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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

COMPOSING A COMPREHENSIVE MUSIC EDUCATION:  
TEACHER AND STUDENT EXPERIENCES  
WITH THE ROLE OF SONGWRITING IN  
ELEMENTARY GENERAL MUSIC

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Music

Tara Lynn Neeley

College of Performing and Visual Arts  
School of Music  
Music Education

December 2021

This Thesis by: Tara Lynn Neeley

Entitled: *Composing a Comprehensive Music Education: Teacher and Student Experiences with the Role of Songwriting in Elementary General Music*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Music in the College of Performing and Visual Arts in the School of Music, Program of Music Education.

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## ABSTRACT

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Music education has for many years focused on the musical role of performance and teaching from the traditional canon of Western classical music. In recent years, it has been noted that just a small portion of students participate in music offerings in secondary schools. Yet, the mission of the music education profession is for all students to experience and make music. To reach more students, music education must be relevant to students' real world, pragmatic for a lifetime of musical involvement, and must help students build their identities. Providing a comprehensive music education in which students experience all musical roles, such as those of composing and songwriting, could address and meet the issues of relevance, pragmatism, and identity construction. In turn, potentially more students may identify as a 'musician' in one of the various roles and thus continue their education in music. This comprehensive music education must begin in elementary general music classes. However, it is unknown how often songwriting is incorporated, what strategies are used to teach it, and how it is experienced by teachers and students in elementary general music.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how songwriting is included and experienced in elementary general music classes. To gain a comprehensive understanding, teachers and students were included in this two-part research study. Through an anonymous survey, 180 teacher participants reported how often they include songwriting, how comfortable they are teaching songwriting, perceived challenges, and strategies they use when teaching songwriting.

Additionally, 50 of the researcher's third-grade students participated in action research to explore how students experience songwriting and how effective visual art might be as one songwriting strategy.

The results of the teacher survey suggested that songwriting is not regularly incorporated in elementary general music, with nearly half of participants never or rarely including it, while the other half only occasionally include songwriting. Teachers also reported being less comfortable teaching songwriting than teaching traditional instrumental composition. Through analysis of the data sets it was discovered that participants who were more comfortable teaching songwriting taught it more frequently and also utilized more songwriting strategies. The greatest reported challenges to songwriting in the general music classroom included students feeling stuck in their writing, songwriting taking too much class time, and songwriting being messy and chaotic.

As part of the action research conducted in the classroom, 50 students working in pairs wrote 12-bar blues songs based on an environmental justice theme of their choosing without any other sort of prompt. Teacher observation and student work analysis revealed lyrical idea generation to be a significant challenge and many students struggled to complete thorough, prosodic verses. Following the days spent on the environmental justice topic, the same student participants wrote another blues song in pairs using a piece of social justice artwork as a visual prompt strategy. Analysis of the student work and student questionnaires after using the art prompt revealed most students felt more confident, found idea generation to be less of a challenge, and completed more detailed, thorough verses. Generating rhyming pairs of words was still a considerable challenge in both parts of the student songwriting study, and a small number of student songwriters found it more challenging to use the visual art prompt.

Taken in the context of one another, the results of the teacher survey and student research indicates using strategies such as a visual art prompt when teaching songwriting in general music could help remedy some of the teacher-perceived songwriting challenges, increase teachers' songwriting comfort level, and boost songwriting frequency by improving the student songwriting experience. Consequently, the vision of a comprehensive music education could begin to take shape if songwriting is included more often. Further research needs to be conducted that explores the effectiveness of other songwriting strategies and ways in which teachers can receive more training in general music classroom songwriting.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **A Century's Mission in Music Education**

“The mission of the National Association for Music Education is to advance music education by promoting the understanding and making of music by all” (NAfME, 2021a). Those last three are worth repeating – music by all. NAfME (2021a) has placed no qualifiers on these words such as “music by all (but only until 6th grade)” or “music by all (but only if you prefer Western art music).” Implicitly, NAfME’s mission is understood as ALL students K-12 participate in musicking. If history repeats itself, then this is certainly an echo of the past. Just months away from the centennial anniversary of the 1922 Music Supervisors’ National Conference in which Board President Karl Gehrkins coined the motto “music for every child, and every child for music” (Hayden, 1922), music education is still speaking these same ideals. Does having nearly the same mission after one hundred years reveal stalwart dedication to music education? Or, perhaps does it underscore the professional struggle to realize that mission? Surely, a professional objective should advance and expand over the course of a century as the organization meets its goals. The realization that the professional music education mission has not evolved should be cause for inquiry and thought-provoking discussion.

While most would agree that having the same mission a century later is indeed a reflection of steadfast dedication and advocacy, it is time for the music education profession to face an uncomfortable truth. Music education is far from reaching the mission of those three words – “music by all.” According to Elpus and Abril (2011), nearly 80% of secondary school

students do not participate in school music offerings. Through the lens of typical American grading systems, 20% active involvement is not average or even below average progress. Our century report card indisputably earns an F. We have failed to realize our mission of “music by all.” If we are to begin making reparations to not only realize our mission, but expand that mission for the 21st century we must begin by looking inward toward the skeletons hiding in our own storage rooms, classrooms, and music libraries.

### **Professional Introspection**

The first of these invisible skeletons can be found embedded deep within the history of the music education paradigm. Despite it being the 21st century and the plethora of ways to make and be involved with music, we still place a heavy emphasis on presentational performance as the anointed path to become a ‘musician’ (Regelski, 2014). So strong and long held is this practice, that Reimer states, “we have become conditioned to think of the duality of the classroom and rehearsal hall as constituting the universe of music study in schools” (2003, p. 279). Kratus (2019) suggests teachers in K-12 schools may only be familiar with music as semi-professional performers since most of their collegiate experience is spent in ensembles or individual performances. Without experiencing other ways to be involved in music outside of performance, many will continue to emulate their previous university directors and professors whom function as what Allsup (2007) refers to as “insatiable skill-builders.”

This endless cycle of perform-teach-perform marginalizes and divides our students into the ‘musicians’ and ‘non-musicians’ by the end of elementary school. At this time, students are preparing to choose middle school electives where they may specialize in a musical role. There are many roles within music such as performer, listener, composer, arranger, improviser, and critic (Reimer, 2003). Some students may indeed wish to continue performing in choir, band, or

orchestra. A small number of students who have been exposed to the various musical roles in elementary music class may still see themselves as musicians, and choose to pursue those roles outside of performance. A larger portion however, who have been pushed toward active performing in elementary with near exclusivity, may see themselves as “failed musicians” (Ruthmann, 2007) if they don’t want to pursue performing in middle school. These failed musicians by no fault of their own are contributing to that 80% that does not participate in secondary school music (Elpus & Abril, 2011). For these students, their personal identity of ‘non-musician’ has been cemented by the age of 11 or 12 years old. This finding reiterates the research of Thomas Turino (2009) when he reported most North Americans stop participating in music when they reach adulthood, with the exclusion of church singing. As devastating and self-destructive as this is to our profession and to musical lives of our students, it seems difficult to imagine there could be other skeletons hiding within but further introspection is required.

Living within music classrooms and libraries is another of these invisible skeletons - aging, worn, and dusty. All around these spaces, textbooks, literature, and curriculum materials from decades, even centuries past can be found. Although some are spared from the garbage more as an honorary nod to our profession’s founders, many teachers still cling to these items as their holy grail of teaching materials. Many times over, researchers have reported the same finding that could help explain this phenomenon - teachers most often create their curricula based on the way they were taught and/or their own goals (Kratus, 2007; Regelski, 2014; Woodford, 2002). The implication is that many teachers today are still dogmatically teaching with the same philosophy, methods, and materials their teachers, and their teacher’s teachers used decades ago. Regelski (2014) refers to this indoctrinated curriculum design as “methodolatry” (p. 3).

As well-intentioned as some might be, it is egregious and unethical to adopt curriculum practices and materials without considering how they apply to students today. In referring to the lack of consideration for community and cultural relevance in curriculum planning, Reimer stated, “we have often deprecated their choices, attempting to elevate their musical lives by substituting our own choices, reflecting our own superior tastes and enthusiasms” (2003, p. 248). Turning deaf ears to the community of parents, students, and the greater society results in a lack of relevance. As society and the musical world rapidly changes, students are looking to find relevance and identity in their music making, but music education still firmly holds the canon of Western art music and its’ traditions as sacrosanct the music classroom. Criticizing this practice, in 2019 Kratus wrote, “it makes no sense that contemporary students are taught music in ways more appropriate to the nineteenth century than to the twenty-first century” (p. 35). We have come to a fissure between school and musical reality. The Western canon of music no longer reflects the reality of students’ musical lives outside of school. Many of the classical and folk songs still taught in music classrooms will never be heard or encountered once students leave the building. From this experience, students view two disparate entities of “school music” and “real music” (Allsup, 2007; Hickey, 2012; Kratus, 2016). When “school music” prevents students from finding identity or building identity because it no longer connects to their ‘real’ musical lives, music education becomes irrelevant and impractical, potentially driving students to become part of the 80% who do not participate in secondary school music offerings (Elpus & Abril, 2011).

### **Comprehensive Music Education for All**

If music education as a collective professional organization wishes to improve its report card progress by actually accomplishing ‘music by all,’ students need to receive a music

education that helps build identity in a relevant and pragmatic nature within all musical roles, including composition, not just performing. As a solution, Reimer (2003) proposes a *comprehensive* education in music beginning in elementary general music in which students are educated in every musical role to promote lifelong music involvement by all in whichever role they desire. Clarifying this comprehensive vision, Reimer states, “the goal of general music, in this conception, is to enable all students to develop their awareness of the roles that music encompasses in their culture, so that those roles can be appreciated, understood, and seen as the repertoire of musical possibilities open to all” (2003, p. 252). Through this vision all roles are presented with equal gravitas and importance. Although each unique in their own philosophical minutiae, the works of fellow musical philosophers, Randall Everett Allsup and Thomas Regelski, are also calling the profession to action, as each highlights the need for students to experience all the ways in which one can be musical, and what each role can bring to students’ holistic education. Allsup (2015), refers to this crossroad as a “both/and” moment, and encourages the music education profession to flourish within the beautiful pluralism of the ways to know and do music. Similarly, Regelski (2014) advocates for viewing every musical practice and pedagogy as valuable ‘tools.’ Indeed, it might be difficult to find any adult, construction-oriented or layperson, who would say only one tool is needed to accomplish any job. Having more tools in a toolbox is never perceived as a problem. Quite the contrary, the more tools that are in a toolbox, the more efficient it is to do the job. Music education is no different and as Regelski suggested, tools are not just materials and equipment. Teachers need to fill student toolboxes with the many roles or ways they can experience music as possible tools.

Through the comprehensive process of educating children in all musical roles, the aforementioned lack of relevance, pragmatism, and musical identity also begin to be rectified.

When looking through the lens of each musical role applicable to a culture, as Reimer advocated, other music canons, history, and societal topics become commonplace in the music education classroom discourse. Examining each of the musical roles would require considerable amounts of research and time. For the purposes of this study, elementary songwriting as a division within the musical role of composition, is investigated.

### **Songwriting as a Role Within Composition**

In its simplest form, music consists of two parts, sound and silence. To compose music is to organize patterns of sound and silence into interesting, expressive, and “feelingful” form (Hickey, 2012). To ‘compose’ has typically been taken in the context of creating classically notated music (Hughes & Keith, 2019) but today music takes many forms and as such, is composed in many different ways. Some might compose with paper and pencil. Others might compose their notation in computer programs such as Finale or Noteflight. Additionally, digital audio workstations (DAW), allow students and professionals alike, to compose directly into a program by creating and layering digital or recorded sounds. Some may still use notation in a DAW while many may not. Songs and the creation of songs known as songwriting, is another role within composition (Kratus, 2016). Reinhert and Gulish (2020), define a ‘song’ in its most basic form as a melody with lyrics. Kratus adds that songs are “sung by one or several persons, and are usually accompanied by one or more instruments to provide harmonic and/or rhythmic support” (2013, p. 267).

Taken as a whole, composition, including all its roles and contexts, has been recognized and elevated as a core competency in music education, as evidenced in the most recent arts standards. In 2014, the National Core Arts Standards, of which music is an included discipline, designated ‘creating’ as one of the four core standards, along with performing, responding, and

connecting. Similarly, the National Association for Music Education bases the current music standards on the three artistic processes of creating, performing, and responding (NAfME, 2021b). Additionally, NAfME offers a Special Research Interest Group [SRIG] for creativity and a Music Composition Council. In *Minds on Music* (Kaschub & Smith, 2009), the authors outline a five-point rationale for teaching composition in PreK-12. This rationale states, “Every child should have the opportunity to study composition because the act of composing:

1. Challenges children to consider their understanding of the world in new ways
2. Allows children to exercise their generative potential in music
3. Develops a way of knowing that complements understandings gained through other direct experiences of music
4. Invites the child to draw together the full breadth of his or her musical knowledge
5. Is a process that allows the child to grow, discover, and create himself or herself through artistic and meaningful engagement with sounds.” (pp. 4-5).

As Kaschub and Smith outlined in this rationale, composition allows students to connect all of their musical learnings from the other roles such as performing and listening. Just as writing and reading have a reciprocal relationship in a child’s language arts development, composing music has a mutual relationship with all the other roles in music education. Each compliment and help develop the other roles. Without the opportunity to actually create in music, the bulk of what students do is simply re-create other already well-known musical works. This would be akin to visual art students only re-painting the works of famous master painters such as Van Gogh’s “Starry Night” or DaVinci’s “Mona Lisa” without ever getting to create their own visual art. There are lessons to be learned from the masters, but art students are given the agency and autonomy to spend most of their time creating their own art based on the principles they learn from masterpieces. Looking deeper into this analogy, it would seem baffling to not allow music students

this same agency and autonomy to create their own music based on principles they learn in performing and listening.

Those who advocate for composition make no reservations about composing at young ages. Just as students even in preschool are given the opportunity to create their own visual art, researchers argue that the role of composition should be experienced by even the youngest musicians in elementary general music classes (Hickey, 2012; Kaschub & Smith, 2009; Reimer, 2003; Wiggins & Medvinsky, 2013). Illuminating this compositional call to action, Hickey (2012) states “there is an urgent need to begin music composition activities early, often, and in a systematic fashion in our school music curricula” (p. 3). By being introduced to the role of composition early, students reach the end of elementary school realizing there are in fact many ways to be a musician, aside from being a performer. Those who then don’t identify as a performer and subsequently join an ensemble, know they are still musicians and are able to pursue other musical roles rather than resigning from music altogether. Researchers have made clear that the role of composition needs to be taught alongside other musical roles and within all grade levels. Further delineation is required to uncover how the role of songwriting as a distinct subdivision of composition can attend to the need of relevance, pragmatism, and identity-building in music education.

