A Cycle of Giving: Transforming Individuals, Transforming Community in a Louisiana Children's Choir

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A CYCLE OF GIVING:
TRANSFORMING INDIVIDUALS, TRANSFORMING COMMUNITY
IN A LOUISIANA CHILDREN’S CHOIR

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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by

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Abstract

Kids’ Choir, a community children’s choir in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, formed in 2014 as part of the Kids’ Orchestra organization. The organization, founded in 2011, is El Sistema-inspired—a model developed in 1975 by Venezuelan orchestra conductor, José Abreu. The model’s mission is “to effect social change through music for children with the fewest resources and the greatest need” (Mission Statement, 2017).

El Sistema's focus on social change through musical excellence may hold great promise in the United States where neighborhoods are becoming increasingly diverse. Moreover, the El Sistema philosophy responds directly to issues of segregation still present in the Baton Rouge community, but more research is needed to determine the impact of programs like these on children’s development and the communities they serve. In addition, researchers have not fully investigated the musical lives of children—lives that arguably encompass a multitude of possible musical interactions.

The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to examine Kids’ Orchestra’s philosophy of social development through musical experiences and document the teaching and learning paradigms associated with this philosophy. I explored the impact of Kids’ Choir participation on the choristers from the perspective of teachers, staff, parents, and the children themselves. In addition, I investigated more deeply the relationship between three choristers’ Kids’ Choir experience and their musical lives outside of the organization.

I provided an historical account of the evolution of the Kids’ Orchestra mission and vision statements since the organization’s inception and detailed how the El Sistema philosophy manifests in the organization and the Kids’ Choir ensemble. I presented the Kids’ Choir
experience as a counter-narrative to current El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired organization critiques. Findings revealed perceived benefits of increased development in choristers’ resilience through holistic education highlighted by increased confidence, maturity development, and social development. Further, findings illuminated evidence of a cycle of giving involving students, parents, teachers, and community members through access, encouraging acceptance and compassion, and community education and enrichment. Finally, I discussed transforming individuals as a means of transforming communities.
Chapter 1: Introduction

It’s 3:30 p.m. on a sunny Monday. A yellow school bus filled with the laughter and chatter of children pulls up to the Christian Life Academy Sanctuary Building in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The children, kindergarten through fifth grade, walk single file from the bus to the cafeteria in the back of the building. They wear various school uniforms and the backpacks they sport represent the entire color spectrum as well as the most current super heroes, cartoon characters, and princesses. From here, they claim their spots at a cafeteria table while anxiously awaiting the moment when they will be funneled into a carpeted room with a piano and a white board, asked to sit “criss cross applesauce” in two neatly formed rows, and exposed to choral music representing centuries of artistic practice and countries from around the world. For this brief hour of their week, these children are transformed from a patchwork of individuals coming from various schools and backgrounds into a unified music ensemble—working together to achieve something magical in the truest sense of the word. Kids’ Choir is now in session.

Music: An Inherent Part of the Human Condition

Philosophers, teachers, musicians, and scientists—in fact, people from all walks of life—have discussed the importance of music. Because all cultures have some form of vocal and instrumental music (Nettl, 2005), we can safely assume it is an inherent part of the human condition. As ethnomusicologist John Blacking observed, "There is so much music in the world that it is reasonable to suppose that music, like language, and possibly religion, is a species-specific trait of man” (Blacking, 1973, p. 7).

In 1956, Max Kaplan pondered the future of music stating, “What will be the nature of our society in the year 2,000 A.D. remains to be seen” (Kaplan, 1956, pp. 48-49). He described a
civilization in the midst of a cultural explosion, where amateur actors, painters, and musicians were steadily increasing in numbers. Kaplan spoke of the growing divide between college and professional musicians and their amateur counterparts. Fear of a degradation of the art form itself led to great concern on the part of college and professional musicians. Kaplan challenged music educators to “enlarge community music and awaken the whole musical world to the real possibility of a wider function and social integration of music and art in the changing society” (Kaplan, 1956, p. 47).

The role of music education in modern society: three offerings. The year 2000 has come and gone and we are still grappling with similar issues regarding the role of music education in modern society. Despite a lack of clarity defining its role, consider these three examples of meaningful and unique music education experiences. In Israel, an inclusive children’s choir was formed in 2000 for children with autism and neurotypical children (Eilat & Raichel, 2016). The ensemble developed out of a collaboration between a mainstream school and a special education school. The participants were selected based on a love for music and the ability to produce vocal sounds of any nature. An examination of the role the ensemble plays in the lives of the children involved revealed a number of benefits including providing a place for individual expression, enhancing the language abilities of the children with autism, providing opportunities to encounter Israeli heritage, improving self-image, enabling the formation of new friendships, and improving the children’s moods. Eilat and Raichel (2016) stated, “The choir’s musical role is to enable every child—irrespective of his or her disabilities—to create music and sing from a place of ability and empowerment” (Discussion, para. 2). In addition, the researchers...
found that the choir “added a unique nuance to producing one’s own culture for both schools, and . . . [generated] social change in the participating community” (Discussion, para. 16).

Meanwhile, 5,765 miles away in Bordentown, New Jersey, a choir made up of prison inmates rehearses for approximately 75 minutes a week. The choir’s founders are two music education majors who began with a mission “to move beyond barriers to create communities of hope that restore, enlighten, and transform lives through music” (Abrahams, Rowland, & Kohler, 2012, p. 67). Rehearsals center on an essential question connected to a particular theme of social justice and align with a four-step rehearsal plan: (1) Partner by honoring the participants’ worlds, (2) Present the sequence of the lesson, (3) Personalize/Perform by allowing for creativity and sharing, and (4) Process the experience through reflection. The participants learn basic music theory, how to read standard notation, solfège syllables and hand signs, pitch matching, composition, and improvisation, but their most important takeaway is the feeling of community created within the space. Sessions conclude with the participants in a circle, eyes closed, as they intone their own musical sounds and listen to each other. “It is then that the inmates, and their teachers, experience the gift of community without boundaries of class or social status. In that moment, the inmates, and the students who teach them, are free” (Abrahams, Rowland, & Kohler, 2012, p. 70).

Traveling 3,353 miles across the Atlantic Ocean will bring you to Watertown, England, the site of Singing for the Brain (SFTB), a singing-based musical activity program for individuals with dementia and their caretakers (Hara, 2011). Started in 2007 by a former music teacher and Alzheimer’s Society committee member, the carefully planned SFTB singing sessions take place once a week and typically include ten care-receivers, ten caretakers, and ten
volunteers. The care-receivers are in various stages of dementia and choose to participate either because they were involved in choirs in the past or were referred to the program by a local doctor. Through the SFTB program, care-receivers and caretakers have experienced a revival in their relationship.

Music seems to become a catalyst that activates the “relationships” between care-receivers and carers [sic], for example, as joining together in song (a song that they have sung together before) reminds both parties of their personal histories together and pre-illness relationship (Hara, 2011, p. 53).

In addition to the rekindled connection among participants, the program increases awareness of dementia in the community and provides a support system for participants and other people suffering with the illness. Considering the decrease in social interaction and involvement for many dementia sufferers, this program helps its participants “become ‘alive’ again when music allows them to reconnect with others, as well as themselves” (Hara, 2011, p. 54).

**Defining community music.** Each of the programs discussed represents a distinct and specialized approach to music-making and speaks to the ways music is entrenched in community. Community music predates school music programs by thousands of years (Elliott, 2012). However, researchers have noted there is still confusion when describing what community music is. As Elliott pointed out, there are clear notions of what music means and looks like, but there is less clarity on how to define community. Bowman (2009) posited that communities are “fluid, porous, negotiated affairs . . . formed and sustained by people’s loyalties and affiliations.” He stated they exist “by virtue of people’s identifications with others . . . to sustain an ongoing sense of belonging” (p. 110). Based on this description, the concept of fitting in is highly prioritized when examining what it means to be part of a community.
An investigation of people involved in community music experiences reveals participants representing a multitude of age ranges; racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds; socioeconomic statuses; and religious traditions. Community music also caters to the gamut of music participants as identified by Gates (1991): (a) professionals, (b) apprentices, (c) amateurs, (d) hobbyists, (e) recreationists, and (f) dabblers. In addition to the people involved in community music programs, the musical experiences manifest themselves in a variety of ways. They encompass vocal and instrumental offerings of all musical genres and types. The goal of the community music program can also serve as a method of categorizing. For example, programs can be designed with a performance objective, an educational aim, a cultural connection, or even a focus on social justice.

