there. It's over and I realize I wasn't recognized. No one really liked that very much so I still can't exist. That was the one chance at existing in this ecosystem and I didn't. I blew it. I was able to bend certain spaces into working for me - you know the music room, the art room. I kind of felt a little bit of gratification in going there where you do feel like, "here's this troublemaker kid but we will let them stay here, you know, and just kind of deal with their problems. We'll give them space to do that". The reason I was able to take refuge in the music room wasn't because of the space. It wasn't because there were instruments in there. It was because I never felt

alienated nearly as much as I did elsewhere. Even though there were people who were just like, “oh okay, this is too much”, there were more often times people who would jab them with their elbow and say, “come on, make them feel like they are allowed to be here.” It’s like people wanted me to be allowed to be there.

The enrichment triad is a huge thing that is extremely necessary for these kinds of people, but again that’s external to the school system. Put an enrichment triad in every classroom, in every school. If you’re sad that someone’s not included, include them. It’s so simple. There’s no if, ends or buts about that. What if someone doesn’t fit in? Well the triad was built so that everyone would fit in. No matter what kind of person you are, you get along in enrichment triad. You learn more in enrichment triad and you are a better member of society after having been educated through the enrichment triad. It’s how it works because you’re telling children they are worthwhile. You give them a space where they can exist. You give them the space where they don’t feel like they have to pretend to be normal. I didn’t have to pretend to do anything. I was just told that what I was doing was valuable and I needed to work on that. It was the only time that I actually worked on myself during school, instead of just beating myself down or trying to exist.

The teacher is not going to be able to have 31 different curriculums going on at the same time. It is about getting rid of this whole number system. For me, that’s the biggest, most absolute thing because we’re talking about recognizing people. So defining people’s worth in numbers, defining success in numbers and people’s worth by their success will kill these children. When I existed in the enrichment triad, in the music community there were people who are about to graduate and there were people who were just coming in. I learned as much from the people who were younger than me and I

was able to teach as well. Existing with these different groups isn't something that we need to be afraid of. Existing with these different skill levels isn't something we need to be afraid of. You could have eight people teaching one child without a teacher having to teach at all.

Music is so diverse. You need to include people differently, and different people are dynamic, so it's not about making a different curriculum for every person. It's letting that person challenge himself or herself and if the kid's not learning anything, you need to be able to step in at that point. That should be your responsibility as a teacher, I think. You need to trust children to push themselves in ways that are most effective for them. You also need to push them to learn things that they need to learn, even if they don't want to, because it's necessary. But once you make a positive environment and a good relationship with children, they will do what they need to do in order to be great. I'm really interested in audio physics, so I needed to know basic physics. I didn't know any physics because it was too frightening for me, but imagine if I was able to go to an environment where there are lots of teachers who know about physics and say, "this is what I need to know. I need to know everything about this, so teach me the basics up to where I need to know and I'm going to remember that for the rest of my life because I need it". Then to be able to just leave that physics environment: "Thank you very much. That was an incredible interaction". I'm building guitars. Well, I need wood shop. When I was in school I would never go to wood shop, ever, but if it were laid out like that, I would have.

School is incredible. Free education is incredible. Getting to see all of these wonderful people who are going through the same thing as you at the same time is incredible. Having one hundred and eighty mentors at your disposal all the time, every

single day of the week, it is incredible. It's something that we should be enjoying. So when you unlock that and you are capable to [unlock], of course. I was somebody who didn't exist properly within the normal education system, but I really wanted to, so when I finally got the opportunity to exist within the education system in the enrichment triad, I learned more than I ever had in my entire life. It was school. I was going to school and they just made it work. That's why I was passionate, because I was so happy to finally be passionate about education.

There's a Certain Point When You Have to be Okay

Lucy's concept of creativity is closely associated with her perception of marginalization. Her description of searching for a place where education makes sense to her is challenging to accept. Her alienation may be difficult to understand for those who have never felt marginalized by authority systems. It would be easier to reject her dialogue by assuming she is just an outlier, one of a group of students that can never be reached; however, her experiences in enrichment contradict such assumptions. Her insistence that creativity is requisite to her identity further highlights the problematic nature of her education experiences. Teachers should have been able to connect with her on a creative level, yet according to Lucy that was not the case. Without a space where she felt able to be herself, she was vulnerable and disenfranchised.

Many students described creativity as an imperative that impacted their whole life. The depth of that imperative suggests how important it is to have creative opportunities in their education experiences. Like Simon's addiction, Janice's lifestyle, Lucy's volatile relationship, and in the next chapter, Susan's catharsis and informed escapism, creativity is an impulse that has to be answered. For example, Kayla described

her need to create and the reward she received from it. “I like making things. I’ve always been like that. I’ve always been making things. I didn’t play with dolls or anything. I was just making things. It’s nice when I’m working on something and I finally finish it. The sense of accomplishment is great”. Joel described creativity as a legacy to be shared. “I strive to try to get better and better until I can finally pass that knowledge onto someone else”. He also subscribed to Lucy’s idea of creativity as a relationship: “I think it’s less defining me, but more or less, I work together with it and then try to create something new”, yet he also sees it as fundamental to his identity, “because creativity at its core is really just yourself. So if you value yourself you should also, in turn, value creativity because it’s a way to express yourself”. April echoed this sentiment:

I guess I do take - I value a certain amount of creativity and being different, because I think that’s important in terms of expression and trying to be your own person, being creative and being unique. So I guess there is that, because I value that in myself and I value that in other people.

Joseph agrees with Lucy’s assessment of creativity being indefinable:

I think one of the big points of being creative is you aren’t really defined. If you are overly creative, you might be undefined. You might be - you know what I mean? [*You can’t fit into a little box?*] That might be the whole point of how your creativity defines you. It defines you as indefinable.

Ben does think creativity can be defined; however, how it is defined is sometimes too limited in scope:

I think creativity is accessible to everyone. Everyone has something that they can find to express themselves with. Even sports and stuff like that, technically that’s the way to express themselves. That’s something that’s part of who they are. So

although it may not be drawing or painting or playing music - it might not be something that someone says: “oh that’s creative, you’re playing basketball”. It’s still something that identifies that person as who they are.

Regardless of the definition, it is still clear that he views creativity as being fundamental to his identity. Imagine the impact of feeling that imperative in a system that appears to not value it. Despite Jiwong being a very accomplished musician, she resists being identified as creative because she finds the process so difficult:

I would say no, but I’m not really sure what makes someone creative? To what level- [*I’m not going to put any limitations on that. You have to decide.*] Well I could be sometimes, but I don’t like being creative - being on the spot. I feel like somebody is expecting something to be really original, something good and brilliant. I feel people always have certain expectations from me, so I don’t like creativity. [*You have less control over it when it’s something that’s coming from you?*] It takes me time, lots of time, so I can’t do it in front of someone. I need to be in my own space, taking my time.