### **Relevance Through the Role of Songwriting**

For many music educators the concern of relevance might be seen as an issue beginning in older children and adolescents as they begin to form preferences for certain musical genres. However, the relevance between music and lived experience actually begins in early childhood development. It seems appropriate to emphasize composition starting in early childhood given that children have a natural proclivity to invent with sound. From a baby’s first days they are

exposed to sounds and songs, particularly lullabies. As they become toddlers, they are still immersed in a world of music, from children's television programs, toys, and movies to songs of holidays and celebrations. Through this immersion, music becomes woven into the developmental fibers of every child. Children naturally begin to add their own music to their play by composing in sounds and short improvised lyrical songs, which continues until about the age of seven or eight when this natural compositional activity begins to taper off if not encouraged and extended through composition activities such those in general music class (Kaschub & Smith, 2009). This sonic experimentation of ideas becomes the soundtrack of their play. Composing in-school is therefore relevant to their lives since it naturally occurs in their development. Even though children's songwriting may not be fully fleshed out songs in what adults consider complete by their standards, Kaschub and Smith add, "the creation of songs is often one of the first compositional activities that children pursue. As the voice tends to be the primary instrument of young composers, song is a natural outlet for musical thinking. Songs also lend themselves to the structure of stories – another medium that children warmly embrace" (Kaschub & Smith, 2017, p. 44).

The relevance of "songs" is not unique to young children though. Because of their ability to tell stories and the fact that most people are naturally born with a singing instrument, previous research of Kratus (2013) suggests that songs are actually the most enduring and ubiquitous form of music given that every culture from Ancient Greece to present day has been known to have songs. Within each culture song have served every purpose from entertainment, celebration, and transmitting secret messages to religious ceremonies, military functions, funerals, and playground games. Regardless of individual function, songs serve to express the profundity and complexity of the human experience. With the importance of songs in every society, most people

actually describe “music” and “songs” as one in the same. In other words, to most people songs encapsulate the world of music because it constitutes most of their musical experience in life (Kaschub & Smith, 2009; Kratus, 2013). Taking into consideration the prevalence of songs and the ever-evolving world of technology, it is no surprise that interest in songs only increases as children grow. With the advent of personal digital music players children and adolescents now have access to the world of music at an unprecedented level (Hickey, 2012; Ruthmann, 2007). Whether it’s an iPod, phone, tablet, or combination of these, children have music at their fingertips throughout the day via personal music libraries, streaming services, and YouTube. Upon examining their listening habits, Kratus (2016) notes that almost all of the music youth listen to through these devices and programs are in the form of songs. It would then be impossible to separate the listening experience of youth with the vernacular music of their society and culture.

The musical form of song goes hand in hand with vernacular music styles such as pop, rap, and hip hop. Educators can either include or exclude students by including or excluding these musical styles. Explaining this, Kallio (2015) asserted, “In excluding, or marginalizing particular popular musics, in turn, so are those young people who enjoy and identify with such musics excluded from and marginalized in school music education” (p. 207). Although these styles would be a firm departure from the music normally taught in general music class, researchers propose that weaving these into the existing curriculum is exactly what music educators need to do to make their classrooms relevant with students (Colquhoun, 2018; Cremata, 2017; Isbell, 2016; Kruse & Gallo, 2020; Tobias, 2015). The support for inclusion of popular music styles in the classroom is not new however. Over sixty years ago, the Tanglewood Symposium participants deemed it necessary and responsible to include all musical styles,

genres, and cultures in the music education classroom, including those popular with youth (Isbell, 2007). Kruse and Gallo (2020) insist however, that just listening to and recreating popular music of others is limiting students' elementary music education. Students also need to be given opportunities for personal creative expression in popular music styles. As a solution these authors suggest including many composition and songwriting projects in popular music styles with elementary students. Undoubtedly, the musical form of song and vernacular music styles are both familiar to students. Allowing students to experience both would help to create a relevant music classroom environment by connecting their in-school and out-of-school music experiences.

Looking beyond child development, interest, and musical styles, relevance through songwriting also relates to the skills students need in 21st century learning frameworks. Society today is past the time when schools functioned more as factories, assembling students as packages of information built on convergent 'one correct answer' thinking. To succeed in the 21st century, students now need to flow between convergent and divergent thinking. Creativity takes center stage in divergent thinking in which many ideas, possibilities, and solutions are innovated and valued. Highlighting the importance of creative thinking to society, Florida (2002) claims that we are living in a creative age where economic growth and social change are brought about by creativity, and as such, human creativity is the ultimate economic resource. According to Reimer (2003), every child is born with a certain degree or capacity of creativity in a particular domain, but it is up to others such as educators to nurture and expand that creative potential. Because of the inherent creative nature of songwriting and composition in which new material is generated by an individual through the convergence of many divergent ideas, these musical roles are particularly suited to practice and expand the creative potential of every child

to meet the needs of their 21st century society. Skills required to succeed in today's world goes beyond creativity though, and are reflected in the Partnership for 21st Century Learning's *P21 Framework*.

Created to guide the educators in preparing students for their current world, the *P21 Framework* outlines five knowledge themes and six skills as essential for 21st century learners. Creativity is just one of the six essential skills which also include collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, innovation, and communication (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2007). Critical to building these skills is curiosity, asking questions, and experimenting. Composition and songwriting is an act in which students must use all of these skills throughout the process of creating their musical product. Requiring the convergence of a students' entire previous musical experience, research describes composition as the most demanding of all musical activities and suggests it is parallel to research in other academic domains (Hughes & Keith, 2019; Kaschub & Smith, 2009). Further elucidating the research connection, Kaschub and Smith report, "From its very beginning, creating a musical work is a research project. The process involves defining a problem, testing hypotheses, formulating an original response, and sharing the results" (Kaschub & Smith, 2009, p. 10).

In addition to allowing students to build 21st century skills, composition and songwriting also allow the teacher to function as a facilitator in a student-centered classroom which is advocated for under the *P21 Framework* as well. During songwriting activities, the students are given autonomy to drive their learning and seek out guidance from teachers, rather than the teacher constructing and delivering all learning. In this sense, the teacher becomes a record producer for their students in which they oversee the entire process, observe and counsel as an advisor, and encourage and inspire new ideas (Moorefield, 2005). Given the complex and close

relationship between 21st century skills and the composition process, music researchers advocate for more inclusion of composition, including songwriting, in music classrooms, as one of many ways to stay relevant to students lives (Hickey, 2012; Kaschub & Smith, 2009; Vasil, 2020; Vasil et al., 2019).

Clearly, songwriting is relevant to students beginning with their development and taking many forms thereafter, including student interest, song exposure, and 21st century skills. Equally of importance still is how songwriting is pragmatic to students lives.

### **Pragmatism Through the Role of Songwriting**

Pioneering music education philosophers such as Allsup, Regelski, and Reimer have all called upon the music education profession to ask questions about their own practice such as “Whose interests are served?” (Regelski, 2014; Reimer, 2003), “Is this practical for my students today? “Does this matter to students anymore?” (Allsup, 2007). When probing the validity of practice under these queries, the dissonance between how music exists in the world and how music exists in schools must be called into question (Kratus, 2007). For these four authors, the basis for comparing classroom practice to how music chiefly exists in the world, rests on the guiding principle that the purpose of music education is to provide students with the musical skills and knowledge that will have the widest and longest lasting musical benefit for an entire lifetime, not just during a student’s years in school. Elaborating upon the lack of pragmatism in music education, or practicality for a lifetime of music making, Kratus retorts, “If music educators do not actively promote music learning that applies outside of school or years later, then why teach students anything at all?” (2019, p. 35). Likewise, Regelski advises, “Instruction that produces no consequential, useful, and lasting musical benefits for students thus fails to qualify as either ethical or as a helping profession” (2014, p. 83).

The questions and thought-provoking statements posed by these authors point us to the fact that for students, music principally exists in the form of recorded music, small bands, and the individual sing-songwriter, rather than large community or professional ensembles of years past. Ruminating on the evolution of music in society, Allsup (2013) writes, “many of today’s musical prophets can be found hiding in plain sight, outside conservatories and schools of music, communicating in vivo through media and social networking sites, in bars and in basement studios” (p. 57). Indeed many, even those who don’t fit the school music profile of “musician”, are participating in music creation, performing, and sharing outside of school. Kratus (2019) states that instruments like ukulele, guitar, keyboard, and digital instruments are the first choice by many students and now lead in instrument sales. By playing these instruments, students are enabled to perform alone or with others and are free to be singer-songwriter-instrumentalists as a total musical package which is often reflective of their actual musical world.

As digital natives, students today may have more tech experience and available tools than all previous generations. If desired, students can write and perform songs, then record, edit, and mix them in user friendly DAW’s like GarageBand and Soundtrap (Bauer, 2020). Upon finalizing their musical products many students share their work with friends, family, and the world at lightning speed through apps and the internet. In these digital communities, students’ musical needs and interests are fulfilled by receiving real-time feedback, advice, and ideas from others like themselves, while also feeling that their musical endeavors are of value in the “real” musical world (Kaschub & Smith, 2013).

Recognizing this evolution of music in society, Regelski (1997) began advocating for a wide range of compositional activities in general music classes since they are highly pragmatic to a lifetime of music-making. In 2016 Kratus explicitly promoted songwriting for in-school music

classes as a practical solution to meet the out-of-school desires of students to be singer-songwriter-instrumentalists. If music educators are truly serving students' interests and needs, then practice and curriculum must be re-examined for pragmatism to be sure it will translate as useful for a lifetime of music. Considering students already have an interest in composition and songwriting outside of school, it would provide a lasting benefit, and therefore be pragmatic to teach it in general music as well.

### **Identity Through the Role of Songwriting**

As a final piece of the rationale for songwriting in the elementary general music curriculum, the place of arts in a democratic society must be examined. Students now live in a culture that is flooded with news media and social media covering a vast number of social and environmental justice issues. This means students not only need to learn the skills to uncover truth, but they also need to be their own truth. Where seemingly everyone is able to add their voice to the narrative, it is necessary for students to know how to have their voice heard in that mix. The arts must not turn a blind eye to this shifting political and societal landscape, but instead must embrace this chance for the next generation of society's innovators and problem solvers to raise their voices through the arts. Challenging music educators to move beyond replication and predetermined answers, Rickels (2020) argues "to use the arts as an opportunity for our students to look outside the bounds of that system of subservient thinking," and to instead "cultivate a classroom where learners feel not only welcome but encouraged to ask questions rather than depend solely on information derived from perceived authority" (p. 5). This echoes Shieh and Allsup (2016) who underscored the importance of musical independence fostered by "making musical decisions that matter" (p. 33). These authors recommend a music classroom in which critical and ethical judgement is common-place and suggest that civic engagement would

be the finest exemplar of making musical decisions that matter. This musical pedagogy also meets the NAfME PK-8 music standard of Connection, Common Anchor 11, which states students should be able to “Demonstrate understanding of relationships between music and the other arts, other disciplines, other contexts, and daily life” (NAfME, 2021b, p. 15).

Throughout history songwriting has always been an outlet for humankind to engage their voices in civil discourse on a variety of topics such as war, drugs, racial oppression, and gun control. As songwriters, students can explore their feelings on a host of issues that affect their generation and society. Illuminating the depth to which composition explores feelings, Reimer offers that “We are able to probe beneath the surface of our feelings by experiencing them more penetratingly, as musical composition allows us to do. We can stay with a feeling, turning it over, examining its implications, getting further into its implied affects, and finally re-forming it in a way that captures its depth rather than its surface” (Reimer, 2003, p. 100). The music classroom provides a safe environment for self-discovery and expression of these feelings, emotions, and opinions (Reinhert, 2019). As students form concrete feelings and opinions through songwriting, their building blocks of identity within the world begin to take shape (Hess, 2019; Weinstein, 2006). In Hess’s 2019 study of activist-musicians, 18 out of 20 participants cited songwriting as a primary means for students to be able explore and build their identities. Explaining identity in songwriting, many participants acknowledged the union of voice, lived experience, personal history, and stories as the fabric of student songwriting that informs identity. When students are given the chance for their songs to become part of movements that speak out for or against issues in society, they subsequently explore and further define their identity. This research correlates with student songwriting testimony that have frequently mentioned expression, identity, and voice in world matters as a benefit of songwriting. In the

research of Kratus (2016) student songwriters made the following statements, “I write songs to help me find out who I am” and “I want to write songs that inspire and motivate people. I want to be the voice for those who can’t be heard and I want to expose the injustices in the world” (p. 65). Comparably, student songwriter participants in Riley’s 2012 study commented, “Instead of always turning towards a song or artist to feel better, instead of trying to identify with someone else’s lyrics, songwriting allowed me to cope with situations unique to me” (p. 16) and “I discovered many things about myself this semester through my songwriting” (p. 14).

These transformational songwriting spaces should not be reserved just for secondary students, however. As injustices and inequities of the world are called out with increasing frequency, those who work with or write for children are seeking to bring change through education in even the youngest students. Though the conversations in elementary may be less sophisticated than those with older students, even early childhood students are discussing issues such as racial diversity, gender roles, and environmental sustainability. Music educators must realize that a certain age or grade is not requisite to songwriting or exploring identity. Instead, music educators need to seize the opportunity for young students to also act as songwriters about topics that inform their identity at a level appropriate to their development.

### **The Status of Songwriting in Music Education**

The time has come for music education to re-examine its philosophy, values, and practices if it wishes to truly accomplish “music by all.” As part of this internal audit, music educators must look closely at how a comprehensive education in each musical role can help solve the issues that plague the profession, namely students not finding music education relevant, pragmatic, or a way to meet and build their identity. Over twenty years, the previously noted researchers such as Hickey, Regelski, Kaschub, Smith, Kratus and others began calling for more

creative compositional activities in music education classes as a source of remediation for these issues. Furthermore, many insisted these activities must begin early in the general music curriculum. Yet, nearly a quarter century later, researchers posit that composition as a whole has not become a regular part of elementary general music curriculum.

As the first study researching how often composition is actually taught in music class, Schmidt et al. (2005) found composition was only given approximately 5% of instructional time. The following year, Strand (2006) discovered similar findings. While 88% of teachers reported using composition in general music at some point, only 5.9% reported using composition often. Eight years later, a comparable study was done which found 84% of elementary general music teachers incorporate composition (Shouldice, 2014). However, Shouldice failed to discuss the actual frequency of composition in the classroom even though participants were asked to report this information. Using the data provided by Shouldice in the study, it can be found that while 84% incorporated composition, only an average of 29% of total participants incorporated it once a month or more across grade levels, while nearly 64% incorporated composition never or rarely, and 7% represented an unknown frequency. Though 29% of participants reporting composition once a month or more is in fact more than the previous studies, the results still mirror those of Schmidt et al. and Strand, along with the sentiments of the research community which suggest many students are very rarely or never composing in their music classes (Cooper, 2005; Hickey, 2012; Reimer, 2003; Schmidt et al., 2005; Strand, 2006; Strand & Newberry, 2007).