**Summation.** Max Kaplan’s charge to music educators in 1956 still resonates today. Although the face of music education has changed, questions surrounding the value of certain musical experiences remain. Kaplan’s (1956) reassurance to music educators of the past is still appropriate:

> Whatever [society’s] nature, your A will still be 440, but who will use that violin bow or the piano key, under what conditions of home life, within what patterns of leisure, through what context of community and nation—these matters will affect the musical functions, meanings, and indeed, the very presence of a musical life itself. To the extent that musical and artistic life in that atomic society is truly creative and significant, let it be recorded by our professional progeny, when it has sobered enough on January the 1st or 2nd, A.D. 2000, that we in the middle of the century were at least willing to look ahead of us and around us. Life then will perhaps be longer than our own; is not our ultimate objective to make it increasingly richer and significant through the common heritage and possessions of the arts? (p. 49)

The role of music in people’s lives and the impact it is able to have has diversified greatly over the past several decades. I believe Kaplan would agree that this diversification has led to a richer
and more significant integration of music into society. This study takes a deeper look into the life of one such musical offering and the meaningful ways it has impacted the surrounding community.

**Kids’ Orchestra: An El Sistema-Inspired Organization**

Kids’ Orchestra is a non-profit after-school program serving the Baton Rouge community based on the “El Sistema model.” El Sistema has its roots in Chile and Venezuela, originally developing out of a collaboration between two youth orchestras in the 1970s (Carlson, 2016). The organization has received international attention for “transforming the lives of Venezuela’s poorest and most at-risk youth by providing an after-school activity that teaches important life skills through orchestral practice and performance” (Carlson, 2016, p. 64). It is based on a set of inspiring ideals that inform an intensive youth music program seeking to effect social change through the ambitious pursuit of musical excellence. El Sistema focuses primarily on children with few resources and great need. The values at the core of El Sistema are as follows:

- Every human being has the right to a life of dignity and contribution, filled with beauty.
- Every child can learn to experience and express music and art deeply, can receive its many benefits, and can make different critical life choices as a result of this learning.
- Overcoming poverty and adversity is best done by strengthening the spirit, creating, as Dr. Abreu puts it, "an affluence of the spirit," and investing that affluence as a valued asset in a community endeavor to create excellence and beauty in music.
- Effective education is based on love, approval, joy, and consistently successful experiences within a high-functioning, aspiring, nurturing community. Every child has limitless possibilities and the ability to strive for excellence. "Trust the young," informs every aspect of the work.
- Learning organizations never arrive but are always becoming—striving to include: more students, deeper impact, greater musical excellence, better teaching, improved tools, more joy. Thus, flexibility, experimentation, risk-taking, and collegial exchange are inherent aspects of every program (Guiding Principles, 2014).
The ideals El Sistema upholds have enticed many followers, fostering the development of El Sistema-inspired programs throughout the world, most notably in Scotland, South Africa, and the United States.

**El Sistema in the United States.** There is some controversy over whether it is feasible to truly replicate El Sistema programs in the United States. Lesniak (2012) cited several reasons hindering a successful implementation in the United States including a lack of orchestral programs represented in low-socioeconomic status schools, difficulties with funding, controversy concerning pay for play, an inability to require large time commitments from students, and competition with a number of other after-school activities. Lesniak (2012) pointed out that “the main value that can and should be imported is the desire to continue to remove economic barriers for students who would like to experience orchestral instrument study” (p. 66). She imagined this could best be achieved through an increase in high quality orchestra programs in the public school systems, especially in communities where there are none.

Tunstall (2013) disagreed, claiming that Lesniak missed the main point of El Sistema programs. “The goal of El Sistema is not to foster the development of professional musicians, but to foster the growth of children toward being cooperative, productive, and joyful members of a community and a society” (p. 69). She referred to hundreds of El Sistema-inspired programs currently thriving in the United States that are proving Lesniak wrong. Tunstall went on to include several reasons El Sistema-inspired programs can successfully cohabitate with current music education practices in the United States: (1) they reach children that might not otherwise have access to music education, (2) they emphasize ensemble, process, and joy, and (3) they work to create learning communities that extend outside of the school itself.
Kids’ Orchestra, Baton Rouge’s El Sistema-inspired program, maintained a mission statement to “bring children of all cultures and backgrounds together using music education as a vehicle to foster teamwork, develop understanding, and emphasize excellence” (Mission Statement, 2015) during the early part of the data collection period of this study. Baton Rouge, like many other cities in the southern United States, still struggles with issues of racism and classism. Despite the 1954 Brown versus Board of Education United States Supreme Court decision declaring segregated schools unconstitutional, the East Baton Rouge Parish School System did not mandate integration until the 1982-1983 school year (Thornton & Trent, 1988). Following this mandate, parents with means began enrolling their children in private schools and East Baton Rouge Parish began creating magnet schools. These magnet schools required students to go through a selection process in order to be admitted. Thirty-six years have passed and the private school/public school/magnet school divide has taken its toll on the Baton Rouge community, further magnifying the significance and appropriateness of Kids’ Orchestra’s mission statement.

**Kids’ Orchestra: a brief history.** My first experience with Kids’ Orchestra was from the piano bench. I was the collaborative pianist for the inaugural choral ensemble in 2014. I recall looking out at the children’s faces during that first rehearsal and already having a sense that we were achieving significant, crucial work through this program. The organization itself began three years prior with the establishment of the orchestra in the 2011-2012 school year. In the first year, Kids’ Orchestra operated with less than 50 students in two schools. In its second year, the organization grew to include eight schools and by the third year it had increased to include participation from over 500 students, representing 16 public, private, and charter schools. At the
time of this research, the program served approximately 800 kindergarten through sixth-grade students at 24 schools, and employed over 70 teachers.

Each Kids' Orchestra program site consists of multiple pairs of schools, typically one lower-socioeconomic status (SES) and one higher-SES. The cost of participation in the program is based on a sliding scale ranging from $20 to $600 per year depending on family income. Program activities begin at the end of the school day when Kids' Orchestra provides transportation from schools to participating sites. At the conclusion of the program, students return to their home schools where they are picked up by their parents. During these weekly two-hour sessions at the Kids' Orchestra site, students participate in music classes, receive help with homework, and enjoy a healthy snack. At the end of each semester, a performance is given for the parents, family, friends, and community to showcase the students’ efforts. While the original vision of the organization was to bring communities together by offering all children in Louisiana the opportunity to play in an orchestra, the 2014-2015 school year marked the expansion of the program to include choral ensembles. Due to the success of the choral ensembles, the organization decided to expand the number of choirs from two to four after the first year. The third year heralded another transition for the choral ensembles: a community youth choir. Kids’ Choir—open to second-grade through sixth-grade students and detached from any particular school—was formed by the staff and choral directors involved in the organization and is currently in its second year of existence. Any child can participate if they can secure transportation to and from rehearsals and performances. This newest addition to the organization, Kids' Choir, is the ensemble at the center of this research.
**Kids’ Choir context.** At the time of this research, Kids’ Choir rehearsed Monday evenings during the school year from 6-7:30 p.m. in the Activity Room at Independence Park Theatre and Cultural Center. The ensemble was co-directed by myself and one other director, Dr. Burns, and accompanied by a native Brazilian pianist, Mr. Garcia. The choir was composed of twenty 2nd through 5th grade students with a demographic makeup of twelve Black students, four White students, three Asian students, and one mixed race student. During data collection, the choir performed five times: once in a collaborative performance with the Louisiana State University orchestra and choirs at a theater on campus, once for a community breakfast, twice in neighborhood “informances” at the rehearsal site, and once in a shared concert with several Kids’ Orchestra instrumental ensembles. The choir rehearsed and performed a total of twelve pieces of music along with a variety of other vocalises, short songs, and musical games. As directors, we worked to include music of a wide variety of genres and cultures and integrated historical information into the rehearsals themselves. We also incorporated music literacy and aural skills activities including rhythm reading/creation and solfege games.

**The growth of the choral ensemble and my role.** In its fourth year of existence, at the completion of this study, Kids’ Choir had nearly doubled in size with consistently approximately 40 singers each week. The Kids’ Orchestra organization had also grown, serving approximately 825 children from 23 different schools and employing approximately 90 music teachers and 50 additional after-school staff members. It was the largest after-school music program for Kindergarten through sixth grade students in the United States (Kids Orchestra » About Us, n.d.). Additionally, during the collection of this research, Kids’ Orchestra became a United States Department of Education 21st Century Community Learning Center, a program that provided
academic enrichment opportunities during non-school hours. In addition to music instruction, students at 21st Century sites received academic support from trained tutors, including standardized test preparation, to help them meet state and local standards in core subjects such as reading and math. The 21st Century grant money was instrumental in allowing the organization to expand to reach additional schools and children. The organization had also been highlighted for its positive impact on children and the Baton Rouge community in the following media sources: WAFB News, LSU Communications (online), Weekends with Whitney (television news segment), InRegister (magazine), The Advocate (Baton Rouge newspaper), Currents (magazine), nola.com (New Orleans online news site), Louisiana Public Broadcasting, 225 Magazine, Baton Rouge Parents Magazine, LSU Media Center (online), and Louisiana Classical Music (online).