Jiwong is alluding to the fact that her technical ability creates performance expectations. Her exceptional skill places her in high demand in the local music scene, yet her training has had little to do with original music production, making it an area with which she has little comfort. She fears the expectations of her creative efforts will be unattainable.

Maggie and April struggle with how to be unique and creative when so many people are trying to find their own identity:

Maggie: For me, I think that creativity in my life has given me a way this past year to find who I am - because I was trying so hard to keep being the same person that I was for years and years that finally I was like, “I’m just going to

totally mix it up and do something different”. So being creative in my choices and in simple things, like fashion and everything. It’s just gotten me to really find myself and set myself apart from everyone. I think that through high school you are trying to fit yourself into the same mould as everyone else, and what you need to realize is that’s the opposite of what you should be doing. You should be trying to get away from all that and trying to find your own sense of style - sense of life, I guess. So I think for me, that’s what creativity has done. It has helped me to set myself apart and finally start to figure out what I want to do in the future.

April: It’s kind of difficult too, because that’s what everyone is trying to do and everyone is trying to find ways to be unique and different, so there’s a lot of-

Maggie: Nobody wants to be the same as anyone else.

April: Yes, so it’s kind of difficult to identify what’s really creative and what’s just stereotypically creative, in a sense.

Maggie and April’s discussion provides an interesting counterpoint to Lucy’s searching for a space to belong. Where they want to distinguish themselves from the crowd, Lucy found herself already marginalized.

It is clear from Lucy’s story that she felt disconnected from her experience in the traditional school setting and that impacted all levels of her social interactions, even when she was in a space where she was generally accepted, like the music room. She felt: “That’s what happens when people mirror their existence onto you”. Maggie and April discuss this in an interesting way when asked what role the audience plays in creativity:

April: It depends on whether or not they like it. You can do something - like with

the memoir in grade 10 - you could do something really, really weird and really, really creative, but it's still not necessarily going to be good by objective standards.

Maggie: And if it's in the arts, thinking of something like Monty Python, either the public's going to react to it in a way that they love it and they think it's great how different it is, or they're just going to be totally turned off and ignore it - totally pretend it doesn't exist because they are more comfortable with it, which happens a lot. Especially at this school, there is a lot going on I find, this year, with people not sticking to gender roles and everything. That's a huge thing in the past couple of years and a lot of people just choose to ignore it and pretend that's it's not happening because they are uncomfortable with it. I don't know.

It's like that quote - I don't know who inspired it - but we are scared of what we don't understand. I think that really comes into play with creativity and the audience that it serves, because sometimes you make art for yourself and sometimes you make it for other people, especially if you're trying to have that as your career. People have to like it. You have to make it so that people like it.

April: If it's just too different, if it's just too far outside of what people are used to, people won't identify with it. It will alienate them.

Maggie: If it's not what they're looking for-

April: But that doesn't mean you can't still appreciate things on a personal level.

You can do things and as long as you like them, that can be all you define it by then. That can be all that matters, but you also do things for other people too.

Lucy touches on how scary this relationship with the audience is when she talks about manipulating her work "in order to twist your art's arm into being something that

someone will consume”. Later, Susan mentions the value of cultivating an audience for her work and a group of peers to provide feedback and perspective.

Lucy talked about the challenges of pretending to care for a subject when the material was not relevant to her needs. Several other students voiced discontent over how curriculum was delivered or what learning was prioritized in school systems. Joel did not have a very high opinion of how curriculum was delivered in the majority of his classes. He clearly identified that many teachers were not creative in how they approached the material. “The most creative is learning something new about it, but even that could still be just following instructions”. He goes on to elaborate: “There is almost no creativity in grade 10 other than the art classes and music classes - but then math, it seems like we do the same formula, death by PowerPoint and then textbook. Its just follow, follow, follow, follow”!

Students’ perception of how creativity was valued in school systems was tied closely to the amount of importance that was placed on arts curriculum. Joseph, Cory and Ben felt that the way arts courses were included in scheduling relegated them to secondary status. When asked whether creativity was valued they had the following response:

Joseph: To some extent-

Cory: Yes.

Ben: Definitely not as much as it could be-

Joseph: Definitely not as much as it should be-

[Okay. Defend that statement.]

Joseph: Well just for example, that art class and music class in grade 9 is split into half a semester each - eight weeks. A week of that is introduction. You only have seven weeks to learn how to play music or how to do art and you have to

decide if you want to take it next year, but for gym class you get a whole semester to choose.

Cory: That's a good point.

Joseph: It's not as important as it should be. People don't - the school hasn't made it as important as it should be, like making it a full semester course.

Cory: Yeah, why is that?

Paul and Zander also felt that the arts, and music specifically, did not receive enough instruction time. They felt the lack led to students undervaluing the skills learned in those classes:

Paul: Yeah we did some really simple stuff, but that is because the teacher didn't have time to teach us. Music is an all year round class in elementary school and it's a semester long class in high school, at least in grade 10, but you take it for two or three weeks a year in middle school and you don't get anything done. You don't have time. You lose everything you learn.

Zander: Even wood shop gets more time.

Paul: You don't have time to get the students to realize this is actually something to learn. This is actually worth learning.

I have seen evidence of what Paul and Zander are referring to in my classes. I often encounter students whose first organized music class happened in middle school for a very limited amount of time. They come into my class feeling defensive and scared to have to pass a subject they know nothing about instead of already having a healthy relationship and understanding of their creative abilities.

Nari felt the underlying structure of how content understanding is measured in classrooms limited creativity:

Education itself restricts us from being creative. If we look at classes, the teachers want specific answers in math and science. We have no choice because there is a certain answer. In real life, there might not be only one answer.

Creativity is kind of away from normal. Some students may be really, really smart, like intelligent in music, like her. She's not normal; she's more advanced right? [Yes.] Not being normal is restricting in society. Those people, they try to be normal. They pretend to be normal.

Nari makes an interesting observation that in school systems exceptional people like Lucy and Jiwong may try to fit in or 'be normal' rather than draw unwanted attention.

Several other students discussed the challenges of being gifted in classrooms that did not handle differentiation in creative ways. As Lucy pointed out: "The teacher is not going to be able to have 31 different curriculums going on at the same time". Devin's idea of the role of school in educating children is a sobering reminder that inclusion practices still require significant improvements:

Because you also have to think of the people who are not like us, who struggle and how they have to follow the set formula that school has for them because the school - I mean, in one way, how the school works is to make sure that everyone can get through, which is why 'smart' people are frustrated and the 'not smart' people don't like school.

Kayla shares her own experiences with being gifted in a class where the teacher is stretched to meet everyone's needs:

It sounds really bad when I say it, but I'm more advanced in certain things like math and science than most other people. [*Just so you know, it doesn't sound bad when you say that. If that's your reality, that's what it is. There is nothing wrong*

with being gifted.] Normally, I end up in classes where there's people who aren't as gifted and there is a wide range, so I'm normally just sitting there twiddling my thumbs. It's really nice when a teacher actually gives me something to do as opposed to just going, "sit there". [*Are you in the English stream or the French stream?*] The French stream. [*Do you find the classes are really close or are they spread apart in terms of ability?*] It depends. Some years it will be really close, so I actually get to do something. I know this year for math, my teacher said to my mom - because my mom mentioned something to her about me actually getting work to do - and she said that was the class that had the most difference from the top to bottom. [*Do you find when there is that much difference you tend to get ignored?*] Yes because they're like, "Oh she actually already knows how to do everything. She can just sit there and be bored. I don't have to spend time". [*That must be frustrating.*] Yes.