In the results of these studies a multitude of reasons have been given as to why teachers choose not to include more composition. Many cite not having enough time to incorporate composition (Bell, 2003; McAnally, 2016; Reimer, 2003; Shouldice, 2014; Strand, 2006). Related to not having enough time, teachers also felt there were too many other activities to fit in

such as getting ready for performances (Shouldice, 2014; Strand, 2006). Data also revealed some teachers don't feel qualified to teach composition due to lack of training, and may consequently believe teachers cannot also be composers or teach composition (Hargreaves et al., 2002). These data are supported by the National Association for Schools of Music [NASM] 2020-2021 Handbook (NASM, 2021) which does not require specific composition and improvisation training for undergraduate preservice music educators (Section O, pp. 119-124). Other commonly cited impediments to composition were large class sizes (Bell, 2003; Shouldice, 2014) and the messy, chaotic, and noisy nature of composition (Bell, 2003; McAnally, 2016). Finally, while many music education researchers have advocated for students to use invented notation in place of standard notation when necessary (Barrett, 1999; Clauhs, 2021; Guderian, 2012; Hickey, 2012; Kaschub & Smith, 2009) some teachers may choose to reserve compositional activities for older students because they believe students must have mastered music theory and standard notation in order to compose (Hickey, 2012; Jorgensen, 2016; Kaschub & Smith, 2009; Reimer, 2003).

The aforementioned research points to a lack of composition in general music. The umbrella of composition includes specific types such as acoustic instrumental composition, digital composition, songwriting, and still others. All the available research uses the term 'composition' within the study but still unknown is how much composition time is actually instrumental, digital, or songwriting. Based on the research noted in this literature review, a comprehensive music education that includes songwriting could be a great benefit to students of all ages but it remains unknown how often teachers employ songwriting in the general music classroom and if teachers perceive the same impediments to teaching songwriting as they do composition as a whole. Additionally, the sparse articles on elementary songwriting generally

focus on whole group songwriting strategies, while most small group songwriting studies have been geared toward high school and collegiate musicians. This is paradoxical considering many researchers advocate for songwriting and composition beginning in elementary. Thus, there is a crucial need for research that explores teacher and student experiences with songwriting in elementary general music.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to explore how often songwriting is included in elementary general music, factors affecting songwriting inclusion, and which strategies are most effective for elementary songwriters. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, the teacher-researcher designed a two-part mixed methods study to collect data about teacher and student experiences. Part I is a quantitative survey study of elementary general music teachers' songwriting implementation frequency, comfortability teaching songwriting, challenges to songwriting in the classroom, and utilized songwriting strategies. Part II is a qualitative teacher action research study with students conducted in the researcher's school. Following the methodology and results of each study, discussion and potential future research opportunities will be offered based on analyzation of trends between the two studies.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guided this study:

- Q1 How often is songwriting included in elementary general music?
- Q2 What factors influence a teacher's inclusion of songwriting?
- Q3 What is the relationship between songwriting strategies and the student songwriting experience?
- Q4 What is the relationship between songwriting strategies and inclusion of songwriting in the music classroom?

The field of music education is currently far from achieving its goal of having all students participate in music. A comprehensive music education in which the role of songwriting is included could potentially help more students actively participate and experience music. Within the existing music education research, there is very little known about songwriting, particularly in elementary general music classrooms. The proceeding teacher and student studies aim to establish baseline elementary songwriting data to begin working toward a comprehensive music education.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODOLOGY OF TEACHER SURVEY

#### **Teacher Survey Participants**

As the purpose of this study was to examine classroom songwriting frequency, strategies, and inclusion factors, a survey of elementary general music teachers was determined to be a key source of data collection. This survey was designed to provide insight from general music teachers' songwriting perspectives and experiences. The researcher developed a 13-question survey administered through Google Forms and distributed online in three Facebook groups for music educators for a broad sample. The three groups included Elementary Music Educators, Music Educators Creating Online Learning, and Hip-Hop Music Educators. This survey was anonymous and determined to be exempt by the Institutional Review Board at the researcher's institution. Any elementary music educator was invited to participate in the study which yielded 181 total participants. One participant submitted an empty form and was subsequently removed, leaving 180 viable participant responses. Because this was an anonymous survey in three Facebook groups with membership representing educators from instrumental music, choir, and general music, it is not possible to determine the total response rate from the general music teacher membership exclusively. However, all 180 eligible responses indicated teaching elementary general music and provide valuable insight to songwriting practices and experiences in the elementary general music classroom.

### Teacher Survey Questions

All survey questions fit into one of the following five categories: teaching background, frequency of songwriting and composition, comfortability teaching songwriting and composition, perceptions of songwriting in elementary music, and strategies for songwriting in elementary. First, participants were asked to indicate how many years they have taught general music based on the fixed-choice responses of 1 to 4 years, 5 to 9 years, 10 to 19 years, 20 to 29 years, or 30 or more years. Additionally, participants were asked if they are certified in any of the following teaching approaches and methods: Orff, Dalcroze, Kodály, Gordon Music Learning Theory, World Music, Conversational Solfège, or other. This data allowed the researcher to analyze any trends between teaching backgrounds and songwriting implementation and strategies.

Next, participants were asked to indicate how frequently their students compose for instruments in the classroom and which grades participate in composing. Likewise, participants were also asked to indicate how frequently their students experience songwriting and which grades participate in songwriting. For composition and songwriting, participants were offered the following fixed-choice frequency responses: “every lesson,” “every unit,” “occasionally,” “rarely,” and “never.” Those who responded that they do include any frequency of songwriting or composition greater than “never,” were then further able to indicate which grades experience these activities. Participants were able to select all that apply from the following grades: preK, kindergarten, first grade, second grade, third grade, fourth grade, fifth grade, and sixth grade. By asking separate questions for instrumental composition and songwriting, it delineated for participants which type of composition was being referenced to avoid confusion and unintentional overlap in responses. The responses to these frequency questions provided the first

known insight into how often songwriting is used in elementary music. It also provided the most updated data on traditional instrumental composition usage in elementary music. By comparing composition and songwriting data from the exact same participants, rather than comparing songwriting to composition data from past studies of others, it provided more precise insight into teacher experiences and perceptions of songwriting as a distinct form of composition.

The comfortability questions utilized a Likert scale in which participants were asked separately how comfortable they are teaching composition and songwriting. Participants indicated their response on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very uncomfortable” to 5 being “very comfortable.” The data from these questions allowed for analyzation of trends when examined with data from the frequency and background questions.

All perception and strategy questions utilized fixed-choice and optional open-ended response so participants would not feel limited to options given by the researcher. This allowed the researcher to more fully investigate participants’ beliefs, experiences, and practices regarding songwriting in the elementary classroom. Regarding perceptions, participants were asked their most important reasons for incorporating songwriting and their three greatest challenges when songwriting in elementary music. As part of reasoning, the following response choices were given: “students can express their emotions and thoughts,” “outlet for activism,” “students experience roles outside performing and listening,” “student agency in the music classroom,” “deeper understanding of music and musical process,” “integration with other subjects,” and an open-ended option of “other.” To explore songwriting challenges, participants were offered choices including “messy/chaotic,” “students are stuck/don’t know what to write,” “I don’t have enough training or experience to teach it,” “admin doesn’t understand the process,” “takes too much class time,” “I have to prepare for performances,” and an open-ended option of “other.”

Following this, participants were questioned about the songwriting strategies they use in their classrooms. Any number of strategies could be selected with an optional open-ended response as well to allow for a comprehensive understanding of all utilized strategies beyond those offered by the researcher. Strategy choices included: “student selected topic,” “teacher selected topic,” “sentence starters,” “rhyming resources,” “picture/image/art prompts,” “idea graphic organizers,” “musical form graphic organizer,” “literature prompts (poems, fairytales, stories),” “story cubes,” “parody writing,” and an open-ended option of “other.” Finally, participants were given an optional extended response opportunity to leave any other personal thoughts, insights, or questions about songwriting in the elementary classroom.

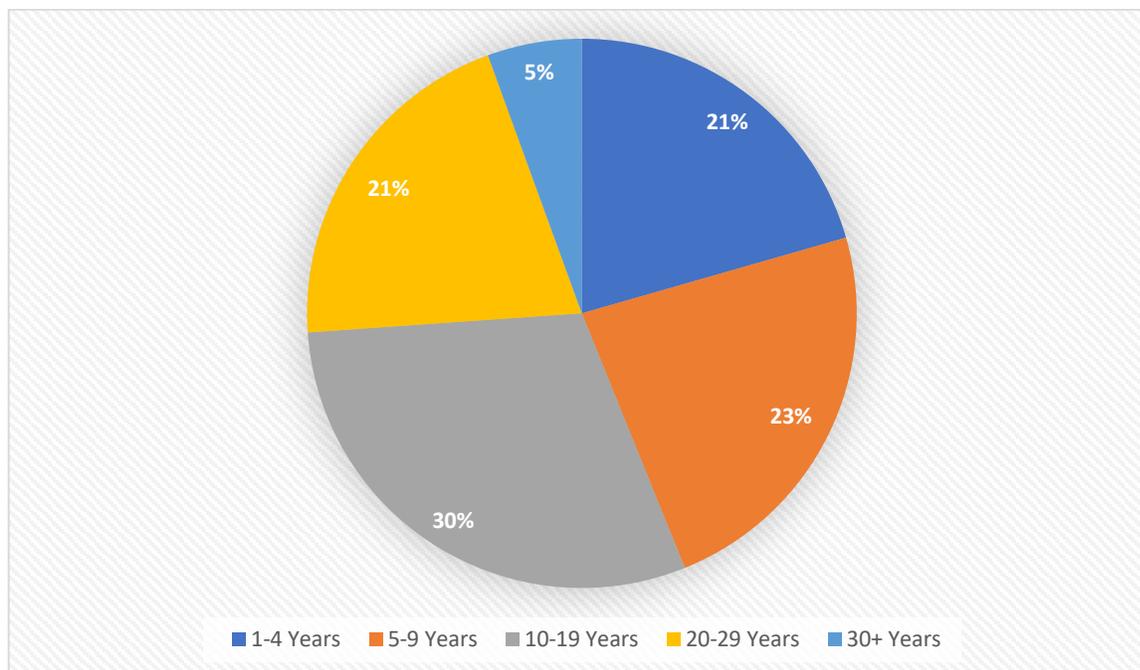
After collecting all data, response frequencies to all fixed-choice and Likert scale questions were calculated by the researcher. These fixed-choice and Likert scale responses were further analyzed for trends and correlations. The researcher coded all open-ended responses and emergent themes were identified.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS OF TEACHER SURVEY

#### **Teaching Experience and Certifications**

A survey of elementary general music teachers was conducted to collect data regarding teacher songwriting experiences and perspectives in the classroom. The purpose of study was to investigate how often songwriting is included in general music, the most effective songwriting strategies for students, and what factors affect songwriting inclusion in the elementary music classroom. A total of 180 elementary music teacher responses were included in the data of this survey study. Of the 180 included participants, 37 had taught between 1 to 4 years, 42 between 5 to 9 years, 54 between 10 to 19 years, 37 between 20 to 29 years, and 10 had taught for 30 or more years. Just over half of the participants ( $n=91$ ) reported that they were certified in one or more music education teaching approaches, while 89 participants did not report being certified in any additional approaches. Orff-Schulwerk ( $n=61$ ) and Kodály ( $n=42$ ) represented the most reported certifications, while Conversational Solfege ( $n=12$ ), World Music ( $n=10$ ), Dalcroze ( $n=6$ ), Suzuki ( $n=5$ ), and Gordon ( $n=3$ ), represented a smaller portion of reported certifications. From the open-ended responses to certification, four participants reported being certified in First Steps in Music and three reported certification in Little Kids Rock/Modern Band. Figure 1 below demonstrates the teaching experience of participants.



**Figure 1**

*Teacher Participant Years of Teaching Experience*

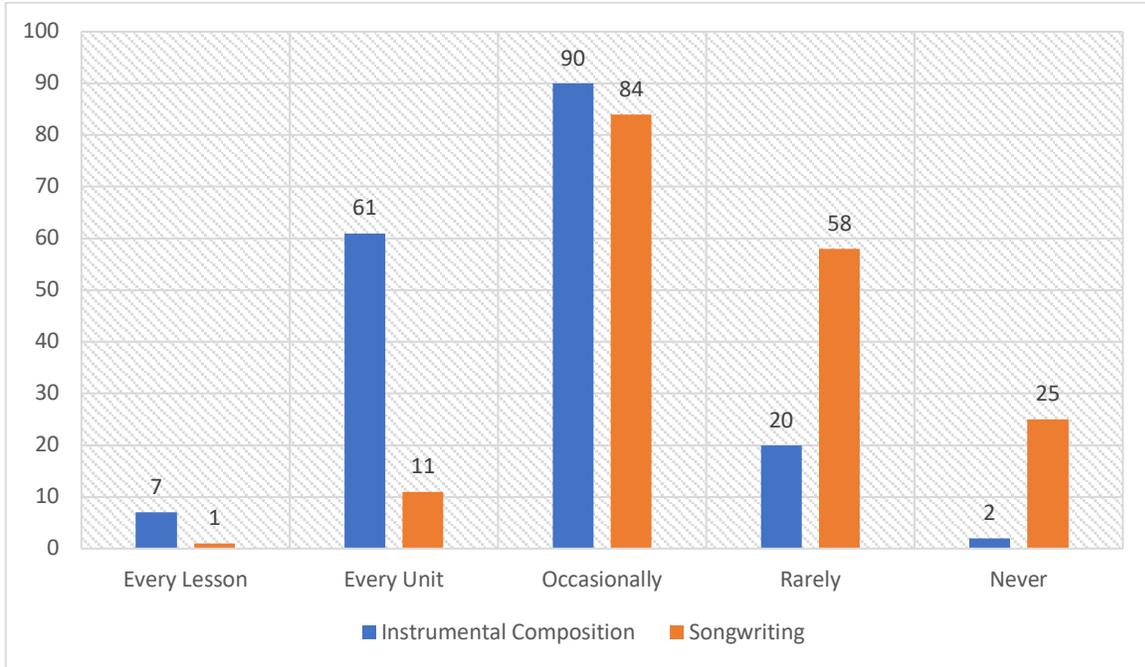
### **Composition and Songwriting Frequency**

When asked how frequently instrumental composition is included in their music classroom experiences, approximately 4% ( $n=7$ ) of teacher participants selected “every lesson,” 34% ( $n=61$ ) selected “every unit,” 50% ( $n=90$ ) selected “occasionally,” 11% ( $n=20$ ) selected “rarely,” and 1% ( $n=2$ ) selected “never.” Participants were also then asked to indicate which grade levels experience instrumental composition. Of the 178 responses to this question, 50% ( $n=89$ ) reported teaching instrumental composition in kindergarten, with gradually higher numbers of instrumental composition in sequential grades, until a slight decrease occurred between Grade 4 ( $n=159$ ) to Grade 5 ( $n=144$ ).