After the first year of the choral ensemble inclusion, my role as collaborative pianist shifted to co-director. For three years, this has been my position in the organization. Having been involved with the choral aspect of the program since the time of its inception, I have a personal and vested interest in its success. I have also gained knowledge of the students’ backgrounds, behaviors, and abilities (some over the course of three years). I have observed and participated in the ever changing and adaptive nature of the ensemble. My students and I have learned, laughed, struggled, celebrated, and grown through the process of music making in Kids’ Choir. It is for these reasons I sought to know more about the impact of the ensemble experience on its participants. My belief in the power of positive relationships to encourage great and necessary change is one reason why the mission statement speaks so strongly to me. It is my hope that this research illuminates possible strategies that could assist in nurturing and guiding children’s growth in ways that will allow them to be happy, kind, and supportive adults. In the next chapter,
I review pertinent research literature to provide context and support the study’s value in the current body of research.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

I have organized the review of literature into four sections: (1) research on community music programs, (2) research on the perceived values and benefits of participation in arts programs, (3) research on programs with social objectives, and (4) research on El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired programs. I identified these four categories based on the multiple roles Kids’ Orchestra plays as a music program. Kids’ Orchestra is a community program, an arts program, a music program with social objectives, and an El Sistema-inspired program. Therefore, I found it appropriate to investigate literature in each of those areas.

Research on Community Music Programs

Hospitality. Drawing on the work of Derrida (2000), Higgins (2012) suggested that the uniquely defining character of “community” music is best understood as “hospitality.” Examining the data from three separate ethnographic studies (Cohen, 2010; Higgins, 2012; Iadeluca & Sangiorgio, 2008), the researcher proposed that acts of hospitality, mainly the open “welcome” to participation, are present in each experience and can be viewed as distinctive to the community music experience. Higgins concluded that community music programs focused on creating diverse and accessible offerings should work toward embodying the concept of unconditional hospitality.

As an extension of Higgins’ (2012) work, Balsnes (2016) investigated the concept of hospitality through community music making in an examination of the KIA Multicultural Gospel Choir in Kristiansand, Norway to determine the impact of hospitable musical and social environments on refugees. The organization was dedicated to multicultural communities, equality, caring, and friendship among all people in Norway, regardless of cultural background,
language, or religion. In addition to the choral ensemble, the organization provided homework help, communal dinners, cultural cafes, courses and seminars, football training, women’s groups, parties, free Norwegian tuition, outdoor trips, camps, etc. Through this case study, Balsnes analyzed the data with particular attention given to Higgins’ (2012) perspectives on hospitality and general themes of community, empowerment and respect, integration, and meaning. Despite the sole use of Christian choral music, the researcher concluded that Higgins’ notion of unconditional hospitality does indeed manifest itself in the actions of the KIA Multicultural Gospel Choir. The researcher found the organization successfully created an environment of caring compassion for all participants, especially refugees who felt like outsiders in the community, through the following methods: (a) instituting an open-door policy, (b) providing the ability to collaborate through music without the demands of verbal skills, (c) incorporating social activities, (d) not requiring prerequisite musical skills, and (e) encouraging singers to present songs from their homeland.

**Identity development through cultural sharing.** Wood (2010) explored the role of music in the lives of refugees resettled in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania through a multiple case study involving an individual from Sudan, a Bhutanese family, and a Free Methodist Burundian Choir within a single community surrounding the Prospect Family Center. Employing ethnomusicological participant-observation and field research methodology, the researcher determined that musical sharing across cultures strengthens one’s sense of identity while at the same time creating a sense of belonging. Wood also emphasized the therapeutic role of music and its ability to provide refuge during resettlement. A similar multiple case study of resettled refugees in Sydney, Australia examined three separate musical contexts: a choir, a general music
education program, and drumming workshops (Sebastian, 2007). The researcher discovered that resettlement challenges were addressed through the participants’ involvement in community music and its ability to shape self-identity. In addition, the researcher found that several themes common to other investigations emerged: (a) acceptance and belonging, (b) acknowledgment and value, and (c) atmospheric equilibrium.

In another study, Eckstrom (2008) employed ethnographic methods to investigate Ukrainian youth development based on involvement with the Kivsharivka Youth and Community Activity Organization (KYCAO). At the time of this study, many Ukrainians were working abroad in order to support their families, due to heavy economic depression. The financial obligations of families along with the lack of local job opportunities left children of all ages separated from their parents for long periods of time. The United States Peace Corps sent more than 1,200 volunteers to effect positive change within the community. One such volunteer, Aaron Brantly, developed the KYCAO, which used music and creative development to encourage collaboration and community involvement in Ukrainian youth. Positive outcomes of the program included activating internal creative powers as a route for self- and group-development, unity through music, and musical activism, which deterred participants from dangerous activities.

Collaboration among diverse groups of children also played an important role in an ethnographic examination of the Mississauga Festival Youth Choir, a racially and ethnically diverse children’s choir that performed multicultural literature. Bradley (2006) selected critical ethnography as a methodology in order to (a) acknowledge the researcher’s values, (b) allow for individual reflection on the researcher’s cultural views and position, and (c) support transformation of oppressed peoples toward emancipation. The researcher hypothesized that the
traditional structures and practices of many community children’s choirs are exclusionary, resulting in predominantly white memberships and Eurocentric repertoire choices. Through the use of individual and focus group interviews, observations, and a personal reflection journal, Bradley constructed a narrative consisting of ethnographic description, analysis, and philosophical discussion. She identified themes including cultural stereotypes, misconceptions of cultures as static entities, cultural jealousy, and the myth of Canadian identity as “White.” Bradley concluded that multicultural choral music education, when taught within an anti-racism discursive framework, can transform members’ self-identities to include what is termed “multicultural human subjectivity.” The researcher defined this as accepting cultural hybridity as a new norm.

Social capital. Immigration, displacement, and growing diversity in the United States has led to a decrease in social capital (Putnam, 2007), defined as “the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively” (Social Capital, 2009). Recent literature has explored concepts of social capital and its relationship to community music (Coleman, 1988; Jones, 2010; Langston, 2009; Langston & Barrett, 2008; Putnam, 2001; Putnam, 2007; Stone, 2001; Veblen, 2002). Despite Putnam’s (2007) discovery of a recent decrease in social capital, studies indicate that music education could play a role in reigniting the development of social capital through community music programs (Jones, 2010; Langston & Barrett, 2008). Jones reviewed literature pertaining to social capital and community music and concluded that music educators should develop skills to increase social capital through pedagogical approaches and carefully selected music literature. The researcher also believed that a theoretical framework should be established to analyze “both
the development of social capital and the unique civic roles, social skills, habits and dispositions developed in various musical practices” (p. 299). Langston and Barrett examined the specific ways that social capital manifested itself in a regional Tasmanian community choir. This case study utilized traditional ethnographic methods to identify social capital indicators. The researchers determined that social capital was evident in the following areas: (a) shared norms and values, (b) trust, (c) civic and community involvement, (d) networks, (e) knowledge resources, and (f) contact with family and friends. Fellowship was discovered to be a crucial element in fostering group cohesion and had not previously been identified in conjunction with community music.

**Partnering community music and school music to support life-long music involvement.** In addition to the development of social capital, community music can also be viewed as a method of supporting life-long music involvement. Myers (2008) argued that school music programs in the United States are heavily focused on preparing large ensemble performances. This focus does not support students’ engagement with music-making into adulthood and has contributed to low numbers of people involved in life-long musical activities. Based on information from various survey data, Myers noted 90% of the population viewed music as a necessary part of a rounded education, but this belief did not translate into a perceived “[link] between school arts experiences and the lasting intrinsic values of arts education” (Myers, 2008, p. 50).

Research has shown that music education is disconnected from American musical life. Myers (2008) recalled the Yale Seminar and Tanglewood as the introduction to the phrase continuing education, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive music program that would
equip students for life in the modern world (p. 51). He also found that despite music educators’ recognition of the importance of school-community integration, community music and school music are rarely partnered. Myers examined various music programs that partner school experiences with community experiences to increase music-making past school age.

**Music programs as instruments of healing.** Community music programs can function as instruments of healing or positive personal development as well. These types of programs began to emerge in the 1970s and emphasized “supporting youth before problem behaviors occurred” (Catalano, Berglund, Ryan, Lonczak, & Hawkins, 2004, p. 99). Davis (2007) explored the potential of an out-of-school time center that incorporated music activities to facilitate positive youth development. The selected program, while not explicitly designed to promote positive youth development, provided participants with musical and nonmusical mentoring. The center ensured inclusivity to the entire community by welcoming participants of any musical skill level and offering services with no financial obligation. The state-of-the-art music equipment and the flexibility of the program allowed for multiple entry points for participants to engage with the program. The researcher found participation in the program to promote both social and musical development with the added benefit of acting as a primary or secondary intervention to negative risk-taking behaviors.