Maggie and April point out the challenges teachers face trying to cover the entire curriculum and their need to have a set of standards for everyone to meet:

In the classroom I think creativity, it's not frowned upon, but you know there is criteria to be met and teachers appreciate it when you try to meet all the points of it and don't just do your thing. That could be kind of hard, but you have to remember that you're going to public high school, so it's what you're in for. [*Do you think it has to be that way?*] I don't think it has to be, but I know that that is how it is and that's how it's been for a long time.

April: We have never had any other way. I don't even really know what the alternative would be because the only ones I've seen - you know when you see on TV and it's like: "oh she's going to a liberal arts school" and they mark her

and she gets a rainbow stamp when she does good. It's a joke - any other system - so I don't actually know of any viable alternative. It would be interesting to learn about them.

April's words suggest two general observations. Students view the education system as being an immovable force that has always functioned the same way, and when change is attempted, it often comes under ridicule, particularly if the reform espouses liberal arts education.

Regardless, students had strong ideas about how school experiences could be improved. Lucy advocated for education focused on students' specific interests and needs. Devin and Paul suggested eliminating the linear nature of schooling:

Devin: If they allowed more freedom in the classroom... just doing things your own way. As long as you get the work done and you're showing how you do it and it's done in a way that works, then you should be able to do whatever you want.

Paul: Yeah, I think they need to be more flexible and not only just on curriculum, but also - I don't know how to explain it - it shouldn't be so linear. Like, you go from grade 1 to grade 12 - you do everything you need to do, but if you struggle you will do it again. When you are 5 years old and you start school, you're put through kindergarten and then you're put through grade 1. What if some people are put through to grade 2. You are put where you are already at and if you understand things more than others, or if others understand less than you, that should be taken into consideration, not just your age, or your marks, or whatever. You don't have a designated grade. There would still be grade 9 Math. There would still be grade 10 English, but you could take grade 8 French and grade...

Instead of grouping students by age, Devin and Paul want to navigate the curriculum freely, based on ability and interest. Lucy experienced her validation and success in enrichment programs where like-interests were focused on, instead of organizers such as age. She described the impact of being in mixed age groups like having “eight people teaching one child without a teacher having to teach at all”. The methodologies at these enrichment opportunities share many similarities to the Musical Futures initiative (n.d.).

Lucy made a point of stressing that she only embraced enrichment outside of the confines of the school, but she goes on to argue that it should be implemented in every classroom. Cory offers a positive perspective on how inclusion could work in an enrichment setting:

We’re all on this path, some people are ahead and some people are behind, but when you are in a group where people are at different levels, people who are ahead can maybe stop and go back a little bit to help you across the path. It’s just nice to have people with different skill sets all being taught the same thing so you can work together and help each other, hear different ideas and stuff like that.

Clearly, Cory feels students working in mixed-ability groups can build equitable practice.

Erin felt having more options would go a long way toward including creative students: “Have more options for them in classes. Learn how to mark things based on effort or originality instead of right or wrong - which I think would be difficult - but if it can be achieved, it would be amazing. Just be more open to different people and different likes and dislikes”. Zander worried that not having the freedom to focus on his passion would impact his future:

I think one of the big things is they need to have more freedom in what you

choose for courses. Even in middle school, you could start to choose what you want to do. With that, that would mean that colleges would have to do the same thing and not say, “oh your grade average has to be 75% in order to get into music school even though most of those grades are depending on how good you are in social studies or how good you are in biology”.

Paul: You don't get to choose your classes really until grade 11. That's only two years to actually take what you like and move on with it to get ready for postsecondary or the workforce. If there is something that interests you, or there is something that you are good at, or that nourishes your creativity, I think it would be okay to have a chance to work on that more in the younger years.

For the most part, students seem to define inclusion as individualized learning plans that allow them to navigate the learning environment at their own pace directed by their personal interest. How that would look in a practical setting is hard to imagine when imposed upon current system structures. Fundamental systemic changes may seem daunting, but as inclusion policy evolves, it may prove to be essential so that all students' educational lives are enriched. Lucy explained why those enriched environments are so important to our creative populations: “Because you're telling children they are worthwhile. You give them a space where they can exist. You give them the space where they don't feel like they have to pretend to be normal”. When they do not have to pretend to be normal, they do not feel disenfranchised.

Chapter Eight: Susan's Story

Introduction

Susan is a 19-year-old university student. Her passion lies in writing and musical theatre. She is a self-published author and has had her plays featured in local playwright festivals. Susan views creativity as a way to reach personal catharsis and to continually learn. An only child of a military family, Susan has experienced different communities' attitudes toward arts based activities. In middle school she faced unrelenting bullying because of her involvement in theatre that caused depression and thoughts of suicide. Her high school provided a markedly different experience, where her talents were recognized and valued. Susan attributes the arts to saving her life, but also feels they were what made her a target. She credits her parents for recognizing her passion for performance and fostering it at an early age.

Susan was my student at a time when poor health forced me to make careful decisions about how I was using my time. As a result, I removed myself from any theatre productions and had to take an extended leave from the classroom. The daily task of existing was taking all my energy and it is not exaggerating to say I was deeply depressed. I felt, to some extent, I was losing out on an opportunity to work with some of the most enthusiastic and talented students I had, and I could not shake the feeling that these students deserved an opportunity to really showcase their abilities. An off-hand comment from Susan brought me back. She suggested how great it would be to do a show together - nothing extravagant, with a cast made up of students who wanted the extra challenge. Her simple but heartfelt remark saved me from the downward spiral I was on and for that I will always be grateful.

At the time of our interview, Susan is full of the adventure of school, brimming with enthusiasm for her chosen path. Even with her positive attitude, the interview is emotionally charged and it is clear there are still strong feelings associated with her past experiences.

You Do You

Creativity is intentionally doing something that is new to you in some way. I feel like every time you approach a creative project, you're doing something completely new. Even if you're going back to be a part of the same play or if you write a song, you're approaching it as a different person, so the outcome will be different and it will be something new. I think passion is the most exciting thing to me - to see other people be so passionate about something. Looking at stuff like that makes me want to work harder, or study vocal techniques harder, or memorize more monologues, because I know I could be like that person too. Creativity is all about the new and the things that are kind of scary, but the things that are scary are the things, in the long run, that are better for you. Someone said to me this year, "art isn't art if there's not someone looking at it", and to some extent I guess it's true. If it's something that you keep, then it's just something that you did, but as soon as you put it out into the world, it's art. I think you can be creative in any aspect of life and everyone has the ability to be creative. You do you. That was my motto this year.