Likewise, participants were asked how frequently lyrical songwriting is included in their music classroom experiences using a frequency scale. Less than 1% ( $n=1$ ) responded that they

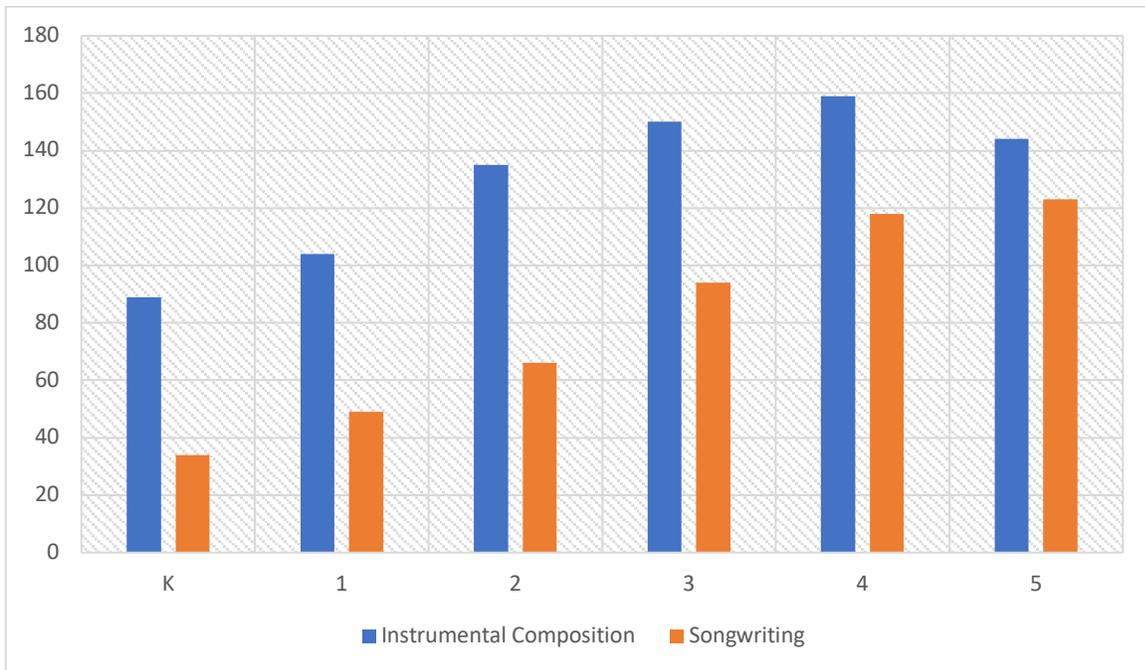
include songwriting in “every lesson,” 6% ( $n=11$ ) reported “every unit,” 47% ( $n=84$ ) reported “occasionally,” approximately 32% ( $n=58$ ) reported “rarely,” and 14% ( $n=25$ ) reported that they “never” include songwriting. Similar to the trends of instrumental composition across grade levels, songwriting appeared to be included more as children get older. However, the number of participants that reported using songwriting in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade was nearly half the amount that reported including instrumental composition in each of those grades. Unlike the slight decrease in instrumental composition at grade five, there was an increase in songwriting that continued through fifth grade, though these numbers are still less than the reported inclusion of instrumental composition in those grades.

In comparison, the number of participants that indicated they “occasionally” included instrumental composition (50%) was very similar to the amount that “occasionally” included songwriting (47%). A striking difference, however, is noted when comparing the number of participants regularly incorporating or infrequently incorporating these concepts. Nearly 38% responded that they regularly (every unit or every lesson) incorporate instrumental composition, with just 12% saying they infrequently (rarely or never) teach it. In juxtaposition, less than 7% of participants said they regularly (every unit or every lesson) teach songwriting, leaving 46% that infrequently (rarely or never) teach it. This data indicates nearly half of participants rarely or never teach songwriting. Taken further in context, nearly half of the students represented by this teacher participant group rarely or never experience songwriting in elementary general music. Figures representing the frequency of instrumental composition and songwriting among teacher participants, along with grades taught these concepts, are depicted below.



**Figure 2**

*Teacher Participant Frequency of Teaching Instrumental Composition and Songwriting*



**Figure 3**

*Grades Taught Instrumental Composition and Songwriting Among Teacher Participants*

### Comfort Teaching Composition and Songwriting

In response to the 5-point Likert scale investigating comfortability teaching instrumental composition, 46 chose “5” being very comfortable, 63 chose “4” being comfortable, 47 chose “3” as neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, 21 chose “2” as being uncomfortable, and three chose “1” as being very uncomfortable. Using this same 5-point Likert scale in regards to comfortability teaching songwriting, 33 selected “5” as very comfortable, 45 selected “4” as comfortable, 54 selected “3” as neither comfortable nor uncomfortable, 34 selected “2” as being uncomfortable, and 13 selected “1” as very uncomfortable. Overall, the average comfortability in teaching instrumental composition among participants was  $M = 3.75$ , while the average comfortability teaching songwriting among this same group was lower at  $M = 3.28$ .

Comfortability teaching songwriting and instrumental composition was also examined through the lens of additional certification. Surprisingly, certification in various approaches (Orff, Kodály, Dalcroze, etc.) appeared to have almost no effect on comfortability of teaching songwriting or composition. The average level of comfortability teaching songwriting among the 90 approach-certified participants was  $M = 3.36$ , while the average songwriting comfortability among the 89 non-certified participants was  $M = 3.20$ . While the overall comfortability teaching instrumental composition was already shown to be higher among the participant group, the difference of comfortability between the approach-certified and non-certified teachers was also just a tenth of a point different at 3.76 and 3.64 respectively. Even more unexpected was the comfortability of teaching instrumental composition among the Orff-Schulwerk certified teachers. The Orff-Schulwerk designates improvisation and composition as core components of the four-step Orff process. Much of any Orff workshop and certification course experience is spent composing, including a great deal with classroom percussion instruments, yet the average

comfortability level of teaching instrumental composition among Orff certified participants was  $M = 3.63$ , nearly the same as the non-certified teachers.

### **Songwriting Inclusion Motives and Challenges**

Though participants were asked to select their top three reasons for incorporating songwriting, some chose more than three, while some just chose their one most important reason. Because of this, it is not possible to create a pie-chart analysis comparing percentages of selected reasons totaling 100% of the study population. Instead, the data presented examines each reason individually and represents the percentage of the entire study population that selected that reasoning for teaching songwriting, possibly among others. The two most commonly cited motivations for incorporating songwriting were “students can express their emotions and thoughts” (73%) and “deeper understanding of music and musical process” (75%). The next most cited reasons for including songwriting were “students experience roles outside of performing and listening” (53%), “student agency in the music classroom” (46%), and “integration with other subjects” (40%). Though songwriting offers an opportunity for written reflection and voice, only 16% cited “outlet for activism” as a reason for teaching songwriting.

The challenges to teaching songwriting also are presented individually as what percentage of the total survey population chose each challenge, rather than analyzing the challenges against each other. Almost 70% of participants selected “students are stuck/don’t know what to write” as a challenge to songwriting. Just over half (54%) of all participants cited songwriting “takes too much class time.” The next most cited challenges to teaching songwriting in order were “messy/chaotic” (37%), “I have to prepare for performances” (31%), “I don’t have enough training or experience to teach it” (25%), and “admin doesn’t understand the process”

(10%). Some participants also included write-in comments about challenges in which the most common theme was low literacy and writing skills among their student population.

### **Songwriting Strategies**

The final question category examined strategies elementary music educators use to teach songwriting. To learn how many strategies teachers use and are aware of, participants were asked to select ‘all that apply’ out of the fixed-choices and they could write-in other additional strategies beyond those listed. Of the 180 participants, 16 indicated they use no songwriting strategies. The data represents the other 164 participants that indicated they use at least one or more strategies, and what percentage of the total 164 uses each strategy. The results are as follows from most selected to least selected strategy: “teacher selected topic/prompt” (63%), “student selected topic” (60%), “rhyming resources” (52%), “literature prompts” (46%), “sentence starters” and “picture/art prompts” (both 39%), “parody writing” (34%), “musical form graphic organizer for lyrics” (32%), “graphic organizer for generating ideas” (29%), and “story cubes” (10%). Emergent themes from the open-ended response section include teacher examples first, whole class writing first, small groups/pairs, and tech tools such as GarageBand.

### **Bivariate Correlations**

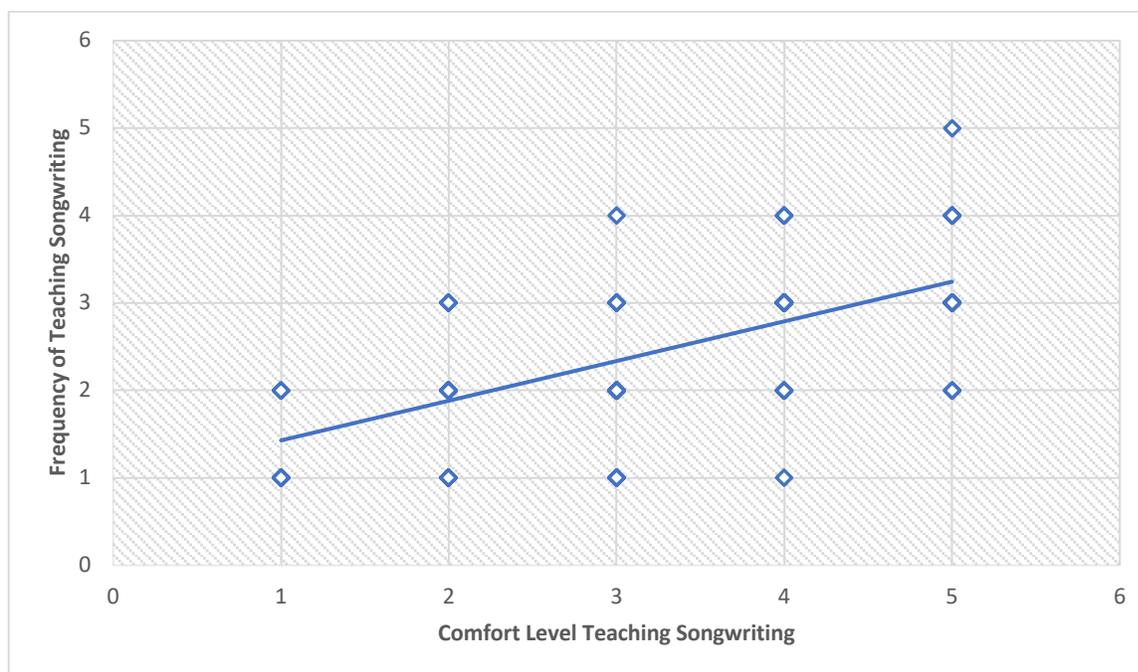
After the above baseline data was examined, sets of bivariate data were cross-analyzed for correlations ( $r$ ) and significance ( $p$ ). All bivariate data sets were tested for linear associations using Pearson correlation computations. For any linear data that were not presented as single numerals in the baseline data, such as years teaching or frequency teaching songwriting, linear values were established for correlational analysis by encoding the data numerically (ex. 1 to 4 years = 1, 5 to 9 years = 2, etc. for teaching experience, and, frequency scale converted to Likert scale as never = 1, every lesson = 5, etc.). The significance level was set to  $p < .05$ .

### **Experience and Comfort Correlation**

The first data set explored possible associations between the years of teaching experience and comfortability teaching songwriting. The correlational analysis yielded a weak positive correlation,  $r(177) = .23$ ,  $p = .002$ . Equally, the years of teaching did not appear to have a significant association with comfortability teaching instrumental composition either, with similar results of  $r(178) = .20$ ,  $p = .006$ . An even smaller, non-significant correlation was observed between years of teaching and frequency incorporating songwriting, calculated at  $r(177) = .13$ ,  $p = .086$ . In consideration of these results, the years of teaching experience seemed to have little correlation to how comfortable participants are teaching songwriting and composition, and also little correlation to the frequency of which both are taught.

### **Frequency and Comfort Correlation**

There was a statistically significant, large correlation (Laerd Statistics, n.d.) between participants' comfort teaching songwriting and how frequently they teach songwriting,  $r(176) = .64$ ,  $p < .00001$  (See Figure 4 below). These results suggest that participants less comfortable teaching songwriting also teach it less frequently, while those more comfortable teaching songwriting incorporate it more frequently. Comfort and frequency were also run in separate correlational data sets with the number of songwriting strategies the teacher participants reported using. Pearson correlations of both generated statistically significant positive results as well.



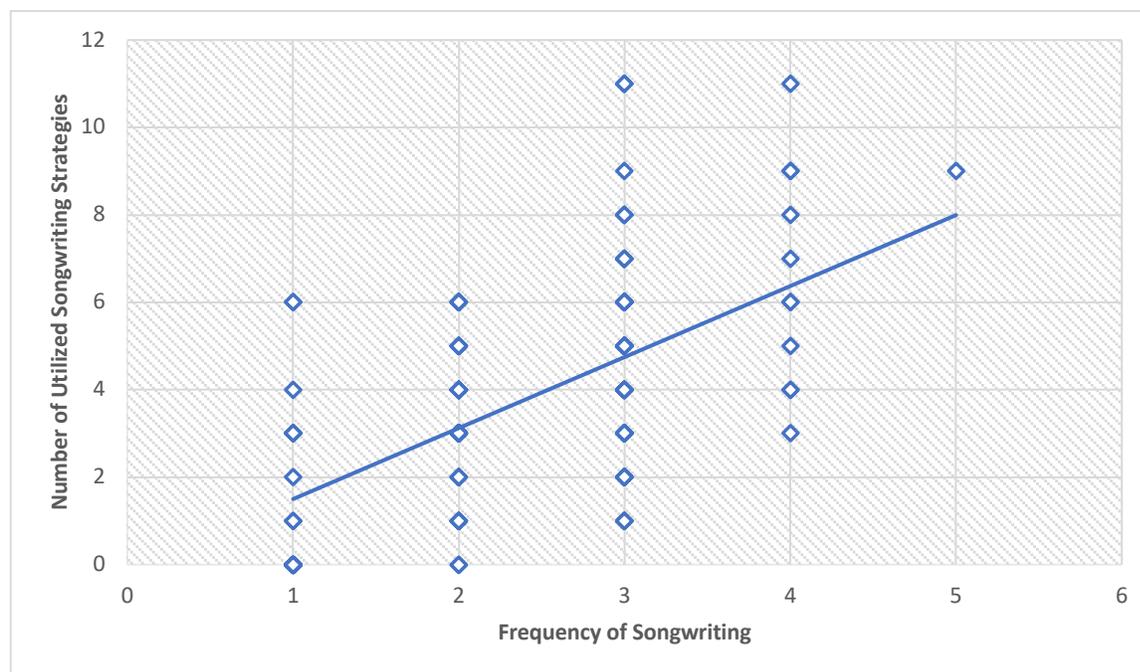
**Figure 4**

*Correlation of Participant Comfortability Teaching Songwriting and Frequency of Songwriting*

### **Frequency, Comfort, and Strategy Correlations**

Comfortability teaching songwriting and the number of reported utilized songwriting strategies returned a medium correlation at  $r(177) = .47, p < .00001$ . Comparably, frequency of teaching songwriting and the number of reported utilized songwriting strategies returned a large correlation at  $r(178) = .57, p < .00001$  (See Figure 5 below). Together, these results suggest that teacher participants utilizing a smaller number of songwriting strategies incorporate songwriting less often and feel less comfortable teaching songwriting. Conversely, participants who utilize a larger number of songwriting strategies incorporate songwriting more frequently and also feel more comfortable teaching songwriting. Worthy of noting, years of teaching experience produced virtually no correlation to the number of songwriting strategies utilized with  $r(177) =$

.09. Therefore, this suggests that teachers do not gain or utilize more songwriting strategies simply by having taught longer.