Researchers have also explored the positive effects of music-making in prisons (Cohen & Wilson, 2017; Palidofsky, 2010; Roma, 2010; Silber, 2005). Palidofsky’s (2010) examination of a program for incarcerated girls offered an example of positive youth development through music-making. Using the medium of storytelling, the participants shared personal life events that, over the course of a year, were transformed by the group into original musical theatre
performances. The girls recognized the choices that led to their incarceration and began to heal through the process of converting their stories into scenes and songs. Silber (2005) offered a similar study exploring the ability of a women’s prison choir to serve as a useful therapeutic tool to foster an increase in positive relationship building. The musical medium of a choir was chosen based on its (a) non-verbal nature, (b) ability to generate multiple opportunities for interpersonal interactions, (c) potential for contributing to a positive self-image, and (d) capacity for reinforcing positive relationships with an authority figure, or conductor. Silber employed traditional qualitative data collection methods and presented the findings in terms of the vertical relationship between the choir members and the conductor, the horizontal relationship between choir members, and the individual’s role as a choir member. The researcher found evidence of positive development in relating to an authority, relating to peers, and self-empowerment.

Research on the Perceived Values and Benefits of Participation in Arts Programs

The previous section of this review of literature examined community music making in a variety of different environments emphasizing a range of objectives. Based on the synthesis of literature, it is clear that community music programs are not only valued, but also provide a number of benefits to their participants. The following section will look more specifically at the values and benefits for participants involved in arts programs, both in-school and out-of-school.

Arts programs. Holloway and LeCompte (2001) posited that arts programs allow participants the opportunity to “imagine themselves out of their current identities and to try on new ways of being” (p. 388). They wrote that this form of identity development has even greater benefit for students dealing with a difficult home or school life. In this research, Holloway and LeCompte focused on middle school-aged girls—due to a heightened awareness of identity
during puberty—but they suggested that boys face similar issues. The researchers used an arts enrichment program in a public middle school that provided intensive instruction in theatre and dance, music, and visual arts as their study site for this research. Data collection involved consistent participant observation during classes, field trips, guest artists’ visits, and administrative meetings over the course of two years. During the observations, the researchers conducted informal conversations with participants, wrote detailed field notes, and provided feedback to teachers and staff. Following several months of observations, 50 students and their parents agreed to participate in structured student interviews about their experiences in the program. At the conclusion of the school year, the researchers interviewed administrators and teachers involved in the program to gain further insight about their background, educational approach, and reflections on the program.

The researchers focused on five girls involved in the theatre arts classes. These girls were chosen based on the emergence of gender and identity themes within their experiences. The theatre arts classes also included examples of innovative teaching and offered opportunities for students to counter traditional gender role norms. By choosing these specific theatre arts classes, the researchers had a particularly fruitful site for examining gender and identity. Through their analysis, the researchers surfaced themes that included the concept of centering, or focusing, open-mindedness, and self-expression, each relevant to identity formation. The theatre arts teacher approached the class pedagogically in a way that interrupted traditional formal instruction and traditional forms of learning and socialization.

**Choral programs.** A number of researchers have investigated the perceived values and benefits of participants’ involvement in various types of choral organizations (Adderly, Kennedy,
Hylton (1981) used a quantitative approach to develop, test, and administer an instrument (Choral Meaning Survey) to investigate high school student participants’ perceptions of the meaning of the high school choral experience. High school choir students were asked to complete a pre-pilot study requiring responses in written form to various open-ended questions. These responses were organized by topic, which the researcher sorted into four broad categories of meaning: (a) psychological, (b) communicative, (c) integrative, and (d) musical-artistic. A fifth category, spiritualistic, was added based on the prevalence of religious and/or spiritual meaning attributed to the choral experience identified by previous researchers. The pilot version of the Choral Meaning Survey included 72 statements designed for a Likert-type rating response. Following a pilot of the study involving 251 participants, the researcher administered the main study to 673 high school choral students in 14 ensembles. Hylton suggested there is a global concept of meaningfulness attached to the high school choral experience, with related subconcepts of achievement, spiritualistic, musical-artistic, communicative, psychological, and integrative. Hylton also found identity development and positive self-image were elements of additional meaning-making of high school choral experiences. Hylton concluded that high school choral music programs ultimately lead to multiple outcomes for participants, outcomes that cannot be defined primarily as the development of musical knowledge or skills.

Kennedy (2002) examined the participation of junior high school boys in choral music through the perspective of eleven male students, three female students, and their teacher. She explored the specific issues of (a) acquisition of musical skills, knowledge, and attitudes; (b)
perception of the “choral experience”; (c) preferred repertoire; and (d) motivation to join the choir and to remain. Data collection techniques included interview, observation, participant observation, and the examination of material culture. Kennedy found that students’ motivation to join and remain involved in the choir were explained by three factors: (a) love of singing, (b) influence of the teacher, and (c) the company of friends. The participants’ acquisition of musical skills, knowledge, and attitudes illuminated broader topics including growing as musicians, developing sensitivity for music, expressing themselves emotionally, and acting professionally. Concerning repertoire preferences, Kennedy did not find that range-appropriate pieces were necessary for enjoyment and participation. Instead, participants expressed a desire for the style to be appealing to their tastes. The participants’ perceptions of the “choral experience” were divided into four categories: (a) teacher aspects, (b) musical aspects, (c) non-musical aspects, and (d) social aspects.

In another study by Kennedy (2009), she explored musical teaching and learning in an informal context through the ethnographic examination of the Gettin’ Higher Choir (GHC). The GHC was a 300-plus member choral ensemble that performed for the community and engaged in both local and global outreach projects. Members ranged in age from late teens to over 80 with the majority being middle-aged. The ensemble also spanned socio-economic backgrounds: from academics and professionals to those on limited income. Kennedy discovered choir members employed a number of techniques to be inclusive. They welcomed people of all kinds and provided scholarships for those that could not afford the fees. The non-auditioned group allowed for equal access to anyone interested in singing. The most important feature of choir membership was the establishment of community within the group. Healing, spirituality, and transformation
were identified as additional byproducts of membership in the choir. The researcher found that, while many members enjoyed making music in the group, most reasons provided for ensemble membership were extra-musical. Kennedy also provided reasons as to why some members quit, citing the large size of the ensemble and the sacred nature of the repertoire as factors that made people leave the group.

Hallam, Creech, Varvarigou, and McQueen (2012) investigated the role of participation in music activities on the lives of older adults and the extent to which participation impacted their social, emotional, and cognitive well-being. They used a case study methodology to look at 500 participants involved in three separate examples of musical community involvement, each group offering musical opportunities for people over the age of 50. A comparison group was created consisting of adults participating in activities other than music. The researchers’ methodology combined qualitative and quantitative approaches to allow for a broad description of the experience and to explore musical engagement in more detail. Quantitative data were collected through questionnaires. Results indicated participants tended to become involved to meet others, make friends, and learn and develop musical skills. Participants identified benefits of learning and developing new skills, increased confidence and self-esteem, feelings of belonging, and opportunities for social interaction and enjoyment. The qualitative data were generated through transcribed and analyzed focus group interviews, revealing four themes: a) social benefits, b) cognitive benefits, c) emotional and mental health benefits, and d) physical health benefits. The researchers suggested that older adults’ membership in music ensembles could be used to facilitate healthy aging.
In an ethnographic study of the Seattle Girls’ Choir, Bartolome (2012) explored the perceived values and benefits associated with participation. The researcher completed a year of fieldwork involving an examination of choir rehearsals; musicianship classes; festival and summer camp experiences; concert performances; faculty, staff, and board meetings; and other community events. Additional data were collected through semi-structured interviews with choristers, faculty members, parents, and staff members. Emergent themes represented musical, personal, social, and external/community benefits. Bartolome’s findings are consistent with Hylton's (1981) in that they represent how a complex and multifaceted choral experience assists in the girls’ development in a number of different capacities. Bartolome also found that non-musical benefits—such as developing friendships—overshadowed the emphasis on music performance. Two themes unique to this study were (1) choir as empowerment, and (2) choir as a constant. A chorister noted, “After a long day, if I don’t understand something at school, I can come to choir and I know that ‘Yes, I can do this. I can sing this difficult piece.’ And that’s really empowered me” (Bartolome, 2012, p. 404). Another chorister recognized the importance of constancy:

Everything else had changed, like I had just moved up to PV [the advanced choir], I had changed schools. So much had changed right then and if it wasn’t for those girls I would have like, cracked. But they stayed with me and they were something constant in my life. I think choir is like that in general, something consistent that goes through all parts of your life (Bartolome, 2012, p. 407).