I think society likes to pretend that creativity isn't valued, that it's just this weird kid in the corner; we don't really know what to do with it. Then you look at how entrenched it is in our culture, like music, TV and movies, you can't - if you go a day without listening to any kind of music, it's kind of weird. The arts are taken for granted,

especially when you read Yik Yak, which is an anonymous app that university students use and you're like: "Oh, why do we even have arts programs in university? Why do we even have a drama program? They're not going to get jobs".

Creativity is informed escapism. It helps you think. I think the most powerful theatre, especially, is the stuff that leaves you questioning what you came in thinking about. I think art is really important because it encourages creativity and these people that may not fit in or might not be the same as everybody else need that to go to - to feel whole - to feel they have a place in this world. If you take that away, a whole lot of people just feel useless. One of the kids who did my show played a character that is struggling with being gay. One of my friends who came to my show talked to me after and was like, "before he did this, he was really homophobic and said some really gross things", but then doing the show really opened his eyes. Creativity has allowed me to work through things. If I go through something really rough now, I will write a monologue about it.

I grew up involved in piano and involved in theatre. It was a way that I was allowed to express myself and find different facets of my personality. Then, when I moved here, the arts were taken a lot more seriously, which is really great and it allowed me to find parts of myself I didn't know were there. I don't think I would be as confident as I am today if it weren't for music and theatre. I've become less afraid to say what I feel in academic situations as well, even in situations of conflict. I don't think I'd be as comfortable telling someone that they're harassing someone or that they're saying something that is really offensive had I not been involved in music and encouraged at such a young age to find my own voice.

I think being a creative person, especially in a small-town setting where

creativity is this really weird thing, is hard. You were allowed to be creative if you were a girl, as long as you were dancing. I'll dance for shows because it's part of the shows, but I didn't do dance. I didn't play hockey. I didn't fit in because I was this weird kid who likes theatre and music. It was paradoxical because it was something that I was targeted for, but it was also the thing that kept me going through being targeted. I'm going to say it's a misogynistic society and creativity in modern times is more associated with feminine traits. So I definitely think it was them pushing back against it, especially where I was - especially with me because I was a girl who was not afraid to do what I wanted and to be involved in music and theatre. I was this thing that didn't fit their model of femininity so they pushed back against it.

Last year I decided to write a book for National Novel Writing month and I picked a subject matter that was - it is about a girl who kills herself and people are reeling with the aftermath. So as I was writing it, I was confronting my own feelings about it because it was something that I had pushed aside, but writing the novel three years later worked me through all of it and it was really cathartic. It was something that I'm so glad to have done. Not just because I am now a published author, but also because I finally got through something that I had been holding onto, but not knowing I was holding onto. And so once I finished the novel and closed my laptop, I just sat there for a minute and it was like [sigh of relief], "it's done, it's out of my system".

When I write something, I send it to different support networks and then once it's released to everyone, I know the people that I want to like it - I can deal with whatever anyone else has to say about it because it is something that I believe in and it is something that they believe in. So I think finding people that will support you and friends that will also tell you if something needs fixing is the most important part of that.

How could school systems improve for creative people? I definitely think enrichment is the best thing that could happen, because you have these people who know what you are interested in and know how to further your skills in it. The times that I'd go to enrichment were some of the best times of my grade 10 year. It was crazy to see how much one morning a week could affect you as an artist. I think having courses is definitely a start. It's not where it needs to end though. I think it's definitely something that's not: "Sit in class. Listen to a lecture. Take notes from this lecture and then go home and memorize this. We're going to have a test next week". For example, music class was something like: "We're going to talk about this thing in an open discussion and now I want you to think about this, and now we're going to see what you can do with this". It was something that forced you to be creative, to think on your feet which I think is a really important skill to have moving forward, especially in today's society where you need to be able to think on your feet and adapt.

Arts classes are more inclusive. People took theatre arts because they needed that arts credit to graduate, but by the end of the semester they were actually interested in it. English is something that's so personal to you. You write about what you know. Your essay is definitely going to be different. No two people can write the same essay. And I think with music, I think those three things are things that are really personalized to each student, not by the hands of the educator but by the hands of the student. I think if the district partnered with professional arts organizations and got to work with the professionals, that would be really great for a lot of kids. I think it is so important to focus not on just allowing creativity to happen, but to make sure that the right people are pushing creativity.

This Weird Kid in the Corner

All of the stories featured mentioned the importance of the teacher in front of the class. It is clear that most students interviewed really felt that who taught was just as important as what was taught. In Susan's case, teacher mentors were catalysts in her life. The time they spent encouraging her talents gave her validation when, socially, she was being rejected. Later when Susan escaped the bullying she faced, her mentors gave her encouragement to excise her insecurities and actively pursue her dreams. Without the support networks she had, her story could have had a very different ending.

Several of the focus group members also commented on the importance of the teacher/student relationship when fostering creativity. Maggie and April talked about teachers who make an effort to connect on a personal level:

April: A lot of the teachers at [school], they relate to students on a personal level and that fosters more creativity too because when you get to know an individual, they feel more comfortable, so they will step out of their box a little more. They feel they can talk to teachers and figure out how they can do projects differently.

Maggie: Yeah, my teachers are really open-minded so that helps a lot.

Marion talked about the importance of the student/teacher relationship when it came to assessment and the validation she felt when the activities in the classroom allowed her to express her own viewpoints:

I think that teachers just have to get to know their students and know what that student has achieved already and what that student wants to achieve, and how hard they work. They need to know their work ethic - and just know their students so they can know how much effort they put into that. Because if you don't know your student and you are given this awful piece of work, you are

going to mark it awfully and just give them a really bad grade, but if you know that student, you would probably know that that person put a lot of effort into it - put hours into it. I think it's something that they just need to know - where students are. Just be a little bit more compassionate and see their side of the story... in grade 11 and 12 they give you the choice to express yourself. They tell you, you have a mouth and you can express your opinions. That's my favourite part of grade 11. You can learn about the world and about what you think and debates... [*Is that because you feel you were being valued as a person?*] Yeah, and I definitely think there should be more of that in schools. Even in extracurricular it should be - I'm on the SRC exec [Student Representative Council] next year so I am definitely going to push that. I really want the arts to be recognized.

Devin and Ryan point out that subject matter has very little to do with whether a class is creative or not. Again it depends on the teacher and how they engage the students in the content. They make an important distinction that just because a subject is considered creative does not mean that it is being taught that way:

Devin: You can't just define where creativity is being gained or lost just down to one course because it's a lot more personal than that. For example, I've had English classes where it has been so stale and dry - and just doing work that I felt like I wanted to shoot myself in the head. It was so boring. And then, for example, this year I have a teacher in English who makes English fun and creative and we do new things all the time.

Ryan: It does vary depending on the teachers.