**Figure 5**

*Correlation of Participant Songwriting Frequency and Utilized Songwriting Strategies*

### **Songwriting Comfort and Composition Comfort Correlations**

The final bivariate correlation set studied possible associations between overall comfortability teaching songwriting and overall comfortability teaching instrumental composition. This test generated another statistically significant, medium correlation with  $r(177) = .48, p < .00001$ . This correlation indicates that participants with lower levels of comfort teaching composition also tended to be less comfortable teaching songwriting, while those with higher levels of comfort teaching composition also tended to be more comfortable teaching songwriting.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY OF ACTION RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS

#### **Student Participants**

To research the relationship between student songwriting experiences and songwriting strategies, the teacher-researcher designed a qualitative action research study on blues songwriting and visual art for the researcher's third-grade music students. While music educators can choose to teach songwriting in many different musical genres, for purposes of this study, blues songwriting was selected. Blues song poetry naturally provided predictable structure for students due to its AAB rhyme scheme and same-same-different verse form. The blues also allowed students to more easily internally audiate and rehearse their verses as they wrote them because the harmonic progression was well-known through their ukulele classwork.

Third grade was chosen by the researcher, as it was the only grade available to conduct any songwriting research given the COVID cohort and rotational parameters during the time in which the study had to occur. This songwriting research occurred as part of the normal music curriculum in the student participants' natural school setting and natural class groupings at their independent preK-8 school in the Denver metropolitan area. All third-grade students had music class with the teacher-researcher every day, for 45 minutes during a six-week block. This study was approved and determined to be exempt by the Institutional Review Board at the researcher's institution. Parental consent and child assent forms were distributed to the 69 possible third-grade participants. Completed pairs of consent and assent forms yielded 50 possible participants with 28 girls and 22 boys. Because the research was conducted in the natural class setting and

was part of the regular curriculum, all students participated in the research songwriting activities, but only the 50 students with completed forms had their work, teacher observations, and questionnaires kept by the researcher as data for this study. The other 19 students' work, observations, and questionnaires were not included in this study. All names on student work examples have been removed to retain confidentiality of the 50 student participants.

### **Songwriting Groundwork and Scaffolding**

The first three weeks of the block rotation were spent learning ukulele chords, strumming, and I-IV-V7 harmonic progressions. During the fourth week of rotation, the foundations for blues songwriting were laid by students learning about blues history and form which later transferred to their own songwriting. To prepare students, first all classes discussed how music and cultures can be alike or different, and appropriate ways to react to music that is unfamiliar to them. Students practiced giving oral feedback about listening examples using musical terminology appropriate to the music elements they could identify in the music. Next, each class discussed the history, origins, and characteristics of the blues. Coinciding with these discussions, students listened to many blues examples and were asked to identify the form, rhyme scheme, and rhymes of each.

The last step of preparation before the actual songwriting research study was to practice songwriting as a whole group in each class as advocated by songwriting researchers (Kratus, 2016; Reinhert & Gulish, 2020). Each class was given three days to complete a class blues song about a topic of their choice. Students volunteered ideas for what gives third-graders the blues which then were narrowed down to one class topic by majority vote. After class topics were finalized, students worked in pairs to write possible rhymes and lyrics for the first verse. These ideas were then shared out with the class and the teacher helped determine the final verse by

demonstrating how the words and rhythm fit or did not fit within the beats of the harmonic progression, also known as prosody in songwriting. The same process occurred for the second verse. Once each class had completed two verses, the whole class performed their song by singing their lyrics while strumming the blues harmonic progression on ukulele. The blues progression used for all class activities used chord I for the first four measures, IV for measures five and six, I for measures seven and eight, V7 for measures nine and ten, and back to I for measures eleven and twelve. This concluded the songwriting preparation activities.

### **Action Research Design and Preparation**

The research study took place in two parts over six consecutive days, three days spent on part one and three days on part two. After the study concluded, the final two days of the rotation were spent rehearsing and performing their partner blues songs from part two. Any observations and reflections of the student blues performances were not included in this study, as the researcher only sought to examine the experiences of students while in the act of songwriting. This study aimed to understand how art as a cross-curricular tool and strategy might affect student songwriting. Student work, perceptions and experiences, as well as teacher-researcher observations, were collected throughout the study to investigate this relationship between art and songwriting. While art was the strategy being studied, two other strategies were also utilized in the set-up and execution of the study based on best practices suggested by research.

### **Grouping Strategy**

Whether referred to as strategies or tools, all strategies do in fact build a toolbox of techniques to help songwriters by providing structure and scaffolding (Bauer, 2020; Kaschub & Smith, 2009). The more tools or strategies a teacher can offer, the greater the potential of student success. The first step to set-up the songwriting study was to establish groupings. As a grouping

strategy, students worked in songwriting pairs which they were allowed to choose themselves. This strategy was based on previous research that suggested songwriting is often most successful for young students when in pairs or very small groups (Kaschub & Smith, 2009), and when they are allowed to work with friends (MacDonald et al., 2002).

### **Graphic Organizer Strategy**

The second strategy used in the preparation and execution of the study was graphic organizers used by students on which they wrote their songwriting ideas and lyrics. Graphic organizers are most often associated with English language arts classes as a pre-writing strategy. Hall and Strangman (2008) define graphic organizers as “a visual and graphic display that depicts the relationships between facts, terms, and or ideas within a learning task.” Research has indicated learning improves when incorporating graphic organizers (Hall & Strangman, 2008) and graphic organizers could be especially beneficial when incorporating writing in subjects where writing is not a regular activity. As the author of one of the most widely used writing curricula, Lucy Calkins (2020) emphasizes the ‘rehearsal’ stage of writing. In the rehearsal stage, students are building and connecting ideas to form intention and identify the audience of their writing. Once a student is fully prepared through rehearsal, they should be able to write with ambition. Since songwriting is lyrical in nature and involves some of the same writer considerations of story, purpose, audience and intention, a bubble graphic organizer was selected by the researcher of the current study to help the student songwriters visually think through possible ideas and rhyme schemes.

It was also the researchers’ observation that within the extremely limited songwriting research, most student songwriting lyrics were written on lined notebook paper. Even the one existing study of elementary small-group songwriting from a master’s thesis (Wadler, 2019), had

students write their lyrics on regular notebook paper. The student writing examples were messy and lyrics were all written together, without distinct sections noted. Additionally, Wadler noted it was hard to identify the form of many groups and audibly recognize the different sections within their songs during group performances. In consideration of this, the researcher of the current study used a second graphic organizer template with the AAB 12-bar blues measures and harmonic structure outlined as a strategy to help students align their lyric writing within the harmonic progression and to be able to delineate different sections within the whole musical form. As is often heard in blues songs, the first measure of the organizer is left open for lyrics, followed by a measure of chords or instrumental riff. This same 'measure of lyrics-measure of chords' format is followed for measures three to four, five to six, and seven to eight, in the A sections. The researcher believed this would help the students better keep track of where they are when performing the song and keep writing cleaner by giving them chordal measures to regroup. The B section of the organizer left measures nine, ten, and eleven, open for lyrics as one continuous thought which brought it back to tonic in measure eleven. However, students could finish the lyrics in the measure 12, the final tonic measure if necessary. The blues template is shown below in Figure 6.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**C** **C** **C**  
A: / \_\_\_\_\_ /..... /..... /.....

**F** **F** **C** **C**  
A: / \_\_\_\_\_ /..... /..... /.....

**G7** **F** **C** **C**  
B: / \_\_\_\_\_ /..... /..... /.....

**C** **C** **C**  
A: / \_\_\_\_\_ /..... /..... /.....

**F** **F** **C** **C**  
A: / \_\_\_\_\_ /..... /..... /.....

**G7** **F** **C** **C**  
B: / \_\_\_\_\_ /..... /..... /.....

**Figure 6**

*Blues Songwriting Graphic Organizer Template*

### **Action Research Implementation with Visual Art as a Prompt Strategy**

With groupings established and graphic organizers distributed, the focus moved to visual art as a strategy. Teachers may believe that the structure and limitations of compositional strategies may stifle creativity, but research has indicated that structure, limitations, and scaffolding can actually help creativity to prosper (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998; Hickey, 2012; Kaschub & Smith, 2009; Kratus, 2016). Composition researchers Kaschub and Smith (2009) and Hickey (2012) add that when students are not given enough structure or guidelines, it can paralyze their compositional efforts because they become overwhelmed with too many

possibilities. This could be even more of a challenge for songwriters when attempting to generate and narrow down lyric ideas. Novice and advanced songwriters alike often need help with inspiration and lyric direction, especially when attempting to write under the tight timelines of music class (Kaschub & Smith, 2009; Strand & Newberry, 2007). Reinhert and Gulish (2020) suggest using prompts as an inspiration or “jumping off” point. In writing about inspiration in her 2012 book on teaching K-12 composition, Hickey states, “I feel strongly that it is the key to successful and fulfilling music composition for students in our classrooms” (Hickey, 2012, p. 63), then continues on to discuss the effectiveness of various “prompts” as inspiration. Prompts can range from a specific topic, poem, or story, to artwork and photographs (Calkins, 2020; Kaschub & Smith, 2009; Reinhert & Gulish, 2020). Not only can the structure of strategies help students complete their songwriting tasks, but the compositional products created could potentially be more musical as well (Smith, 2008). The efficiency and success of every possible songwriting strategy and prompt would take considerable time beyond the scope of this study, as there are numerous available songwriting strategies and prompts a teacher could use with students. In light of this, the strategy of using visual art as a prompt was the focus on this student songwriting study because of the richly integrated lessons and deep critical thinking it provides.

**Implementation Part One:  
Without a Visual Art  
Prompt**

For part one of the study, all participants were given a teacher selected topic of environmental justice issues in the world. Students were asked to write at least two complete blues verses in AAB form about an environmental issue which they know and care about. Possible topics were discussed such as recycling, melting icebergs, air pollution, rainforests being cut down, trash in the ocean, littering, wildfires, etc. They were not given any literature,

information, or visual imagery prompts on which to build their blues songs, nor did they have any electronic devices to research information. Part one specifically did not use prompt reference material in order to explore the outcome of student work with no prompt, as opposed to student work using a visual art prompt strategy in part two.

Throughout the three days of part one in which students were songwriting, the teacher-researcher served as a facilitator by answering questions, checking student progress, and offering possible solutions when needed. Students were encouraged to conference with the teacher when they finished verse one, before starting the second verse. During this time, the teacher-researcher kept detailed observations of students and recorded how often certain questions were asked. Notes made by the researcher included information such as off-task behavior, questions about form, questions about rhyming, help needed with matching syllables to beats, and students feeling stuck/needing ideas in their writing. At the end of part one, day three, student work was collected and students took a short open-ended questionnaire to investigate their perceived challenges and confidence during songwriting.

### **Implementation Part Two: Using a Visual Art Prompt**

For part two of the study, artwork was displayed in all classes as an inspirational prompt for their songwriting based on the topic of social justice issues in a kids' world. The artwork was kept on display throughout each class period of part two so participants could reference it whenever needed. Each class used the same painting, "New Kids in the Neighborhood" by Norman Rockwell (1967), as shown below in Figure 7. This painting depicts black children meeting their new neighbors, who are white children. Each class discussed how to look for an artist's message and students were encouraged to look closely at details within the painting,

reflecting on why the artist might have chosen to include those details. Students could choose to write the song from the perspective of the white or black children in the painting, or both.

Mirroring the same process as part one of student songwriting, the teacher-researcher once again served as a facilitator by answering questions, checking student progress, and offering possible solutions when needed. When student pairs finished the first verse they were encouraged to conference with the teacher. Identical to part one, the teacher-researcher kept detailed observations of students and recorded how often certain questions were asked, specifically noting anytime the same questions and conversations arose as detailed in part one. At the end of part two, day three, student work was collected. As a conclusion to the study, students took a five-part open-ended questionnaire to explore their perceived challenges and confidence in their second songwriting experience, if they thought art did or did not help their songwriting, what other tools or strategies they think would help them, and what advice they would give to other student songwriters.



**Figure 7**

*“New Kids in the Neighborhood” by Norman Rockwell (1967)*

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\*Used with permission of the Norman Rockwell Estate (See Appendix F)

### **Post-Action Research Data Analysis**

After all data was collected, the teacher-researcher coded all student questionnaire responses using in-vivo coding. Codes were created using common words and phrases in participant responses. After codes were established, emergent themes were identified. Because the researcher anticipated certain questions and topics to arise during the teacher observation of student songwriting, categories were pre-created on an observation form which allowed the researcher to tally each time that question or topic came up with the participants. This allowed

the teacher-researcher to more freely observe, interact, and help students during the process of songwriting. Other questions or observations not included on the form were still noted by the researcher. The observations and student responses were then analyzed in the context of part one or part two of the study to look for trends in student songwriting experience as it relates to visual art as a strategy.

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS OF ACTION RESEARCH WITH STUDENTS

Elementary student songwriting was studied with the researcher's third-grade students to investigate the relationship between songwriting strategies and the student experience. Using visual art as a prompt was the focus of this qualitative study. Students first experienced blues songwriting without a visual art prompt, and then again using a visual art prompt, both of which utilized student work, teacher observation, and student questionnaires as sources of data collection.