Noting that identity development emerged as a benefit of participation in arts programs (Holloway and LeCompte, 2001; Hylton, 1981), Mills (2008) isolated this element in an ethnographic case study examining the effects of participation in a community children’s choir on participants’ identity. The researcher looked specifically at how participation shaped personal
identities and musical identities, and what role participants’ relationships with peers and conductor played in that shaping process. Ethnographic research methods included focus group interviews, individual interviews, observation of rehearsals, a choir background questionnaire, and field notes. Mills’ analysis drew on various theories including social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), social identity theory (Tajfel et al, 1971; Tajfel, 1978, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), self-categorization theory (Tajfel, 1981; Turner, 1982, 1985, 1999), and social influence and conversion theory (Martin & Hewstone, 2003). Mills divided her results into three separate categories: (a) personal identity, (b) musical identity, and (c) collective identity. Personal identity highlighted an enhancement in choristers’ self-concept, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Participation was found to develop the choristers’ musical self-concept and musical self-esteem in terms of musical identity. Collective identity, formed through the family-like atmosphere, seemed to greatly impact the participants and their roles in the ensemble.

In the studies on choral programs, the researchers identified perceived values and benefits in multiple categories including musical, social, and community. Interestingly, there was a strong emphasis within all participant groups on the idea of community and relationship development, suggesting that non-musical benefits of participation in a choral ensemble are more highly valued than musical benefits.

**Research on Programs with Social Objectives**

The perceived values and benefits of participation in arts programs are varied and complex. It is important to note that myriad social benefits recurred throughout a number of the studies included in the previous section. This section delves more specifically into research on programs that maintain social objectives from their onset.
Hallam (2010) reviewed research pertaining to music’s impact on the intellectual, social, and personal development of children and young people. Reviewed research included empirical studies on the brain as well as quantitative and qualitative psychological and educational studies. In the synthesis of the literature, Hallam determined that music is able to have a meaningful impact in the following areas: (a) perceptual and language skills, (b) literacy, (c) numeracy, (d) intellectual development, (e) general attainment, (f) creativity, (g) social and personal development, and (h) physical development, health, and well-being. As a caveat, the musical experience must be positive, successful, and rewarding in order to reap the benefits.

In a study by Sousa and Neto (2005), the researchers assessed the effectiveness of a musical program at reducing anti-dark-skinned stereotyping among light-skinned Portuguese children aged 7-10 years. A sample of 193 children attending public school was divided into two groups: (a) a control group that followed the traditional program of music, and (b) an experiment group that received 18 60-minute sessions of cross-cultural music education. The Preschool Racial Attitude Measure II (PRAM II; Williams et al., 1975) was administered prior to and following the music education sessions. The PRAM II is a measure of ethnic attitudes designed for children aged 3-9 years. The results of the study indicated that children exposed to cross-cultural music education show less evidence of pro-white-skinned/anti-dark-skinned stereotyping than children in the control group.

**Underserved populations.** There is a great amount of research looking specifically at students from underserved populations involved in after school programs that include social development as one of their objectives. Halpern (1999) examined a program called MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) currently in operation in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle.
Challenges facing the program were: (a) the ownership, size, and structure of the facilities; (b) the recruitment, compensation, and retention of quality staff; and (c) inadequate financing. Despite the identified issues, a number of benefits were found including providing a safe place for children to be themselves, offering a variety of programming, and providing tutoring and help with homework. Halpern concluded that after-school programs serving low-income children should provide the following opportunities: (a) to feel and be safe; (b) to have some social and physical space of their own in which to develop their own thoughts, explore feelings, learn friendship, and learn how to handle interpersonal conflict; and (c) to explore interests by nurturing special abilities in arts, sports, or other areas.

In a longitudinal study comparing after school programs with activities at home, Posner and Vandell (1999) examined the after-school activities of 194 African American and White children from low-income households across three years (third grade to fifth grade). The researchers were most interested in the relations with child, family, and contextual variables as well as the children’s adjustment over time. The researchers found race to be operating as a complex contextual variable, which led to the examination of African American and White children separately. They determined that children involved in after-school programs devoted more time to academic and extracurricular activities while children that spent after-school time at home devoted more time to watching television and hanging out. The researchers found a number of significant partial correlations concerning children’s adjustment in fifth grade. Most pertinent to this literature review, African American children earned higher academic grades and were more emotionally well-adjusted in fifth grade when they spent more time socializing in after-school programs in third and fourth grade. This confirms previous ethnographic research
that indicated low-income elementary school children who have more social connections during the after-school hours are better adjusted than those who do not (Belle, 1997).

**Arts inclusion in after-school programs.** After-school programs regularly incorporate the arts into their activities. A number of studies have looked at the impact of arts inclusion into after-school programs on the participants. In a study sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts, researchers investigated the potential effects of intensive arts involvement on low-income populations and how those effects compared with students who had little or no arts engagement in childhood (Catterall, Dumais, & Hampden-Thompson, 2012). Data showed that 71 percent of low-SES students involved in arts programs attended some sort of college compared to just 48 percent of low-SES students that had little or no arts engagement. In addition, low-SES students’ involvement in the arts led to better academic outcomes and more civic-minded behavior, such as volunteering, voting, and engagement with local or school politics.

The Health, Education, in the Arts, Refining Talented Students (HEARTS) Family Life Center was an after school violence prevention project sponsored by the Office of Minority Health of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and operated at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. It served African American middle school students who were in greatest risk of academic and social failure. The after-school program took an experiential learning approach through the incorporation of art, music, drama, and dance and also included intervention strategies such as individual and group mentoring, service learning opportunities, and a youth advisory council. The program worked in direct connection with the school system and, therefore, served as a link between the community and the school.
In a study conducted by Respress and Lufti (2006), the researchers examined the HEARTS project to determine if African American students who participated in the fine arts achieved higher academic success, had a greater commitment towards school life, increased their self-esteem, and were less likely to engage in violent acts than African American students who did not participate in the fine arts. Sixty-six middle school students, 6th grade through 8th grade, were divided in half and placed into either a participant group or a comparison group. The data were derived from a statistical analysis of assessments, grade point average, and disciplinary referral data collected in a pre-test and post-test and compared. The results of the study indicated that the participant group showed a 0.5 increase in their GPA, increased by one grade level in math and spelling, improved their self-esteem, reduced their violent risk index and their high violence risk, and improved their attitudes toward school in relation to the comparison group. The researchers recommended that after school programs include the fine arts into their program activities.

Andreassen (2013) argued that, because poverty significantly affects children during the after-school and summer hours, extracurricular activities are an important way of closing the rich-poor achievement gap. The researcher explored this possibility through the self-reporting of 32 middle and high school students using survey research in two case studies, one extracurricular choral music program and one extracurricular instrumental music program. Both programs served primarily low-income students from disadvantaged urban areas. Survey responses indicated improvement in teamwork, social skills, dealing with authority, time management, leadership, friendship, and study skills.
In another study focused on urban students, Ward-Steinman (2006) studied a partnership between an urban university music education department and an outreach organization collaborating to provide after-school music classes for at-risk children. During the course of the program, 15 music education majors taught 125 first through fifth graders general music, recorder, and choir. In a teacher questionnaire given at the conclusion of the program, music education majors felt there were many strengths of the outreach program, citing most frequently “the opportunities for at-risk children to have a valuable, memorable, and meaningful music learning experience after school in a safe place” (p. 92).

Wolfe (2000) observed four at-risk adolescent females institutionalized at a treatment facility for troubled juveniles to see if participating in a community youth choir had any impact on their self-concept or behavior. By permission of the White River Youth Choir, the four girls were included in the choral ensemble rehearsals and performances for a semester. Two inventories, self-concept and behavior, were administered prior to and following participation in the ensemble. Qualitative data were also collected through observations, visitations, formal and informal dialogue, journals, and analysis of various material culture. The following themes emerged through the qualitative data: (a) music plays a role in these girls' lives, (b) a three versus one division separates the girls, (c) the girls segregate themselves from others, (d) a community choir may not be the panacea, and (e) indications that the girls have been or are at-risk sexually. The quantitative data revealed that behavior and self-concept were changed, but the changes could not be attributed specifically to choir involvement. Due to a number of uncontrollable factors including staff turnover, communication problems, absenteeism, and anti-social behavior, the researcher suggested offering a music program housed within the institution itself. This
program would allow for the benefits of the experience while at the same time eliminating a number of the issues that emerged due to the ensemble existing off-site.

**Social justice in music education.** Social justice, while occasionally the focus of music education research in the 1980s and 1990s (Bowman, 1994a, 1994b; Gould, 1994; Jorgensen, 1996; Koza, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1994a, 1994b; Lamb, 1987, 1994a, 1994b, 1996; Morton, 1994; O’Toole, 1994), has become an increasingly prevalent topic in the last two decades (Bowman, 2000, 2007; Bradley, 2006, 2007; Elliott, 2007; Elliott & Veblen, 2006; Gould, 2004, 2005, 2007; Jorgensen 2003; Koza, 2001; O’Toole, 2002, 2005; Woodford, 2005). Definitions of social justice vary depending on the source, but they all reference the distribution of advantages such as wealth, opportunity, or privileges versus the distribution of disadvantages within a society. Music education research offers numerous variations on this definition, including contradictions depending on the researcher, leading Bowman (2007) to put forth “the only thing straightforward about social justice in music education is that it is not straightforward” (p. 3). He sought to reduce the complexities of social justice to something simple and approachable without sacrificing its significance. He resolved that social justice is essentially a tool with finite utility—in order to maximize the benefit, it is necessary to recognize its limitations. Bowman concluded that music education must be shown to be a “realm in which this social justice tool can be and must be deployed” (p. 12).