Devin: So I think it is important to recognize that it's not just certain fields of school. For example, you can have a music class that's totally boring with no creativity at all because they're putting you into this formula they have made out for the system that they think works, but sometimes that kills creativity. Actually, that always kills creativity.

Devin points out that creative students do not want destinations; they want pathways to apply their knowledge and come up with their own results. Like Susan's description of her music class, "we're going to talk about this thing in an open discussion and now I want you to think about this, and now we're going to see what you can do with this", the onus is placed on the process, not a preordained product. Classrooms familiar with creative processes will be comfortable with ambiguity. Other school environments could find it troubling.

Susan faced extreme bullying while in middle school and ended up using her creativity as a way to find catharsis from those experiences. Janice, "used creativity to say no to all the bad stuff that wants to get in", and Lucy felt her creativity made her less likely to fit into society, yet found within that creative space a community of like-minded individuals. Creativity is alternately being used as a tool for mental health and a declaration of identity and place. Ben shared the importance of creativity in finding who he was:

For me, probably ever since I was a kid, I've been a very quiet person. At least when I was younger, I was very shy and kept to myself. I'm definitely not so much like that now (laughter) - probably not. Going into middle school - coming out of elementary school I was picked on a fair amount. I didn't have a lot of friends. I was very lost and confused. I wasn't sure where I belonged... Going to

band, being in it since grade 6 and then coming into high school - back in middle school I played sports, but coming into high school that stopped, so if I didn't have band, I probably wouldn't be involved in much, if anything. I guess, not only has band allowed to me to find something that speaks to me and helps me identify who I am, it also allowed me to come out and be more explosive. I'm much more...

Cory: Outgoing?

Ben: Outgoing, that's the word. Since elementary school, I was very much a quiet kid and didn't really have much to say. But since then, especially since being in band and having that creative aspect just hitting me on all sides – it allowed to me to get to know who I am. Allowed me to hone my skills like being outgoing. My public speaking skills have grown a lot since.

Cory: Do you think joining band and all the other clubs helped you? Do you think if you hadn't "come out" like you said...

Ben: Yeah, it's definitely given me a lot more confidence because even now I don't think very highly of myself, not as much as I should, and being in band and having people there for me - even like you and [name] and other people in band are always there to encourage me. Having friends that have my back definitely allowed me to, not only get to know myself and be more outgoing, but it also boosted my confidence in who I am. It's made me be able to embrace myself and say, "this is who I am" and not care so much about what other people think about me.

Unfortunately, bullying is still an issue in many schools and much time and resources have been focused on promoting awareness and creating social empathy

toward marginalized communities. One of the pleasant surprises of these interviews was the lack of evidence that creative students were being targeted for bullying. There were instances, but less than expected based on my own personal experiences. Ryan shared a story where bullying led to a surprise validation of his work, although the language and imagery which he used to tell the story still incurs painful memories:

I remember one specific incident - like I said I plan on making video games - there was one specific incident in grade 8 where there was a guy who I respect less than I do my own fecal matter, who got a hold of - I had a couple of little books to put ideas in for a story or for game play and there was one I was doing for some story stuff - and so he got a hold of it one day while I was out and he started laughing at it and started sharing it with the class. He was getting them to laugh at it too, which didn't really bother me because I'd grown up to have a pretty thick skin by now, but it does go back to the point people laugh at creativity and they didn't think: "You know what? There may be a good idea in this". A year later as a joke, these two clowns right here - they just took it and they started handing it around, and it got to one of my friends who just went through it, and he was a little far so I couldn't get it back, and after he was done he just handed it back and said, "there is some really, really good stuff in there". [*That was affirming.*] Yeah, the negative didn't matter, but the fact that someone was actually really impressed by it, that baffled me because I'm a little hush-hush about it.

Zander: It probably also inspired you a little bit more as well.

Ryan: Yeah, so like some people laughed - but some people, they see it and they do acknowledge it for the better, which is definitely a good thing.

Marion and Erin had a frank discussion about the dangers of trying to fit in with the popular crowd and the courage it takes to be your own person regardless of peer pressure:

Marion: I feel that arts kids are little less superficial, are a little more down to earth. They know - for me, I feel like I have a real sense of who I am and who I want to be and who I am working towards being. I don't know, the rumours and all that gossip that gets spread around that top balcony is just a little incredible and, personally, I stay out of that. I don't even go near that balcony. That balcony terrifies me. [*Who hangs out on the top balcony?*]

Marion: It's very cliquish.

Erin: Very gossipy and mean.

Marion: The mean girls.

Erin: Very superficial.

Marion: They wear pink on Wednesdays if you get my drift. It's a Mean Girls reference [movie]. I feel like they aren't being creative and they're not expressing themselves. [*Do you say they aren't being creative because they're not willing to step out of that?*] Yes, because they're so focused on what other people think - and what other people have predisposed mentalities that, "you can't do this because it's wrong, it's not what we stand for". I mean that group may be very supportive of their drinking habits and their means of intoxication, but they are not that supportive over whether you are in band or not - whether you are in production or not. I have been a friend with all of those girls. I've been there and I've done that and I got right out of there. I had a moment where I was like: "Maybe I want to be that person. Maybe I want to be those girls on the

balcony”, but I found my home in the music room.

Erin: It takes a certain courage to be who you are and express yourself how you want to - to step out of that box and not try to fit in with those girls, but it makes you, I think, a better person. The people who do that, I find, are a lot more enjoyable to be around.

On a positive note, Marion and Erin really felt that boundaries were becoming blurred and diverse interests were becoming more accepted regardless of social cliques:

Marion: There are so many diverse likes and dislikes now, that you can have someone that’s on the AAA hockey team or on the football team and still playing an instrument here in band and still loving that art room upstairs. I think that it’s really important because I’m a cheerleader, which is so stereotypical to be blonde, and I am not blonde and peppy and just all up there and with the football boys. I’m the complete opposite. I’m in the band room a lot, so I think it’s just really interesting.

Erin: I think it’s less separated, it seems, than it used to be. People are more open with what they like and what they do. Since everyone is moving towards that, they’re becoming more accepting of it.

Ben, Cory and Joseph also talked about the pressures of fitting in and the value of arts activities when exploring identity:

Ben: There is a big pressure on people to conform. Especially being such a small city, there seems to be very much one mould that you have to fit into, and if you’re not part of that mould, you are cast off to the side and treated as an outcast. Like I said, being able to own your own kind of personality and creativity is really important. Especially being in high school and being such a

small city, there's this big pressure coming at you 24/7, but you need to fit this particular thing and if you don't there is something wrong with you. So being able to just say: 'This is who I am, I don't care what people think' is definitely a good quality, a skill to learn and own.

Cory: And also finding people who accept you for being like that. As a society, maybe we have to conform to certain characteristics, but when you can find a group of people who accept you for who you are and maybe they are also creative, it makes it a lot easier.

Joseph: Yeah there's a lot of pressure to be a certain way, to do certain things, but if you were to be your own individual and be very independent, there's also a group of independent people who you can become a group with.