#### **Results of Part One Without a Visual Art Prompt**

##### **Part One Questionnaire**

In the questionnaire at the end of part one without the visual art prompt, just under half ( $n=22$ ) of the students cited their biggest challenge to be coming up with ideas to write about. Nearly as common, rhyming words were cited as the second biggest challenge ( $n=21$ ). A few students mentioned teamwork and matching word syllables to rhythms as their greatest challenge from part one. The second question asked students how confident they felt as songwriters in part one. Using their own words as confidence classifications, 11 students felt "not confident," 15 students felt a "so-so" or "medium" confidence level, 18 felt "pretty confident," and six felt "really" or "very" confident.

##### **Part One Observations**

Throughout the three days of part one, the teacher-researcher made notes of the following in-class observations and conversations. The data represented here does not reflect the total

amount of conversations or conferences, as students not participating in the study have been excluded in the proceeding data, as previously mentioned. The teacher-researcher had 21 total conversations with students who requested help with ideas or verbalized that they “don’t know what to write,” meanwhile having 25 conversations about help with rhyming words, typically for the rhyme at the end of the B line in the AAB form. In both of these scenarios, the teacher-researcher asked questions such as “what do you want to tell your audience?” or “what words best fits what you are trying to say?” Possible ideas or rhyming lists were brainstormed with the students, but it was left up to the students to ultimately decide what to write. Another common conversation ( $n=16$ ) was telling students they needed to expand the ideas in their writing, filling out the beats in each measure which allowed the verse to flow (more on this subject is detailed further below in the observations of their written work). Of the students with fully expanded verses, the topic of prosody occurred eight times during teacher-student conference sessions as a first revision step. In these conversations, the teacher-researcher explained how to slightly adjust words so that syllables better flowed and matched the melody they wanted to sing. To help explain this, the teacher sang their original writing to them followed by singing a slightly adjusted, more prosodic version, then asked them which one flowed better. Again, it was up to students to determine the final product and to make sure their intended message is still communicated. Other questions and conversations, though less often, included clarification on the repeated lines in AAB ( $n=6$ ), and settling partner disagreements about ideas ( $n=7$ ). Over the three days of part one, 18 reminders were given about being on-task, with two student participants (partners) frequently off-task. That partner grouping also struggled to finish one verse.

## **Part One Student Work Analysis**

After part one was completed, the teacher-researcher examined the written work of the 50 student participants to look for common trends. While the majority of students either finished both verses, or nearly finished the second verse, there was a commonality in the depth, detail, and prosody of their work. With the exception of the small number of students who had fully completed measures and were ready to revise syllabication to match beats and rhythms (prosody), most students lacked complete thoughts in their verses. Each measure averaged two or three words and functioned more as sentence fragments without details, or the entire sentence/thought was stretched across the A or B line. This made the ideas presented appear surface-level without deep thought and did not flow with the harmonic form. This was most pronounced in the B line where students needed three or four measures to flow with one continuous idea or final thought as the conclusion of that AAB verse. Examples of student work that demonstrate these observations are provided in Appendix D, Examples 1-8.

## **Results of Part Two Using a Visual Art Prompt**

### **Part Two Questionnaire**

In the questionnaire at the end of part two in which the students used the Rockwell painting as a visual art prompt, still just under half of students stated that rhyming words were their biggest challenge ( $n=24$ ), similar to part one. However, only eight students wrote that their biggest challenge was coming up with ideas. Another nine students either left the question blank or wrote “none.” In small numbers, the other challenges cited were “teamwork” ( $n=5$ ), “matching words to beats” ( $n=3$ ), and “using a picture” ( $n=1$ ). Exploring any change or trends in confidence level during part two, categories were again established using their common responses. Of the 50 participants, three students wrote “not very confident,” five wrote “a little

less,” 16 students wrote either “better” or “more confident,” 11 wrote “pretty confident,” and 16 students responded that they were “really” or “very” confident.

The third question asked students if they felt the visual art did or did not help them as songwriters, and they were asked to explain their answer. Categories were again established using their own words. From these responses, three students felt that it was the “same” with the art as to without the art. Additionally, 10 students responded “no” the art did not help, with most citing that it felt harder because they had to use ideas from the art. Finally, 37 students responded “yes” the art did help and wrote that “it gave them more ideas, more details to write about, better rhyme ideas, or more inspiration.” When asked what other strategies would be helpful to them as songwriters, the most common answers were “larger groups,” “rhyming books,” and “more pictures.” A few students answered that they would also find a video or some sort of virtual tour experience helpful as a songwriting prompt.

The final question asked students what advice they would give to other students and teachers like themselves who want to do songwriting. Within the responses, 16 said to “use pictures” or “use inspiration.” Surprisingly, the next most common responses were words of encouragement such as “be confident, be patient, it’s challenging but fun so don’t give up, it’s worth it so keep trying.” The third trend in response was to use rhyming books. Other various, but less common responses included “hum it back to yourself,” “work with a friend,” and “brainstorm together.”

## **Part Two Observations**

Throughout the three days of part two using the art prompt, the following observations and conversations were noted by the teacher-researcher. Once again, the noted occurrences do not reflect the total number of conversations and conferences held with the teacher, as any that

occurred with non-participants have been excluded from the data. Students initiated six total conversations with the teacher-researcher for help with ideas or clarification on how to use the art for ideas. Similar to part one, 27 conversations took place to ask for rhyming help. Again, most of the rhyming assistance was needed for the end of B lines to rhyme with the end of the A lines. The teacher-researcher briefly offered ideas or asked questions as a facilitator, but left it up to the students to decide on the final written product. In an inverse relationship to part one, eight conversations involved the teacher instructing students that they need to further expand their writing to fill a whole measure(s), while 22 conversations were spent in prosodic revision by refining and adjusting syllabication to match the beats and melody. Reminders to stay on-task were given five times, and partner disagreements were settled with teacher intervention on three occasions.

### **Part Two Student Work Analysis**

Following the conclusion of part two, all student work was collected and again analyzed for songwriting trends. Nearly all students finished both verses, similar to part one. A vast difference in quality of songwriting was noted between part one and part two though. Where the student work in part one often lacked depth and detail, the work from part two was much richer and full of detail. Lyrics extended across full measures, averaging four to six words per measure, and ideas seemed more connected across A and B lines, with more pronounced conclusions to a lyrical thought (see Appendix E, Examples 1-8).

### **Teacher-Researcher Experience**

As a final note on student songwriting with visual art, the teacher-researcher reflected on their own experience as well. During part one without the visual art, the teacher spent most of the available conversation/conference time making rounds to tell students they don't have enough

lyrics to fill the measure, helping students get going with ideas, redirect off-task behavior, or offer rhyme assistance. In this sense, the teacher could not act like a ‘producer’ or facilitator as mentioned earlier in this study. Instead, they were more of manager in a frenetic environment. However, in part two, the teacher-researcher could function much more as a facilitator and simply help guide, especially with prosodic revisions. While students still asked for help with rhymes, many students were immediately able to get to work with ideas and begin their writing. The teacher-researcher did not have to give nearly as many reminders to fully fill measures with lyrics, but instead was able to jump into prosodic syllable revision. Additionally, it was noted that during part two the conversations between student and teacher were much richer, connected, and often got to a point of clarification or resolution much quicker. With the art available, the teacher could reference the painting to attempt to clarify what the student was trying to write or communicate, whereas in part one, the teacher had to attempt to understand the student’s internal songwriting thoughts solely through what they verbalized, with no external point of reference.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

#### **Exploration and Implications of Teacher Songwriting Research**

As stated in the literature review of this study, there is no existing data on how often songwriting is included in elementary general music. The results of the teacher survey in this study offer the first glimpse at how frequently elementary music educators might be including songwriting, though not generalizable to all teachers. Instrumental composition was incorporated with some regularity, but nearly half reported only occasionally including it. With regard to songwriting, almost half of participants never or rarely include it, a similar number occasionally include it, and under a tenth include songwriting regularly. Since songwriting is a type of composition as well, this study supports the claims made by researchers such as Hickey, Kaschub, Smith, and Kratus that compositional activities are not regularly experienced by students.

Reimer (2003) emphasized the importance of a comprehensive music education in which all students experience each of the musical roles. He believed this to be especially important in general music because it lays the foundation for choosing specialized music classes later. However, the possibility of achieving that vision is troubling when this study found nearly half of participants never or rarely teach songwriting. If many students leave elementary school and never understand that songwriting is a musical role open to them, just like the role of performing, they are possibly losing the exploration in that musical identity for a lifetime.

Data sets collected from this study indicated participants were less comfortable teaching songwriting than they were composition. The years of teaching experience had very little correlation to the comfort level of teaching either activity. Similarly, teaching experience had almost no correlation to the frequency of songwriting in the classroom. The researcher was surprised to find that the overall comfort in teaching composition and songwriting was nearly the same between the additionally certified and non-certified participants. These results suggest the additional certification in various available music education approaches, methods, and philosophies used in the study which are taken after the undergraduate degree has been obtained, may not increase the overall comfort in teaching composition and songwriting. It is possible that other approaches or classes not mentioned in this study are better suited to teaching composition and songwriting, but none were mentioned in noteworthy numbers to suggest they are the approaches widely recognized, available, or taken by many elementary music educators. Perhaps most baffling and unexpected to the researcher, was the lack of correlation between the Orff Schulwerk approach and comfortability in teaching composition. As stated in the results of the teacher survey, composition is one of the four key tenets of the Orff Schulwerk approach. Instrumental, speech, and movement composition or improvisation occur repeatedly throughout the Orff training process so it is puzzling that the teachers who reported being Orff certified did not feel any more comfortable teaching composition than the non-certified teachers.

While years of teaching experience and additional certifications did not appear related to comfort in teaching songwriting, there was a large correlation between comfort and frequency of teaching songwriting. Results indicated that teacher participants who were more comfortable teaching songwriting also taught it more frequently. This may seem a logical and expected finding, but it is an important one when looking at how to bring more songwriting to elementary

general music. If teachers would be more likely to include songwriting if they felt more comfortable, then more attention needs to be placed on how to build comfort in teaching songwriting. Given the study findings, teaching experience and additional certifications did not appear to build comfort and therefore are likely not going to increase the frequency of songwriting in the classroom either. The question then becomes, for those who were more comfortable teaching songwriting, what exactly helped them become more comfortable? Further research might explore personal songwriting experience, and what songwriting training is currently or could be happening, in preservice music education programs. Additionally, the implications of adding songwriting to preservice programs would have to be examined, such as who would teach it and what would need to change to add this training.

Since this was a baseline songwriting survey where comfort levels were not previously known or researched, the researcher did not include a question specifically asking for open-ended responses to “what would help you/what does help you feel more comfortable teaching songwriting?” However, the Pearson correlation results of the songwriting strategies question could provide valuable insight. Participants in the study who reported using more songwriting strategies also tended to be more comfortable teaching songwriting and taught it more often. Based on this finding, one possible way for more songwriting to occur in elementary music is to help teachers build a toolbox of strategies to be used when teaching songwriting. Again though, it remains unknown where teachers in the study learned the strategies that they use. This study found no correlation between strategies used and experience, indicating teachers are learning strategies by means other than teaching year after year.

### **Exploration and Implications of Songwriting Action Research with Students**

Students in the songwriting study reported that idea generation and rhyming words were their greatest challenges during part one which did not use any prompts other than a generalized teacher-given topic. This report is also reflected in the teacher-researcher observation which found idea generation and rhyming words were the most common topics of conversation/conference between teacher and student. These student and teacher-researcher findings align with the previous research which noted many students struggle with generating ideas. Meanwhile, in part two which used a visual art prompt, only a third as many students reported that idea generation was their greatest challenge at eight total students, compared to 24 in part one. In the context of both parts, using a visual art prompt did appear to make a noteworthy improvement in the student songwriting experience since ideas were seen as much less of a challenge in part two. Once again, this echoes the work of composition and songwriting researchers that emphasized the usefulness of various prompts to jump start the creative process.

The boost in reported student confidence during part two using the art prompt is also worthy of discussion. In part one, 26 students, or about half, felt either not confident or a medium level of confidence, while 24 felt really or pretty confident. In part two, just eight students felt not confident or less confident, while 16 actually felt more confident and 27 felt pretty or really confident. Just as part two with an art prompt seemed to help promote idea generation, it also seemed to improve the songwriting experience for many students by boosting their confidence.

### **Recommendations From the Synthesis of Both Studies**

These student results using an art prompt are noteworthy in their own right, but when also considered through the lens of the teacher survey results, they become even more remarkable.

Only 39% of the 164 teacher participants reported using visual art/picture prompts, yet 70% also selected “students are stuck/don’t know what to write” as a challenge, representing the most selected challenge to songwriting in the classroom. Given that idea generation was reported as a challenge at a greatly reduced number and ideas were far less the topic of conversation with the teacher during part two, teachers should consider visual art/picture prompts as a possible remedy to “students feeling stuck/don’t know what to write.”

Teacher participants selected “takes too much time” (54%) and “messy/chaotic” (37%) as the next most cited challenges to songwriting in the classroom. Since students were given three days to complete and continually revise their songwriting to the best of their ability by the end of the third day, it is not directly clear if the use of an art prompt reduced the amount of overall time students spent songwriting. However, a connection with time and classroom environment can be made to their work quality when using the art prompt in part two. As noted in the results section of the student research, the teacher-researcher had a smaller number of conversations with students about ideas in part two, while most of conversations were about rhyming or prosodic syllable revision. In this sense, time was more efficiently used by students in part two. Since they did not need as much help with ideas, they were able to more fully complete verses on their own and spend much more time on revision to create their best work over the three allotted days. In contrast, while most students eventually completed two verses in part one, they still needed quite a bit of help to expand those ideas into a full verse before prosodic revision could even be discussed. Therefore, teachers may not directly notice a vast difference in time used with certain songwriting prompts when giving a set amount of writing days, but prompts may indirectly help students reach higher quality work at an earlier point in the writing and revision process. If a teacher does not have a set number of days planned for writing, instead allowing students to

fluidly move onto practice while others are still writing, perhaps then teachers might notice less time spent on songwriting when using prompts since students could potentially reach revision, and thus practicing, sooner. This study was not designed in such a fluid manner, though this could be a potential area of research in the future.

While many teachers in the survey reported messy and chaotic classes as a songwriting challenge, no messy or chaotic classes were observed by the current researcher in the third-grade classes. The environment of the classroom and the role of the teacher was different though in part one versus part two. As previously noted, in part one the teacher-researcher was continually making rounds to give reminders about filling out measures, provide help with ideas and rhyming words, and redirect off-task behavior. The environment felt unsettled and the teacher was placed in fast-paced manager role. In part two with the art, much less time was spent quickly moving from one raised hand to another. The teacher did periodically move throughout the room to answer questions, but for much of the time the teacher was able to remain in a central location where students could casually approach for a conference-style revision with fully completed verses. This allowed the classroom environment to feel less busy, and also more positive, peaceful and smooth. It is possible that the more strategies students are given for songwriting, the more autonomous, on-task, and successful they can be, which in turn might aid the classroom environment.