Elliott (2007) offered an argument for the inclusion of social justice into music education based on the concept of aesthetic education. He claimed that music’s ability to educate feelings makes it an ideal vehicle for promoting values of social justice. He concluded
that by learning to feel more deeply and broadly through aesthetic education, students will be more sensitive and responsive to the feelings and needs of others; they will act more ethically, morally, and charitably towards other human beings; they will be predisposed to challenge cultural oppressions (p. 86).

In two separate studies, Silverman (2009, 2015) extended Elliott’s argument when she asserted that community music is in a better position to address issues of social justice than school music programs. In “Sites of social justice: community music in New York City,” Silverman focused on three community music sites in New York City and the aspects of social justice practiced within them. Drawing on the work of bell hooks, Silverman (2009) maintained “there can be no social justice without love, and no love without justice” (p. 179). Silverman defined love as a combination of care, commitment, trust, responsibility, respect, knowledge, self-other listening, and open communication. Combining several research strategies (narrative inquiry, case study methodology, historical research, and philosophical inquiry), she investigated the Turtle Bay Music School, the 30th Street Men’s Shelter, and Art’s Start The Hip Hop Project. Commonalities among the three sites that emerged from the research included: (a) a focus on community as hospitality, (b) fellowship, and (c) social betterment for the individuals and group. These findings align with the writings of bell hooks and Silverman’s definition of love. Silverman posited that music education and community music should be viewed as one and the same and that music teacher education programs should focus on people’s humanity above all else.

In another study by Silverman (2015), she again looked at three separate examples of community music: (a) a senior citizen choir, (b) a music group for children under the age of one, and (c) an adult ensemble consisting of inmates, opera chorus members, and church choir
members. She determined that in addition to collaborative music making, community
development, and personal growth, each program also provided fellowship, hospitality, and a
welcome environment. Silverman posed the idea of love as action in community music, and
described the many ways that love manifested itself in the happenings of the three programs. She
found that the inclusion of love as action assisted in removing emotional barriers between
teachers and students. Once again citing bell hooks (1994), Silverman (2015) stated:

> When school and CM (community music) educators ground their work on teacher-student
mutuality and openness we can “teach in ways that transform consciousness, creating a
climate of free expression that is the essence of a truly liberatory liberal arts
education” (p. 160).

Jorgensen (1996) discussed the concept of music education as liberation in her article “The Artist
and the Pedagogy of Hope.” In it, she described music education as tending “toward facilitating
individual growth, self-knowledge, [and] a critical awareness of the world about us” (p. 39).

_Urban education and anti-racism._ A number of studies that emphasize issues of social
justice focus specifically on themes of urban education and anti-racism (Bradley, 2006;
feared that critiques against music education concerning social justice issues could lead to
teachers’ inaction due to the confusion of how to begin approaching the topic. This “paralyzing
effect,” Gaztambide-Fernández and Rose stated, “[leaves] music educators who are committed to
social justice without clear direction and reluctant to engage in social justice projects” (p. 457).
The researchers suggested developing an approach to social justice that challenges all previously
held beliefs with regard to music education—“one premised on a dynamic conception of culture
and social change” (Gaztambide-Fernández & Rose, 2015, p. 457).
Gaztambide-Fernández and Rose recognized that urban music education tends to be based on the salvation narrative—the belief that students without access to “traditional” forms of music education (i.e. Western Classical Tradition) are somehow deficient. The salvation narrative is present in anthropology research as well under the name the deconcentration thesis. Lipman (2009) expressed:

The deconcentration thesis is a racially coded morality discourse that targets for dispersal and correction African American “inner city” communities and their public institutions. Black public spaces, in particular, are constructed as pathological and in need of discipline (p. 226).

In response to assumptions that deficiencies exist in urban communities, Gaztambide-Fernández and Rose forwarded that socially just urban music education should be viewed as cultural practice, meaning teachers would draw upon urban culture when preparing for all aspects of the class in order to reduce the effects of power structures in place. More specifically:

Such an approach begins from the assumption that social inequality and marginalization are structural problems that reflect flaws in the institutionalization of dominant ideology. That is, rather than locating the problem of justice within the students (e.g., it is the students who lack exposure to the right music, or it is the students who have to learn how to engage in democracy, etc.), it assumes that the problem of justice requires the transformation of society itself, along with the students (and the teacher) (Gaztambide-Fernández & Rose, 2015, p. 467).

The researchers posed techniques for dealing with four key problems associated with urban music education: (1) providing access, (2) ensuring representation, (3) rethinking pedagogy, and (4) questioning ideology.

Bradley’s scholarly work shares a common goal to “[eliminate] racism and the intersecting oppressions of sexism, heterosexism, and ableism” (Bradley, 2006, p. 5). In a philosophical article (2006), she focused specifically on anti-racism, insisting the first step to
finding a solution to racism is bringing race into the dialogue. She referenced Bedard’s (2000) work, which identified one of the objectives of anti-racism and critical multicultural education as seeking to incorporate knowledge, history, and culture of non-dominant populations into the curriculum. Bradley believed that identifying racially coded language within the context of music education could achieve this task by moving the profession “beyond the ‘us and them’ thinking indicative of cultural whiteness” (Bedard, 2000, p. 56).

In another study focused on anti-racism, Hess (2014) employed a multiple case study methodology to examine the discourses, practices, and philosophies of four elementary music educators attempting to interrupt dominant paradigms in their classrooms. Combining the theoretical frameworks of anti-colonialism, anti-racism, and anti-racist feminism, Hess argued that a radical music education requires a shift from a liberal to a critical paradigm. The researcher discovered that each of the four elementary music educators centered attention on the student, as opposed to the music. Hess illustrated this focus on the student in three different ways: (1) privileging the idea that relationships supersede the music, (2) creating a safe classroom environment, and (3) validating students as individuals. The validation came in the form of repertoire choices, achievement recognition, providing leadership opportunities, and allowing students to share their stories.

**Inclusivity.** Many researchers in music education concerned with social justice highlight the importance of inclusivity as a requirement of socially just music programs (Bradley, 2007; Burnard, 2008; Higgins, 2015; Marsh, 2015). The English Oxford Living Dictionary defines inclusivity as “an intention or policy of including people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized, such as those who are handicapped or learning-disabled, or racial and sexual
minorities” (Inclusivity, 2009). In the field of music education, classes can be available to all students, but artistic practices can serve as exclusionary devices (Kearney, 2003; Tate, 1999). The researchers of the following studies sought to identify exclusionary elements in music education programs and to determine how to circumvent those issues.

Bradley (2007) feared that social justice could be “misconstrued as an act of charity” (p. 133), citing an example of the salvation narrative as corroboration. She dissected various mainstream phrases that she deemed problematic including “least advantaged” and “common good.” These phrases warrant a discussion on who decides the criteria to be considered “least advantaged” and who defines the “common good.” Bradley reiterated her belief that speaking about race is imperative before any advances can be made and that the perpetuation of institutionalized whiteness in music teacher education is clearly evident through the “narrow focus on Western art music” (Bradley, 2007, p. 148). She recommended music teacher education programs begin dismantling exclusionary practices by first incorporating music typically deemed “the other” into the main folds of the coursework. Bradley argued that organizing music in textbooks by region, or continent, or European historical time periods just serves to increase the divide between peoples. She put forth “the importance of learning music from diverse cultures, in a range of styles as well as languages beginning with the youngest learners [is] one way to de-center the Western canon” (Bradley, 2007, p. 155).

Higgins (2015) believed people involved in community music programs have attempted to transform attitudes, behaviors, and values toward music making through their practice . . . [leading] to critical questioning surrounding the appropriateness of current music education provision in areas such as inclusion, community responsibility, creative opportunities, diversity, and preparation for a life in music making (p. 446).
Higgins cited two starkly different narratives as examples: one focused on a music teacher’s experience working in the China Conservatory in Beijing and the other highlighting two choral conductors’ development of a music-making course in a Massachusetts correctional institution for men. Both examples involved “people vocalizing a desire to be included in music making” (Higgins, 2015, p. 452). Hospitable music making, Higgins (2015) posited, manifests itself in

an open embrace toward those who wish to participate in active music making and those who just might. In a broader sense, educating within a context that celebrates peoples’ differences, or at least thinking about it, might encourage a greater sensitivity toward issues of social justice (p. 454).