Ben: It allows you to branch out into multiple different areas so you don't get stuck into one stereotype or subculture, as you said - just being able to reach all these different mediums and things that speak to you. It allows you to be all over the place, all at once.

Ben did feel that sometimes creativity was relegated to last place. He felt people had the perception that creativity was a default position when someone was not good at anything else:

I guess being where we are, being a creative person can sometimes be looked down upon because it's like: "oh why aren't you in sports? Does that mean you're not fit?" or "wow, you're an art student. It must mean you're really dumb. Why don't you go take a math course, you dummy?" Stuff like that. I've heard things along those lines. It's not in-your-face. It's under the radar, under their breath kind of stuff.

Devin and Zander accused the education system of being complicit in this perception:

Well just talking about exams and things like that, if you have ever seen the picture of - its this cartoon style picture of this guy sitting at a desk with this whole array of animals and it says: "OK, to be fair we are going to take the same test, climb that tree", and there is a fish and an elephant so obviously they are not going to be able to climb the tree. That is basically the way our education system works. If you are not good at what they deem to be important in the education system, then you are dumb.

Zander: Yeah and you are not going to go anywhere.

[So do they deem creativity to be important?]

Zander: No, they just want you to get those 85% averages and go on with your life.

Ryan suggested that the education system views creativity as childish: "I find as I come into high school now, a lot of that creativity stuff, it's either been pushed away as being childish or it's not emphasized as much". Devin felt that the education system was vacillating on how important creativity was, in essence only paying lip service to its value:

The system topples itself every now and then. It's really counterproductive because I mean everyone's always trying to claim that we need more creativity in the school system, that the school system wants you to be creative, yet it really doesn't want you to be in most cases... if someone is interested in writing, interested in a certain style of writing and the way that they do it - you know, they're not interested in by-the-book writing, then they are told it's wrong. Well you could've shutdown someone who possibly could have been one of the

greatest writers in the world. You can say that about anything. You can't really generalize anything because everything is so case-sensitive, but you need to take into account the possibilities that could be there if people are not shutdown for things that they are interested in at such an early age. And I still consider high school to be an early age; you've got so much of your life left.

Maggie also felt it important to mention the damage that could be done when creativity is dismissed:

I think it's just important for anyone in a high school environment or in a life environment to know - don't shut people down. If somebody has an idea that is out of the ordinary, either let them build on it themselves if you're not comfortable dealing with it or help them. Encourage them if they have a creative idea, because somebody who has a tiny idea in your English class could go on to change the world just based on that idea that they had.

All of the former students featured had the benefit of enrichment. Marion suggested that pushing students to engage with their work in a creative fashion provides its own type of enrichment. She cited the effort she has to put into creative work because it is outside of her comfort zone:

I'm not really artistic, but for projects I have to be because they enforce it and by adding it - I'm not artistic at all so, I mean, I enjoy doing it. I'm a perfectionist, type-A personality, so if it's not perfect I get upset, but if it's mediocre, I'm pretty proud of myself because that's something that I am not usually doing or enjoying, but when it is the finished product and it's alright, that creativity makes me happy.

[You see you trying to be creative as pushing yourself?]

Marion: (agreement) - because usually I do what I need to just get by and get that A.

Nari also talked about the challenges associated with using creativity. “ I think creativity is a part of the thinking process and that won’t come right away like, ‘oh my god this is really cool’. I think it needs practice to think well and to process what you are thinking about”. Jiwong denied her creativity earlier, yet when she shared her experiences in a senior course that allowed her to build her own curriculum, it was clear she was excited about what she had accomplished:

That is like creativity - everything you have to create on your own. That’s probably one of the biggest classes that involve creativity. Basically there is nothing. There are no rules. You set your own rules. You do whatever you want. [*Build the course?*] Yeah, so that was tough. I think that was challenging because I had to do everything, because we are not used to not being told what to do. We are always like, “you do this - that”, and then where there is just nothing... I think it builds independence too because you do everything on your own. I think creativity let’s you do that and you’re more mature. I think that’s what you grow up into in the world.

Joseph, Ben and Cory also talked about how creative options engage their work ethic:

Joseph: A lot. If there’s ever the option to make a Bristol board or draw the main characters in a novel in English class, I will usually pick that. I will just draw and express myself through that for marks for other courses.

Cory: This might be a bit of a stretch, but I think it actually helps with my mathematics skills and even writing. I’ve gotten a lot better at expressing myself through words.

Ben: Definitely English is a big one, English is such a broad - there's so much that is part of that and, I don't know, writing can definitely go anywhere and it makes you think outside the box. Another one is my French course. We have a lot of projects that involve a possibility of making videos and stuff like that along the lines of creativity and I really like doing stuff like that so-

Cory: There have been some good ones.

Joseph: And it makes you, I wouldn't say more driven, but definitely gives you a work ethic. If you are really focused on your creativity and your art, it prepares you for your other classes and it gets you into the groove of powering through and doing all your work.

[Interesting.]

Cory: That's true.

Enrichment opportunities as they were conceived in the past are no longer offered to students. Beyond financial considerations, the reasoning is that all students should have access to enrichment activities within their schools. Although that makes sense in terms of equitable practices, I cannot help but wonder what impact this will have on creative students who find school environments alienating or hostile. However, it is clear that many of the students consider engaging in creative work a type of enrichment and they would like ample opportunities to do so.

Creative students are very passionate about their craft and that passion sometimes makes them targets for ridicule. As Susan pointed out though, people who are passionate are inspirational and integral to dynamic learning spaces. Erin talked about passionate people and how important it was to not allow judgement to dampen their enthusiasm:

Sometimes they are not supported very well, especially in high school, because people are very judgmental. In the long run, I think it will turn out better for them to stick to what they love doing because there is such a pressure to fit into a certain mould, which isn't always the best thing to do. So I think eventually someone will notice and respect you for what you are passionate about, but not always, especially if you are very open with it. There are going to be people that don't agree with it or think you're weird.

Marion talks about how passion is a strong motivator and how the naysayers are actually providing an important service when someone is trying to figure out life trajectories:

I love passion because I think that's what drives you. That's who you are, and what you're passionate about is really important, but when people do step on your dreams or step on how you feel about everything you know, and they just step away and are like: "Um, that's a little too much", I think it does crush, but I think it makes the person stronger in the end because they can either push through and continue being so passionate about what they love, or they can step back and take a moment and: "Is this real"? If it's not, they will do something else. Everyone needs a dream crusher because then you can figure out whether it's really what you need and what you want and something you live and breathe for - or something that you could find somewhere else and be better or be stronger and love it more, doing something else.

Ben explained that sharing what he was passionate about was a way for him to declare who he was:

Wherever you are right now in society, it seems there's so much of being cookie-cutter and feeling there's always a certain image you have to fulfill, so finding a

way to express yourself let's you know who you are as a person and gives you something to grasp onto. This is who I am. This is what I'm passionate about.