Based on the results of the student and teacher songwriting research in the context of each other, it appears using visual art prompts may be able to help remediate some of the teacher perceived challenges to songwriting in the classroom while improving the student songwriting experience. The researcher recommends an exploration of visual art/picture prompts for teachers when planning songwriting in the general music classroom. A bit of caution should be exercised

though when selecting art as the only songwriting prompt. As self-reported in the part two questionnaire, five students felt less confident which could possibly be attributed to having to use art as prompt. Whereas art or visual images may be a helpful songwriting strategy for many, it may not be effective for all. Therefore, it would be in the best interest of all students for teachers to offer a variety of songwriting prompts, even if they all present the same topic but in a different format. Some students may find idea generation easier through other prompts such as poetry, stories, news articles, or even videos, so including these in addition to art could possibly serve all students. More research would need to be done to explore the effectiveness of other songwriting prompts, as has been done with art/picture prompts in this study.

Although rhyming was not specifically being studied in this research, the results of the student study suggest teachers need to spend time considering how they will address this songwriting challenge. Equivalent to part one, about half of the students stated rhyming was their greatest challenge in part two. Based on both parts, rhyming words appear to be a considerable challenge when not given rhyming books or other resources. The fundamental task of rhyming itself was not hard for the third-grade students. Rather, the specific challenge for the students was brainstorming rhyming word pairs that still matched the idea of what their AAB verse was trying to communicate. Rhyming resources certainly could not hurt if used in any given grade, though it should be noted that older students may not find rhyming word pairs as difficult.

### **Limitations of the Research**

A few other limitations of the study should be mentioned. Those teachers who reported including songwriting in their classes were not specifically asked what type or genre of songwriting they include. Likewise, there is no way to gauge the quality of the student songwriting or teacher instruction. Also, as mentioned in the student songwriting methodology,

the student research was limited by COVID parameters at the researchers' school. Because of this, the only grade able to be studied in the available timeframe was third grade. Students were also seen every day for a six-week block which could have potentially led to higher quality work and faster work completion if students retained more. It is also important to note that classes at the researchers' school are capped at 18 students, therefore possibly affecting student work quality if the teacher can spend more time with songwriting pairs. Further research will need to be done to see if public school teachers would experience these same results, even if they see more students on a less frequent basis.

### **Future Research Propositions**

Nearly one century after the idea was introduced, the music education profession has miles to travel before "music by all" is reached. Others outside of music education cannot be entirely blamed for the profession's inability to accomplish this mission. If music educators want to rectify this problem, they must first recognize some of the internal struggles that prevent songwriting and composition in the classroom such as emphasizing the role of presentational performance, only offering traditional and classical music, and idolizing only a certain method or approach as the one true way to teach general music. Next, music educators must research, study, and teach in ways that are relevant and pragmatic while also developing students' personal and musical identity. Songwriting offers students this relevant, pragmatic, identity-building experience. Through songwriting students are also able to experience another musical role and experience other genres of music.

As promising as songwriting could be towards attaining "music by all", this study found nearly half of participants are rarely or never teaching songwriting, while the balance report just occasionally teaching it. Teachers in the survey selected a number of self-reported challenges to

songwriting in the classroom, along with their comfort level teaching it and utilized strategies. These responses provide initial insight as to why teachers don't include songwriting but also ways that this lack of songwriting frequency can begin to be rectified. This study suggests that teachers feel less comfortable teaching songwriting, but if they would feel more comfortable, they also might teach it more often. Additionally, to build comfort and frequency, teachers need more experience and knowledge with songwriting strategies. Between the teacher and student research in this study, strategies could be the key to improving the student songwriting experience which may also remediate some of the teacher perceived songwriting challenges and improve their comfort level.

This study provides baseline data about songwriting in elementary general music and a concrete starting point to bring more songwriting to the classroom. As outlined in the preceding discussion and interpretation of the results, new research questions can be formed based on this songwriting research data. Further research needs to be conducted in the following areas:

1. Other than strategies, what are additional ways teachers can build songwriting comfort?
2. How could preservice music teacher education programs play a role in bringing more songwriting to general music classrooms? What would have to change in these programs and who would teach it?
3. What lasting impact would preservice teacher songwriting training and workshops have on songwriting frequency in the classroom?
4. For teachers who report using many songwriting strategies, where have they learned these strategies? Are some of them experienced in songwriting themselves? Is there any particular training they have done?
5. Are other strategies, including other prompt styles, equally effective and efficient in improving the student songwriting experience?
6. Can songwriting strategies be just as effective for public school teachers? Would strategies actually lead to more songwriting in public schools and also allow these teachers to overcome some of their challenges?

Continuing research in these topics could provide further clues on how to bring more songwriting to the classroom. It is time for music education to have its “both/and” moment. The profession is not being called upon to throw out traditional and time-honored ways of being a musician or learning music. Rather, the call is to look within current times and the future to assess what students need for their ‘real’ world. Music education must match those needs by allowing students to experience additional ways to be a musician that are relevant, pragmatic, and build their personal identity. For many students, it could be too late to begin these experiences in secondary school. A comprehensive music education in all musical roles, including songwriting and composition, must begin in elementary general music when students are beginning to form their musical identity and preparing to choose specialized music classes in secondary school. Through this, the music education profession might become closer to accomplishing “music by all.”

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**APPENDIX A**  
**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**  
**EXEMPT APPROVAL**



Date: 02/28/2021

Principal Investigator: Tara Neeley

Committee Action: **IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol**

Action Date: 02/28/2021

Protocol Number: [2102022413](#)

Protocol Title: Arts Integration with Blues and Visual Art

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(701) for research involving

Category 1 (2018): RESEARCH CONDUCTED IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS. Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

**As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:**

- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).
- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).
- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. \*You cannot continue to reference UNC on



any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.

- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 or via e-mail at [nicole.morse@unco.edu](mailto:nicole.morse@unco.edu). Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - <http://hhs.gov/ohrp/> and <https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nicole Morse".

Nicole Morse  
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

2102022413

**Protocol 2102022413 IRB Acknowledgement**

Streamlyne Research <production-research@unco.streamlyne.org>

Wed 5/12/2021 3:43 PM

To: Masztalerz, Gabriela <gabriela.masztalerz@unco.edu>; Neeley, Tara <neel7743@bears.unco.edu>;  
nicole.morse@unco.edu nicole.morse@unco.edu

The IRB protocol number [2102022413](#), Principal Investigator Tara Neeley has had the action "IRB Acknowledgement" performed on it.

The action was executed by Morse, Nicole.

Modification request to add anonymous teacher survey, as indicated in 5/11/21 Notify IRB, has been approved. You are free to proceed. Thank you!

IRB Protocol Number: [2102022413](#) - Document Number: 48007

This notification was generated by Nicole Morse.

**APPENDIX B**  
**RECRUITMENT MATERIALS, CONSENT**  
**AND ASSENT FORMS**

**From:** Gail Sonnesyn  
**Date:** Tuesday, February 16, 2021 at 5:53 PM  
**To:** Nan Remington  
**Cc:** Tara Neeley  
**Subject:** Re: Thesis project

Yes, this is fine. We often ask parents for permission for research purposes, etc. Please just let us take a look at what you plan to send before it goes out.

Thanks,  
Gail  
Associate Head of School

---

On Feb 16, 2021, at 5:50 PM, Nan Remington wrote:

Hi Tara,

Your master's thesis sounds wonderful and such a benefit to our third grade students. I am fine with asking parents permission. We have had other master's projects that involved students and parents were comfortable and gave permission.

Thanks,

Nan Remington  
Head of Lower School

---

**From:** Tara Neeley  
**Sent:** Tuesday, February 16, 2021 5:41 PM  
**To:** Nan Remington; Gail Sonnesyn  
**Subject:** Thesis project

Gail and Nan,

I am currently working on my master's thesis to finalize details. As I mentioned before, the topic for my thesis is empathy through ekphrasis, or using the arts to inspire music or vice versa. Specifically, I am working on a blues unit with 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. They have learned how to play a standard blues progression on ukulele and learned the AAB lyrical format of blues poetry. They are currently working on writing a class blues song. The final step is to introduce a piece of social justice art to inspire their own blues lyrics. They will use the art as a point of reflection to understand social justice issues and build empathy. I would like to write about the project as the research section in my thesis, but I will need to obtain permission from parents by sending home a consent form. No identifying information such as names would be used in my thesis, and the data I would be using is examples of written lyrics and student reflections. No photographs, videos, or recordings will be used. From your perspective as administrators, are you okay with me sending home a consent form that outlines this information?

Thanks,  
Tara

Dear 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade Parents,

As you are probably aware, we have just finished our final 6 weeks of music class for this school year. During the first 3 of these 6 weeks together, your students learned how to play ukulele. Using their new skills on ukulele we began a multi-week unit on blues music. Throughout our unit we listened to the blues, discussed it's origins, learned how to play standard blues chords progressions on ukulele, and learned the format of blues poetry. As a scaffolded step to partner work, we wrote a class blues song based on the blues from a child's perspective – quite creative and entertaining! As a final project, we discussed what social justice topics might come up as a child when moving to a new neighborhood. This was followed by introducing Norman Rockwell's "New Kids in the Neighborhood." Using ideas presented in the artwork such as similarities, differences, and feelings of the children, they worked with a partner to write a blues song that was presented to the class.

Currently, I serve as the Borgen Faculty Fellow while completing my Master's in Music Education at University of Northern Colorado. My focus as the current Fellow and in my thesis research is exploring how learning can benefit from integration of the arts. Since our most recent 3<sup>rd</sup> grade unit integrates several humanities – blues music, poetry, and art – I would like to include examples of songwriting and student reflections from our unit as research in my thesis. Written work or reflections would be the only type of work included, no photographs, videos, or recordings. Likewise, all work will be treated confidentially with no student names appearing in my research. Allowing your student's work to be included is voluntary. *If you would like to allow your student's work to possibly be included in my thesis research, please review and sign the attached parental consent form, then return this form to me either by sending to school with your child or scan and email.* In case you do not have access to a printer, this consent form will also be sent home with your child. As standard practice, if you give consent, I will then talk to your child as well to be sure they give their assent to including their work.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to reach me by email.

Best Regards,

Tara Neeley



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: Arts Integration with Blues Songs and Visual Art  
Researcher: Tara Neeley, Graduate Student, School of Music

Advisor: Dr. Nancy Glen, UNC School of Music, (970) 351-2484, nancy.glen@unco.edu

As part of my music education master's thesis I am researching the cross-curricular learning benefits of arts integration in the music classroom. Recently, in your child's music class we have been learning ukulele and how to play blues chord progressions. As a class we have listened to the blues, played blues progressions, and learned the lyrical format of blues poetry. Using these learned skills, we wrote a class blues song based on the blues from a child's perspective. The topics they arrived at included homework, recess, candy, and vaccinations. As a final project in our blues unit we studied the painting "New Kids in the Neighborhood" by Norman Rockwell. First, we discussed how it might feel to move to a new neighborhood and the issues that might arise from a kid's social justice lens. Then, together we discussed what we noticed in the painting – similarities, differences, how the children might feel, and what they hope happens after the brief moment captured in the painting. Children worked in pairs to write their own blues lyrics pertaining to ideas presented in the painting. These student-written songs were then performed in pairs for our class.

Because this unit in our curriculum incorporated integration, I would like to include examples of student work and student pre/post unit reflections in my thesis research writing. If you grant permission and if your child indicates a willingness to participate, your child's written song lyrics and/or personal reflections and feedback on the unit may be included as student examples in my final thesis writing and potentially a published research article. No photographs, videos, or recordings will be included in my thesis, nor will any personal identifiers be used such as student names.

I foresee no risks to subjects beyond those that are normally encountered during a typical music class.

Page 1 of 2 \_\_\_\_\_  
(Parent's initials here)

Please feel free to email me if you have any questions or concerns about this research and please retain one copy of this letter for your records.

Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tara Neeley

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to allow your child to participate in this study and if (s)he begins participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to allow your child to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO; 970-351-1910 or [nicole.morse@unco.edu](mailto:nicole.morse@unco.edu).

\_\_\_\_\_  
Child's Full Name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



ASSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Dear 3<sup>rd</sup> Grader!

You might remember when I told you teachers still go to school to learn and I am working on my master's degree. As part of my research homework, I am studying how using the arts like dance, visual art, and drama can help us learn music.

Recently we have done a lot of work in our music class to learn ukulele and the blues. Our classes have worked hard on our songwriting skills, especially when we wrote blues songs about Norman Rockwell's art. I would like to share examples of student blues lyrics and student thoughts on our blues projects in my research homework. This means I may include your written lyrics or thoughts, too. I will not share your name, photo, video, or recording.

Sharing your blues examples and reflections probably won't help you or hurt you. Your parents have said it's okay for me to share your work, but you don't have to. It's up to you. Also, if you say "yes" but then change your mind, you can choose not to share at any time you want to. Do you have any questions for me about my research?

If you want to possibly have your song lyrics and thoughts on our blues lessons included in my research sign your name below and write today's date next to it. Thanks!

---

Student

Date

---

Researcher

Date

**APPENDIX C**  
**TEACHER SURVEY QUESTIONS**

# Songwriting in Elementary Music

## Informed Consent

You are being invited to participate in a research study survey about elementary music teacher's songwriting practices, perceptions, and instructional strategies. This research is being conducted by Tara Neeley as the Principal Investigator in partial fulfillment of her Master's in Music Education degree at University of Northern Colorado. This survey is anonymous. None of the information collected will enable you or your device to be identified. Participation in this research survey is completely voluntary. You may choose to withdraw at any time and for any reason, without penalty, by abandoning the survey before its completion. There are no known risks for participating in this research survey. There are 12 questions to answer, taking approximately 5 minutes to complete.

By completing and submitting this survey you are indicating that you have read this consent information and agree to your anonymous responses being included in this research study. If you have questions about this study, you may contact the Principal Investigator at [neel7743@bears.unco.edu](mailto:neel7743@bears.unco.edu) or the academic advisor, Nancy Glen at [nancy.glen@unco.edu](mailto:nancy.glen@unco.edu). If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Nicole Morse, Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO; 970-351-1910 or [nicole.morse@unco.edu](mailto:nicole.morse@unco.edu).