Burnard (2008) focused on inclusivity in a multiple case study that examined three secondary school music teachers’ beliefs about and approaches to inclusive teaching and learning in “under-achieving” schools. Burnard utilized semi-structured in-depth interviews, followed by open-structured recall interviews to determine the participants’ perspectives on the techniques they employ to overcome disengaged learners. Burnard identified three ways social inclusion is expressed in the ideas and practice of the three participants: (1) re-engaging learners through democratizing music learning, (2) re-engaging learners through high status creative projects, and (3) re-engaging learners through digital technology. Citing Fraser (1997), Burnard articulated that the development of self-respect, musical honor, and mutual respect played particularly important roles in the re-engaging process. She concluded that inclusivity practices should “upwardly revalue disrespected, marginalized or maligned individuals or groups and nurture cultural diversity by recognizing cultural difference” (Burnard, 2008, p. 62).
Marsh (2015) examined the role of music in developing social inclusion, maintaining cultural traditions, and creating opportunities for participating in activities that connect refugee and newly arrived immigrant young people with others in Australian society. The Sierra Leone Youth Group, a collaboration between two Sierra Leonean refugees and a Salvation Army church, served as the site for this study. The program was designed to provide a safe social space for Sierra Leonean young people and incorporated drumming, dancing, drama, and music into the activities. Marsh, along with two research assistants, observed and video recorded participants engaged in musical activities and conducted formal and informal interviews. The researchers found that

the process of developing a range of music and dance activities and performance opportunities in which young refugees and newly arrived immigrants could develop and demonstrate their capabilities in a joint venture led to acceptance of marginalized participants both within a performative group and by a mainstream audience in a venue with significant status in the host culture (Marsh, 2015, p. 185).

They elaborated that cultural justice as an aspect of social justice “has the potential to develop ongoing forms of social inclusion for marginalized participants” (Marsh, 2015, p. 186).

**Empowerment.** In addition to inclusivity, social justice researchers in music education also identify empowerment as an important objective. Allsup (2001) maintained that in order to begin a liberatory practice of music education, we must teach our students to articulate problems. In so doing, Allsup claimed, students begin to make connections and become aware of the world around them. This awareness empowers students and teachers alike to embody a position that is not neutral. “As I see it,” Allsup (2001) stated, “music education must become more than canonic music-making, pragmatic exercises in multiculturalism, or token dabblings in popular culture; it must enable self-transformation” (p. 7).
Wagoner (2015) also brought up the issue of neutrality in terms of music educators. She argued that music education’s role in “enforcing cultural identities, validating specific Western musics, and maintaining exclusionary and unequal power relationships” (Wagoner, 2015, p. 1) warrants a proactive stance in preventing marginalization. Through an historical perspective, Wagoner examined the impact of educational reform on music education since 9/11, and identified increased privatization, reduced funding, declining local control, and expanded standardized testing as the main contributors effecting music education. She insisted the atmosphere is ripe for opportunities to address social justice concerns in the arts, noting the ever-present issues of access and participation. Wagoner felt that research needed to be increased in three specific areas pertaining to social justice issues in music education: (1) preparing democratic spaces, (2) teacher education and social justice goals, and (3) musical voices of students.

The future of music education depends on attitudes within the profession toward interrupting barriers and encouraging greater communication among sub-groups within the profession . . . Increasing music education research foci on empowering students and teachers, encouraging musical expression opportunities for all students, threaded with philosophical inquiry and situated in historical context, can serve to expand how the profession proceeds in attending to the future (Wagoner, 2015, p. 11-12).

O’Neill (2015) investigated transformative music engagement as a generator of youth empowerment. She suggested employing appreciative and dialogical inquiry with students in order to encourage individual reflection. Through this process, students “discover that they are capable and ready to effect positive change” (O’Neill, 2015, p. 389). O’Neill referenced Jennings et al. (2006) for a description of the conditions necessary to foster youth empowerment: (1) a welcome and safe environment, (2) meaningful participation and engagement, (3) equitable
power sharing between youth and adults, (4) engagement in critical reflection on interpersonal and sociopolitical processes, (5) participation in sociopolitical processes to effect change, and (6) integrated individual- and community-level empowerment. She concluded that, through transformative music engagement, music educators are able to “provide young people with the kinds of learning opportunities that are capable of helping them to recognize, question, challenge, and transform unjust practices and generate greater social justice” (O’Neill, 2015, p. 401).

Griffin (2011) looked at the interplay between children’s in- and out-of-school music experiences. He provided literature supporting the need for conversations about social justice in relation to children and also drew on personal connections as a teacher in the field of music education. In his desire to discover how children experience music in their daily lives and how those experiences interplay with in-school music experiences, he situated the study within three theoretical threads: social constructionism, experience, and attentive listening. The researcher examined a grade 2/3 classroom located in a large western Canadian city. The school in which the classroom functioned employed the Project Approach where children co-construct learning in small groups. Data were obtained through ethnographic research methods and, following analysis, results were presented in the form of narratives (fictionalized dialogues between the researcher and the participants). Results indicated that, although the children seem to enjoy music class, their out-of-school music experiences were not only very important to them, but also considerably different from their in-school music experiences. The researcher suggested that music educators draw upon children’s out-of-school music experiences to provide more opportunities for interplay between the two. Empowering students to engage in activities in
music class that recognize their personal music interests could lead to greater awareness of social justice issues in music education.

Research on El Sistema/El Sistema-Inspired Programs

As an organization that alleges to confront issues of social justice through music experiences, El Sistema and El Sistema-inspired programs represent a very distinct type of music education program. Despite the great increase in El Sistema-inspired programs globally and in the United States, there is little empirical research available. This section attempts to synthesize the research that is available in addition to illuminating scholarly areas that are lacking.

Sistema Global, a non-profit organization that “[seeks] to connect, encourage, and inspire El Sistema teachers and leaders everywhere” (About Sistema Global, 2015), recently published a review of literature on El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired programs (Creech, Gonzalez-Moreno, Lorenzino, & Waitman, 2013). The researchers analyzed 85 research and evaluation papers representing 44 El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired programs in 19 countries. They acknowledged the countless positive experiences participants in El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired programs relay, but also recognized the “need for high quality research to measure, understand and articulate the social impact of these programs on the communities they serve” (Creech, Gonzalez-Moreno, Lorenzino, & Waitman, 2013, p. 8). The researchers compiled six key messages derived from their analysis:

• The evidence to date adds a valued contribution to the wider literature concerned with the power of music.
• Partnership working is a key to success.
• Investment in teacher development is fundamental to achieving the dual aims of social and musical development.
• Dialogue and collaborative networks could greatly support a highly integrated and cohesive approach to achieving social development through music.
• El Sistema and Sistema-inspired programmes provide a rich context for further research into (in particular) the pedagogy of learning through immersion in ensemble, barriers to participation, and the impact of programmes at a community level.
• The emerging ‘communities of practice’ amongst Sistema-inspired programmes provides an opportunity to bring a level of coherence, rigour and meaningfulness to future research and evaluation (Creech, Gonzalez-Moreno, Lorenzino, & Waitman, 2013, p. 11).

Steele (2016) examined one El Sistema-inspired public school partnership in the United States two years into its operation to determine if the El Sistema principles were realized and if so, in what way. Utilizing a case study approach including ethnographic observations and focus group interviews with the program participants, their parents, schoolteachers, and music teaching artists, Steele discovered a number of El Sistema principles manifested through the program. In terms of social change, she noted the themes of participants’ persistence to succeed and increase in pride in themselves and the program. The data also showed a strong development of community and a sense of belonging through the idea of ensemble. Due to the great number of participants from disadvantaged households, the program represented an opportunity that many of the students would never have access to otherwise. Similar to El Sistema programs in Venezuela, the musicians rehearsed for large amounts of time each week—typically two hours a day, four days a week.

Steele also noted a number of challenges that surfaced through the research. The program took place in the afternoon when the participants would normally have free time outdoors. This led to students who were easily distracted and difficult to focus. Also, the rehearsal spaces were not always ideal; some groups had to share a single classroom while others were required to rehearse outside due to a lack of space. Learner variability caused difficulty for many music teaching artists that were attempting to differentiate instruction for students with a number of
different skill levels. In addition, the program was competing with a number of other activities taking place at the same time. Steele (2016) concluded that “this American model, founded on El Sistema’s values, has great potential to influence young participants musically, personally, and socially, but may need the freedom to operate outside of the public school system to realize that full potential” (p. 11).