Ben is not the 'weird kid in the corner', but a confident and articulate student, self-assured and grounded in his passions. Most students communicated the value of creativity in grounding their sense of self, despite some of the social challenges identifying as creative caused. Should not all students be given the opportunity to discover those strengths for themselves? For many, creativity will be essential to that process and making those connections will offer a life line to students in desperate need of a sense of place. Creativity can encourage community, and in extreme cases, even save lives. Finding a way to visibly support creativity in education systems through policy and deed could have significant impact on the quality of school culture for all students involved.

Chapter Nine: The Breathless Chance of a New Idea

In *Issues of Identity in Music Education: Narratives and Practices*, Campbell and Thompson (2010) argue that Narrative Inquiry may allow music educators to extend beyond the traditional interpretations of what music education should be to a more inclusive manifestation, but: “It may take removing ourselves from the insulating and isolating assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that create the music education world we find ourselves in” (p. ix). The story shared in Chapter Four represents the moment when I, as a reflective educator, shed many of the preconceived notions I held about how music classrooms could and should function. That catalyst led to the development of music curriculum around composition and to considering ways to reach the wide array of music-makers who were alienated by traditional music settings.

Although the original intent of my research was to explore the usefulness of composition in creating inclusive classrooms, the resultant work has much further reaching implications. Fundamentally, the narratives have emphasized the importance of providing opportunities for student agency when engaging in creativity and learning, as Susan states, “not by the hands of the educator, but by the hands of the student”, but they also highlight the complexity inherent in teaching creativity in the classroom, the power dynamics involved in assessing creativity, the social implications of identifying as a creative person, and the diversity of experiences the participants encountered regardless of the fact they all went to school in the same building at some point.

However, I believe recognizing student diversity is crucial. A school system that

embraces what is unique in their population in a legitimate way is creating an inclusive community and a microcosm of a socially just society. Lucy felt that it “would require an entire revolution over the way we teach in order to make it so that the school system didn’t reflect our social structure”. I do not subscribe to her fatalistic viewpoint. I believe our social structure can be impacted by the innovations in our school system. There are thoughtful educators throughout the organization who are striving to provide students with the tools needed to discover their passions. As a profession, we need to identify these teachers and disseminate their methods. They are building creative spaces where students can explore their identities and find their voices. In these spaces, students do not feel ostracized.

Do former and current music students perceive school systems as allowing them to direct their learning experiences and express their creativity in a meaningful way? The participants strongly felt that how successful and creative a class was depended a great deal on the teacher in the front of the room. It would be interesting to pursue further research into how New Brunswick teachers value creativity in their classrooms. The students’ assertions call into question whether all teachers should be engaging in creativity training and what that training should look like? They did feel that such an initiative would face resistance and many suggested the arts were viewed in a subservient position to other subject areas. Several students felt that there were teachers who honoured their creativity and valued their contributions to the class, but there was some confusion as to how teachers defined creativity and how it could be fairly assessed. Students felt their options for study were too controlled and the underlying structures of the school system dictated organizational formats that were detrimental to creative work.

Does being involved in creative endeavour at school impact students’ music

identities and if so, in what way does the impact manifest? Regardless of the students' experiences, their identity was impacted by their identification with creativity. For some, creativity provided a refuge and a peer group with similar ideologies. For others, it created isolation and made them targets for unwanted attention. Some students felt the school system was, at least partially, culpable for attitudes around creative endeavour, and many called for a more equitable celebration of academic, athletic and artistic pursuits. As Ben argues: "I hope that sooner than later, we will reach a stage where music and art will be more, will be placed on a higher pedestal and valued more than it is right now. Because I just feel it definitely isn't accented and placed as highly as it should. I feel like everything should be on the same level." Most of the participants articulated that creativity was synonymous with their sense of self, calling into question the impact of functioning in educational spaces where the perception was that it was not valued. April expresses the integral role creativity plays in identity formation beautifully:

Creativity has really helped me define who I am. That's probably a pretty typical answer for people who feel they are creative, but just being able - just the way I think and process things. It's been important for me as I've gone to high school to realize that sometimes I look at things maybe a bit differently than other people do...like processing in relation to other people. That's been a really positive thing for me because it's given me a lot of perspective, and I appreciate that because it helps me understand how I fit in better. I was really insecure coming into high school because I'm an introverted person. I don't really like a lot of social interactions, but that perspective has given me - it's really helped me figure out how I fit in with other people and its helped me - given me a lot more

confidence. Sometimes, when I'm in social situations, I don't necessarily want to be more out there or be more outgoing, and I've begun to see that that's okay. I don't have to be that different person. I wouldn't have been able to do that without being able to look at people, almost more like analyze...but just being able to creatively look at that and look at other people has helped me understand more about myself.

Many students echoed April's belief that creativity allowed them to more fully understand the experiences of their peers and of themselves. Such an endorsement suggests that all subjects would benefit from allowing time for creative pursuits within their curriculum.

What systemic changes do students propose to meet the needs of creative members of the school community and do their ideas reflect current inclusion ideology? Most students focused on flexibility in subject matter, age grouping, pace and assessment. They expressed frustration over the pacing of classes of students with widely differing skills and wished education could be more self-directed. Some students did point out that even if creative options were offered, they would choose the more straight-forward approach because it required less effort. However, many students wanted more opportunities to discover how something worked rather than be told. The value they all placed on their enrichment experiences should be noted and suggests that schools should consider creating similar environments within their building, a proposition that would involve careful planning and schedule organization. Despite this, the rewards would far outweigh the challenges. Fostering relationships with community artists and creating more opportunities for collaborative work between disciplines would also have a positive impact.

There are limitations to this research. The students were specifically selected from a group who identified themselves as creative. It would be interesting to repeat the interviews with a random sampling of the student population to see how the results are impacted. Although I did my best to mitigate my influence on student answers, there is no denying my connection to the interviewees and the subject. Despite of, or because of this relationship, I found the students quite candid in their responses. The research was quite large in scope and although, to some extent, that was the point, it would be interesting to isolate on some of the specific issues the students identified for a more substantial examination.

Music is often relegated to a superficial role when cuts need to be made to education requirements, yet, almost everyone has some sort of relationship with music, whether it is as consumer, producer or both. “Our contention is that music is not only important for us all, but that it plays a fundamental role in the development, negotiation and maintenance of our personal identities” (MacDonald, Hargreaves & Miell, 2009, p. 462). Because of its universality, all students have access to some level of experience with music which is tied to their sense of self. Authentic experiences with music could connect with that sense of self and foster belonging and community for otherwise disenfranchised students. We need to expand our definition of inclusion away from trying to fit students into an existing system. Instead, we should be looking at how the education system and classroom methodologies can be improved to meet the needs of our diverse populations. After all:

Inclusion is not a target to be hit, or a goal to be reached; nor is it the final destination of a road of continuous linear improvement. Rather, inclusion is an ongoing process: marked out by struggle and negotiation and worked out through

interpersonal actions and relations in a wider social and political context.