1. How many years have you been teaching elementary music?

*Mark only one oval.*

- 1-4
- 5-9
- 10-19
- 20-29
- 30+

10/31/21, 10:12 AM

Songwriting in Elementary Music

2. How frequently do students experience instrumental composition/improvisation in your classes?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Every Lesson  
 Every unit  
 Occasionally  
 Rarely  
 Never

3. Which grade levels engage in instrumental composition/improvisation? (check all that apply)

*Check all that apply.*

- PreK  
 K  
 1  
 2  
 3  
 4  
 5  
 6

4. How frequently do students experience lyric songwriting in your classes?

*Mark only one oval.*

- Every lesson  
 Every unit  
 Occasionally  
 Rarely  
 Never

10/31/21, 10:12 AM

Songwriting in Elementary Music

5. Which grade levels engage in lyric songwriting? (check all that apply)

*Check all that apply.*

- PreK  
 K  
 1  
 2  
 3  
 4  
 5  
 6

6. How comfortable are you teaching instrumental composition and improvisation in elementary?

*Mark only one oval.*

1      2      3      4      5

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Very Uncomfortable      Very Comfortable

7. How comfortable are you teaching lyric songwriting in elementary?

*Mark only one oval.*

1      2      3      4      5

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Very Uncomfortable      Very Comfortable

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Songwriting in Elementary Music

## 8. What driving factors lead you to teach songwriting in elementary? (choose top 3)

*Check all that apply.*

- Students can express their emotions & thoughts
- Outlet for activism
- Students experience musical roles outside of performing and listening
- Student agency in the music classroom
- Deeper understanding of music and musical process
- Integration with other subjects

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

## 9. What are your greatest challenges when teaching songwriting in elementary? (choose top 3)

*Check all that apply.*

- Messy/chaotic
- Students are stuck, don't know what to write or compose
- I don't have enough training or experience to teach it
- Admin doesn't understand the process
- Takes too much class time
- I have to prepare for performances

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

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Songwriting in Elementary Music

10. What strategies do you use to help students be successful during lyric songwriting activities? (check all that apply)

*Check all that apply.*

- Student selected topic
- Teacher selected topic/prompt
- Sentence starters
- Rhyming resources
- Picture/image/art prompts
- Graphic organizers for generating ideas
- Parody writing
- Musical form graphic organizer for writing lyrics
- Literature prompts (poems, fairytales, story)
- Story cubes

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

11. What genres/styles of music do you use with elementary students when composing and songwriting? (check all that apply)

*Check all that apply.*

- Blues
- Rap
- Popular
- World
- Pentatonic/Modal/Diatonic in traditional and folk music
- Jazz

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

12. Have you completed levels or certification in any of the following: (check all that apply)

*Check all that apply.*

- Orff-Schulwerk
- Kodály
- Dalcroze
- Gordon
- World Music
- Suzuki
- Conversational Solfege

Other:  \_\_\_\_\_

13. Is there any other information on composition and songwriting in elementary you would like to include for this research based on the above questions or your own experience? (Please note, do not include your name or school)

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**APPENDIX D**  
**STUDENT SONGWRITING EXAMPLES**  
**WITHOUT ART**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / <sup>C</sup> The <sup>C C</sup> ocean /.../ <sup>C</sup> is filled with <sup>C</sup> trash

A: / <sup>F</sup> The <sup>F C</sup> ~~ocean~~ /.../ <sup>C</sup> is filled with <sup>C</sup> trash

B: / <sup>G7</sup> The animals / <sup>F</sup> will die <sup>C</sup> in a <sup>C</sup> flash

A: / <sup>C</sup> Small turtles /.../ <sup>C C</sup> will die <sup>C</sup>

A: / <sup>F</sup> Small turtles /.../ <sup>F C</sup> will die <sup>C</sup>

B: / <sup>G7</sup> Because of / <sup>F</sup> all the trash <sup>C</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>C</sup> ~~disturbing~~ /.../ <sup>C</sup> ~~by~~

Ex. D.1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / <sup>C</sup> The courts <sup>C C</sup> aren't /.../ <sup>C</sup> so people aren't /.../

A: / <sup>F</sup> crying /.../ <sup>F C</sup> crying <sup>C</sup>

B: / <sup>G7</sup> But no / <sup>F</sup> one /.../ <sup>C</sup> crying /.../ <sup>C</sup>

A: / <sup>C</sup> /.../ <sup>C C</sup> /.../ <sup>C</sup>

A: / <sup>F</sup> /.../ <sup>F C</sup> /.../ <sup>C</sup>

B: / <sup>G7</sup> /.../ <sup>F</sup> /.../ <sup>C</sup> /.../ <sup>C</sup>

Ex. D.2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / Polar bears time is /.../ running out /.../

F C C C

A: / Polar bears time is /.../ running out /.../

F C C C

B: / That is why we / we really must / put /.../

C C C

A: / The pollution is /.../ coming in everywhere /.../

F C C C

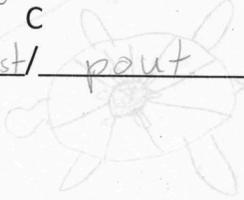
A: / The pollution is /.../ coming in everywhere /.../

G7 F C C

B: / That is why the / animals don't / have anywhere /.../

C C C

Handwritten notes: "We must save the route", "we must save their route", "put", "the", "the sand".



Ex. D.3

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / we clean /.../ up all <sup>the</sup> land /.../

F C C C

A: / we clean /.../ up all the land /.../

F C C C

B: / But we / put it / down <sup>in the sand</sup> /.../

G7 F C C

A: / what ~~about~~ /.../ all the fish /.../

F C C C

A: / what ~~about~~ /.../ all the fish /.../

F C C C

B: / trash is / all on / their dish /.../

G7 F C C

Ex. D.4

pie + pair

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / <sup>C</sup> Oh my, /.../ <sup>C C</sup> Ocean pollution /...<sup>C</sup>

A: / <sup>F</sup> Oh my, /.../ <sup>F C</sup> Ocean pollution /...<sup>C</sup>

B: / <sup>G7</sup> Oh my golly we need / <sup>F</sup> a <sup>C</sup> solution /...<sup>C</sup>

Dog

A: / <sup>C</sup> the trash, /.../ <sup>C C</sup> Its right there /...<sup>C</sup>

A: / <sup>F</sup> the trash, /.../ <sup>F C</sup> Its right there /...<sup>C</sup>

B: / <sup>G7</sup> You know where, / <sup>F</sup> I'll save sea life, / <sup>C</sup> Everywhere!!! /...<sup>C</sup>

## Ex. D.5

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / <sup>C</sup> the ocean /.../ <sup>C C</sup> is so sad /...<sup>C</sup>

A: / <sup>F</sup> the ocean /.../ <sup>F C</sup> is sad /...<sup>C</sup>

B: / <sup>G7</sup> we are / <sup>F</sup> being really / <sup>C</sup> bad /...<sup>C</sup>

A: / <sup>C</sup> we are not /.../ <sup>C C</sup> glad /...<sup>C</sup>

A: / <sup>F</sup> we are not /.../ <sup>F C</sup> so bad /...<sup>C</sup>

B: / <sup>G7</sup> help the / <sup>F</sup> ocean because / <sup>C</sup> its sad /...<sup>C</sup>

## Ex. D.6

Name: 

C C C  
 A: / the ice is melting / ... / its going away / ...  
 F F C C  
 A: / the ice is melting / ... / is going away / ...  
 G7 F C C  
 B: / time is running out / today is the day / do you have something say / ...

C C C fair  
 A: / trash is here / ... / trash is there / ...  
 F F C C  
 A: / trash is here / ... / trash is everywhere / ...  
 G7 F C C  
 B: / We don't care / but the animals do / and it isn't fair / ...

## Ex. D.7

Name: 

C C C  
 A: / ~~people throw trash~~ ocean pollution is / ... / every single day / ...  
 F in the ocean F C C  
 A: / ~~people~~ ocean pollution is / ... / every single day / ...  
 G7 F is C C  
 B: / the saddest thing / ~~and~~ now the dolphins cannot play / ...

C C C  
 A: / the coral reefs / ... / it is so / ...  
 F are dying F C sad C  
 A: / the coral reefs / ... / it is so sad / ...  
 G7 F C C  
 B: / it needs to stop / right now / because it is / ...

## Ex. D.8

**APPENDIX E**  
**STUDENT SONGWRITING EXAMPLES**  
**WITH ROCKWELL ART**

alone  
stone

A: / ~~I'm~~ cold to the ~~bone~~ / ... / ~~I'm~~ so ~~alone~~ / ...  
 C C C C C  
 F C C

A: / I'm cold to the ~~bone~~ / ... / I'm so ~~alone~~ / ...  
 G7 F C C

B: / ~~I don't know~~ who to talk to / I ~~don't~~ know what to ~~do~~ / ~~the only friend~~ I ~~have~~ / ...  
 C C C C C  
 C C C C C  
 my only friend is a stone  
 is talk to stone

A: / ~~I~~ ~~play~~ baseball / ... / ~~I~~ ~~do~~ ~~you~~ ~~play~~ / ...  
 C C C C C  
 F C C

A: / ~~I~~ ~~play~~ / ... / ~~I~~ ~~do~~ ~~you~~ ~~play~~ / ...  
 G7 F C C

B: / ~~I~~ ~~hope~~ ~~I~~ ~~can~~ ~~play~~ with ~~you~~ / ~~can~~ ~~I~~ ~~be~~ ~~part~~ / ...  
 C C C C C  
 C C C C C  
 of your crew

Ex. E.1

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / ~~People~~ ~~always~~ ~~think~~ / ... / ~~I'm~~ out of ~~place~~ / ...  
 C C C C C  
 F C C

A: / ~~People~~ ~~always~~ ~~think~~ / ... / ~~I'm~~ out of ~~place~~ / ...  
 G7 F C C

B: / ~~I~~ ~~think~~ ~~that~~ / ... / ~~I~~ ~~think~~ ~~that~~ / ...  
 C C C C C  
 C C C C C  
 because of my

A: / ~~I~~ ~~always~~ ~~ask~~ ~~the~~ / ... / ~~kids~~ ~~if~~ ~~they~~ ~~can~~ / ...  
 C C C C C  
 F C C

A: / ~~I~~ ~~always~~ ~~ask~~ ~~the~~ / ... / ~~kids~~ ~~if~~ ~~they~~ ~~can~~ / ...  
 G7 F C C

B: / ~~but~~ ~~all~~ ~~they~~ ~~say~~ / ... / ~~is~~ ~~no~~ / ...  
 C C C C C  
 C C C C C  
 you cannot  
 go away

Ex. E.2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / I'm moving today / ... / on what should I say / ...  
 C C C  
 F C C

A: / I'm moving today / ... / on what should I say / ...  
 G7 F C C

B: / I'm trying to make / ... / no one cares / ... / not are lucky / ...  
 friends

A: / I want to go home / ... / we feel so alone / ...  
 C C C  
 F C C

A: / I want to go home / ... / we feel so alone / ...  
 G7 F C C

B: / you the cool kid / we're the cool kid / we feel it in our / ...  
 bones

Ex. E.3

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / you are black / ... / we are white  
 C C C  
 F C C

A: / you are dark / ... / we are light / ...  
 G7 F C C

B: / because we're different / we seem to fight / but it just isn't right / ...  
 but it just isn't right

A: / we're feeling scared / ... / in a new place / ...  
 C C C  
 F C C

A: / we are feeling scared / ... / in a new place / ...  
 G7 F C C

B: / all the other kids belong in this space / they think we are a  
 disaster

Ex. E.4

Name

C C C

A: / baseball, baseball / .... / we wanna play with all / ....

F F C C

A: / baseball, base ball / .... / we wanna play with all / ....

G7 F C C

B: / baseball is cool / base ball is fun / theres a wall so we / ....

C C C

A: / skin, color, skin color / .... / it doesnt matter / ....

F F C C

A: / skin color, skin color / .... / it doesnt matter / ....

G7 F C C

B: / we dont care at all / lets go play fball / and make their / ....

rules shater

Ex. E.5

Name:

A B C D E F G H I  
J K L M N O P Q R S T U V  
W X Y Z

C C C

A: / Sometimes I feel alone / .... / like im stripped / ....

F F C C

A: / Sometimes I feel alone / .... / like im stripped to the / ....

G7 F C C

B: / I only taste / of pure sadness / in my tongue / ....

C C C

A: / Sometimes im tired / .... / of my new / ....

F F C C

A: / Sometimes im tired / .... / of my new / ....

G7 F C C

B: / I am tired and / sad / my life is / ....

Ex. E.6

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / I just got here / ... / feeling kinda nutty / ...

A: / I just got here / ... / feeling kinda nutty / ...

B: / got a baseball glove / gott a baseball bat and I want to find a buddie / ...

A: / We have the same shoes / ... / We have the same taste / ...

A: / We have the same shoes / ... / We have the same taste / ...

B: / We may look different but inside we are the same and I do not want to feel misplaced / ...

Ex. E.7

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

A: / people are staring at me / ... / I Don't want a fight / ...

A: / people are staring at me / ... / I Don't want a fight / ...

B: / Nothing is going my way / They're mad at me / life just isn't bright / ...

A: / I'm so lonely / ... / I don't have a friend / ...

A: / I'm so lonely / ... / I don't have a friend / ...

B: / I'm so sad / not feeling rid / feel like my world is going to end / ...

Ex. E.8

**APPENDIX F**

**PERMISSION TO USE NORMAN ROCKWELL ART**

Tuesday, November 2, 2021 at 8:45:46 PM Mountain Daylight Time

**Subject:** [External] RE: Rockwell Art in Thesis  
**Date:** Tuesday, November 2, 2021 at 7:31:40 AM Mountain Daylight Time  
**From:** Mike Mueller  
**To:** Tara Neeley  
**Attachments:** image004.png, image001.png

Tara – thank you for contacting me and for the interest in using the Norman Rockwell painting in your thesis, and with your students. The NR estate is happy to see it put to such good use! Please do include it in your thesis, no formal agreement or fee required.

Regards,

Mike Mueller  
 Licensing Director, North America



124 Azalea Point Drive North, Ponte Vedra Beach, FL 32082

[mike.mueller@img.com](mailto:mike.mueller@img.com)

904-495-2502

[www.imglicensing.com](http://www.imglicensing.com)

**From:** Tara Neeley  
**Sent:** Monday, November 1, 2021 9:50 PM  
**To:** Mike Mueller <Mike.Mueller@img.com>  
**Subject:** Rockwell Art in Thesis

EXTERNAL

Hello Mr. Mueller,

I hope this email finds you well. I am a music teacher about to finish my Master's in Music Education and submitting my thesis next week. My thesis study researched songwriting and applicable songwriting strategies in elementary music. One of the main strategies I researched with my students was using visual art as a prompt to help students generate lyrical ideas, with a focus on social justice and empathy. In my study I displayed Norman Rockwell's "New Kids in the Neighborhood" (1967) which my third grade students critically studied and discussed, then wrote about in their own blues songs.

I am writing to ask permission to include the image of "New Kids in the Neighborhood" and include the name Norman Rockwell in my thesis as part of the 'methodology' section where I explain how the study was designed for my students. This painting as a prompt strategy really made quite a difference in the quality of my students blues lyrics. They wrote some really lovely, thought-provoking lyrics so I want my thesis readers to be able to see the artwork kids were viewing.