(Benjamin et al. 2003, p. 556 as cited in Belanger & Gougeon, 2009, p. 291)

Schools could learn from creative students' preferences for pathways rather than destinations. As Lucy pointed out: "Knowing creativity does not mean knowing everything it will do, can do and has done". The ability to approach systemic problems not to find an immediate solution, but instead to explore, examine, reframe, reflect and draw inference from multiple perspectives would lead to more thoughtful and sustainable reform. After all, knowing education does not mean knowing everything it will do and can do. It is not possible to predict all the changes the education system will undergo in the future, but we can hope to impact those changes by fostering creative and responsible citizens in our classrooms.

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Appendix A: Letter of Introduction

Dear Student,

My name is Jennifer Keating and I am working on my Masters in Education at the University of New Brunswick. As part of my research project I would like to invite you to take part in a focus group about the role creativity plays in your life. You have been identified as a candidate because of your involvement in music.

My research will explore the role creativity plays in how students interact with learning, whether it assists in creating inclusive classrooms and whether creativity plays a part in how you define yourself and your relations to others. I hope that what I learn from your participation will help teachers make decisions about the inclusion of creativity in the curriculum.

If you agree to take part in this research, the focus group will last for 90-120 minutes and will be made up of fellow students in the same grade. The group will meet in the Dream Catcher Room, _____. Please read the enclosed Information and Consent Form, sign it and have your parent/guardian sign it as well. Return the form to the office in the labeled envelope provided by **Tuesday, May 19th, 2015**.

During the interview, I will ask questions to encourage you to share stories of how creativity plays a role in your life. I will ask you to reflect on your experiences, positive and/or negative with creativity in school. You may refuse to answer any question or withdraw from participating at any time. The interview will be voice recorded. All information will remain confidential and any recordings will be destroyed five to seven years after the completion of the study. You may have a copy of the final study report if you wish.

This project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2015-048. If you would like further information or have any questions please contact me by phone or email, contact my advisor or University of New Brunswick's Chair of Research Ethics:

Jennifer Keating

jennifer.keating@nbed.nb.ca
Jennifer.Keating@unb.ca
459-4395 (home)

Dr. Ann Sherman

Dean of Education, UNB
Phone: 506-453-4862
shermana@unb.ca

Dr. Steven Turner

Chair of REB, UNB
Phone: 506-453-5189

I am very excited to hear your thoughts on the role of creativity in inclusive classrooms. Thank you for considering participating.

Sincerely,
Mrs. Jennifer Keating
Music Teacher, BMus. BMus.Ed.

Appendix B: Guiding Interview Questions

1. Can you define creativity for me?
2. What role does creativity play in your life? How does your creativity define you?
3. Why do you think creativity is important?
4. Do you think creativity should be valued in life? In school? Can you give me examples of where it is valued? Where it isn't valued?
5. Why do you participate in being creative? What role does an audience play in your work? Is it necessary?
6. Describe an experience where being creative had a positive impact on the outcome.
7. Tell me about a time when being creative had a negative impact on your life.
8. What do you like best about being creative?
9. Where do you find your inspiration? Where does your creativity come from?
10. How does creativity play a role in your schoolwork?
11. How do you see creativity playing a role in your careers?

Appendix C: Consent Form

Title: Student Voices on Inclusion, Music Identity and the Power of Composition

Investigator: Jennifer Keating
jennifer.keating@nbed.nb.ca
Jennifer.Keating@unb.ca
459-4395 (home)
260-4395 (cell)

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Ann Sherman
Dean of Education, UNB
Phone: 506-453-4862
shermana@unb.ca

School Representative: Mr. Brad Sturgeon
Principal, LHHS
Phone: 506-457-6898

Research Ethics Board: Dr. Steven Turner
Chair of REB, UNB
Phone: 506-453-

5189

brad.sturgeon@nbed.nb.ca

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study by Jennifer Keating, a Masters of Education student at the University of New Brunswick. This research is an opportunity for students to share their experiences with creativity in inclusive classrooms. It is an opportunity to discuss whether schools value creativity and it is a chance for students to share their ideas on how to make education better and more inclusive for all students.

Information Summary:

I understand that:

- I am taking part voluntarily.
- I may withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on my standing at school.
- Jennifer Keating will interview the focus group I am participating in. The interview will be recorded. I will be asked to provide consent to being voice recorded.
- I will be answering questions on creativity and the role it plays in my life and education.
- There are no known risks to taking part in the focus group. I do not have to answer any questions that make me feel uncomfortable if I do not want to.
- The focus group will take 90-120 minutes.
- By signing the consent form I am agreeing not to discuss what happened during the focus group outside of the meeting.
- I will be responsible for any schoolwork missed as a result of taking part in the focus group.
- I will be asked to provide my name, age and experience with music making. I will be asked to provide a contact number and email for later contact if needed.
- My personal and identifying information will remain confidential. Only Jennifer Keating will have access to the recordings. They will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in her place of residence. Any recordings will be destroyed five to seven years after the completion of the study.
- The findings may be used in conferences and scholarly publications.
- I may request and receive a copy of the final report. A copy will be provided to Mr. Brad Sturgeon, principal of LHHS, for public access.

Please keep this information letter for your use. Please complete the Information and Consent form on the following page and submit it to the office in the provided envelope.

Participant Information:

Full Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Grade: _____

Gender Identification: _____

Please provide a brief outline of your music experience:

Please describe any other creative arts you participate in?

Participant Consent:

I, _____ have read the information letter and have had all questions answered to my satisfaction. I understand I will be participating in a focus group for Student Voices on Inclusion, Music Identity and the Power of Composition for 90-120 minutes that will be voice recorded. I understand that my participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw at any time

I have been assured that my personal information will remain confidential and safely stored in a locked filing cabinet for five to seven years; at which point it will be destroyed. I can contact the researcher, Jennifer Keating, her supervisor, Dr. Ann Sherman, principal, Mr. Brad Sturgeon or the Research Ethics Board with any questions, concerns or complaints I have. I hereby give my informed consent to be a participant in this study.

 Signature

 Date
Parent/Guardian Consent:

I, _____ the parent/guardian of -
 _____ have read the information letter and have chosen to give consent. I understand that my child's participation is voluntary and I am free to withdraw permission for him/her to participate at any time

 Parent/Guardian Signature

 Date
Researcher Statement:

I acknowledge that this project has been reviewed by the Research Ethics Board of the University of New Brunswick and is on file as REB 2015-048.

 Signature

 Date

Curriculum Vitae

Candidate's full name: Jennifer Elizabeth Kathleen Keating

Bachelor of Music, Mount Allison University, 1995

Bachelor of Music Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1998

Publications

Keating, Jennifer. (1998). Making connections. *Canadian Music Educator Newsletter*, (100), Winter, 6.

Keating, Jennifer. (1998). Identity formation in music education: A conversation with fourth year music education students. *Canadian Music Educator*, vol.40, No. 1, Fall.

Conferences

Student Voices: Creativity in Inclusive Classrooms, (2015), Learn2Learn Conference. UNB Education.