Ilari, Keller, Damasio, and Habibi (2016) investigated underprivileged children’s development of musical skills through their involvement in an El Sistema-inspired program in a longitudinal study over the course of one year. The study focused predominantly on Latino children and their improvements in pitch and rhythmic discrimination, pitch matching, singing a song from memory, and rhythmic entrainment. The researchers divided 50 6- to 7-year olds from equally underserved communities into an experimental and control group. The experimental group participated in the Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles at Heart of Los Angeles while the control group did not. A pre-test and post-test were administered to provide a baseline and to measure levels of improvement for each selected skill. Ilari, Keller, Damasio, and Habibi found that children in the experimental group had increased development in pitch perception, vocal production skills, and rhythmic skills while children in the control group actually experienced a decline in singing and pitch discrimination skills over the course of one year. The findings also suggested that a combination of variables contributed to the development of musical skills with socioeconomic status playing a less important role.

In another study focused on underserved populations, Hedemann and Frazier (2016) examined a university-community partnership involving an after-school El Sistema-inspired music program. The researchers specifically focused on the mental health needs of the youth
participating in the program and the abilities of the support staff to meet those needs. The goals of the study were to (a) provide training and consultation to music educators related to youth development, activity engagement, and behavior management, and (b) infuse social-emotional goals into music education via explicit opportunities for youth to learn and practice skills. Sixty-one youth and their parents completed measures to provide information on mental health need. The results of the measures indicated that nearly two thirds of youth and one quarter of parents reported heightened levels of anxiety and/or depression. The researchers claimed this could connote potential challenges for inexperienced teaching staff and serve as justification for training on youth development and strategies to engage students with mental health needs.

The second goal of the study sought to determine the extent of enthusiasm for a social-emotional curriculum. The researchers measured the extent of enthusiasm through staff attendance and youth participation and enthusiasm during a week of music games. The researchers designed the games specifically for this study to focus on feelings identification and relaxation techniques, cognitive changes, and problem solving. Sixty-one percent of eligible students attended at least one day of the music games, while just five staff of a total 26 attended (mainly citing the lack of compensation for their time as the reason for not attending). Youth satisfaction reported 90% liked or liked very much the activities during the music games and 96% of students indicated they would participate again if the music games were offered. Hedemann and Frazier concluded that attention to the specific needs of the community involved is necessary for after-school programs to be successful and meaningful and that integrating a social-emotional music curriculum is a feasible option to increase social development.
A critical look at El Sistema. A great number of music scholars have taken a critical approach when studying El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired programs. Bergman and Lindgren (2014) pointed out that a critical analysis does not “[highlight] possible negative aspects of a specific educational practice. . . . [It] means taking into account the historical, social, and cultural context” (p. 370). The researchers analyzed three aspects of El Sistema programs in Sweden: (a) El Sistema as identity practice, (b) El Sistema as educational practice, and (c) El Sistema as civic education practice. They argued that El Sistema’s emphasis on developing a strong sense of unity within the program conflicts with their goal of inclusivity. They also stated that El Sistema programs use culture as a tool to change what the program claims to be a society in need of improvement. Finally, Bergman and Lindgren drew on the work of Foucault (1978/1991) to point out El Sistema’s use of discipline and obedience to assimilate children into what it deems good citizens.

Dobson (2016) took an ethnographic approach to argue that an El Sistema-inspired program in which he was an instrumental tutor reinforced authoritarian, teacher-centered approaches that reduced children’s potential for creativity and autonomy. In addition to the ethnographic account of the orchestral rehearsal experience, Dobson also completed a discourse analysis of the documents and correspondence related to the program during his involvement. His description of the orchestral rehearsal borders on dictatorial, completely lacking support and encouragement for the children’s endeavors. He chronicled the tutors’ behavior as “withholding of affection, severity, coldness, sternness . . . even though the handbook specifies that we speak to the children ‘with warmth’” (Dobson, 2016, p. 111). Dobson’s discourse analysis revealed the use of progressive education jargon such as critical thinking, creative music-making, safe
environments, and freedom of expression while his ethnographic account of the rehearsal exposed a deficiency in the manifestation of any of these phrases. He concluded stating, “It is vitally important that the claims and counterclaims around a project of such vast international scope, influence, and reputation receive the scrutiny they are due” (Dobson, 2016, p. 114).

Kuuse, Lindgren, and Skåreus (2016) examined two advertisement films from the El Sistema Sweden website and their use as a marketing tool to reify the ideals of the organization’s founders. They analyzed a Swedish film set in Hammarkullen, the suburb where El Sistema was first implemented in Sweden, and a Venezuelan film set mainly in the city streets of Caracas. The researchers created a timetable of events for both films and coded all aspects of the advertisements. This coding process led to the development of three themes: (a) music as harmony, (b) music saving families, and (c) music and feelings as moral fostering. In music as harmony, the researchers found that the musical activities of the program were constructed as the only places where children were in harmony and happy, implying that the musical experiences of the program serve as a tool to create happiness. Music saving families highlighted the Venezuelan film as depicting children in poor, crowded, and violent scenes coupled with the claim that music experiences in El Sistema can save children from these scenarios and improve family bonds, despite the reality that El Sistema requires children to invest large amounts of time away from their families in rehearsal. Finally, in music and feelings as moral fostering, children are shown freely connecting to their feelings through the music with families and society benefiting from this emotional association. Kuuse, Lindgren, and Skåreus (2016) maintained that the El Sistema advertising films examined in this study “seem to consist . . . of normative views, holding music as inherently connected to moral values, so that offering music education to those
not previously reached by it will be life-changing in an obviously good way” (p. 208). They called for greater scrutiny of music programs claiming to achieve social integration aims.

**Salvation narrative.** Within the studies that provided a critical perspective of El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired programs, many focused on the concept of the salvation narrative (Baker, 2016; Bull, 2016; Fink, 2016; Logan, 2016; Rosabal-Coto, 2016; Shieh, 2015). Baker (2016) elaborated, “El Sistema may be seen as part of a 500-year history of attempts by Latin American social elites to ‘civilize’ or ‘improve’ social or ethnic Others through education in European-style music” (p. 14). He continued, stating:

> While the heightened attention to the social aspects of music education is very welcome, it is accompanied by the re-normalizing of conventional practices of institutional music education of the past, ones of a kind that scholars have critiqued extensively in recent years: learning that is sequential and repetitious, teacher-centered and hierarchical; emphasizes the transmission and “banking” of existing knowledge rather than creativity; is dedicated to performance rather than composing, improvising, arranging, or listening; and marginalizes discussion of broader social and cultural issues (Baker, 2016, p. 24).

Logan (2016) defined El Sistema’s form of the salvation narrative as “cultural domination via the rigid aesthetic mores and obvious hierarchical organization of classical music, . . . shown as steps away from under-achievement and deviancy, and as steps up the social ladder” (p. 60). He described the organization’s actions as “turning music into a cultural veil to be draped over the failures of the state and the inconvenient facts of everyday life” (Logan, 2016, p. 61). Logan also emphasized that El Sistema programs promote the notion of meritocracy, which states that individual progress should be based on ability and talent. In addition, a meritocratic approach, Logan elaborated, perpetuates the idea that the masses need to be made more respectable and that the poor deserve pity.
Fink (2016) noted that Western observers of El Sistema programs have bought into the claims because of a yearning to prioritize Western art music above other forms of music. He also disputed El Sistema’s assertion that classical music can serve as a tool to achieve social justice, identifying that the organization markets change, but programs the same Western art music heavy-laden with notions of colonialism and upper-class elitism. Bull (2016) combined a re-reading of historical literature through the lens of research within the sociology of education, with an ethnographic study of youth orchestras in the United Kingdom to ask why classical music is being used as a social action program. Through her analysis, Bull argued that “classical music education (a) fits with a middle-class disposition by rewarding investment in a future self, (b) cultivates an ideal of hard work as a moral project, and (c) allows young women to perform a ‘respectable’ female identity” (p. 120). Drawing on Hunt (2014), Bull stated that teaching lower-income populations to value middle-class culture reinforces the belief that, through their difference from middle-class people, they are deficient and in need of improvement. She posited that El Sistema-inspired programs in the United Kingdom act as a moral project presented as a middle-class civilizing mission.

Through the use of postcolonial institutional ethnography, Rosabal-Coto (2016) examined SINEM—the Costa Rican version of Venezuela’s El Sistema. He collected data through individual and focus group interviews, participant observation, and analysis of various artifacts. The researcher analyzed the data in three phases: (1) scrutinizing people’s actions as lived and reflected upon, (2) identifying participants' standpoint (the location from which the participants announced their experiences of socialization through music learning), and (3) identifying disjuncture or dislocation in the teachers’ learning webs. The findings of the study “suggest that
music learners in Costa Rica may often be constructed as inferior subalterns” (Rosabal-Coto, 2016, p. 164). Through the use of Western classical music, the learners are socialized to become cultivated and civilized. Rosabal-Coto concluded by discussing a separate music program, initiated by the Costa Rican Ministry of Public Education, titled “Education in Artistic, Ethical, and Citizen Values.” This program offers an alternative to El Sistema music programs, while still addressing social issues. Its goal is to support the development of future citizens “who are not only socially aware, but also able to make responsible individual and collective choices and engage in healthy social relationships” (Rosabal-Coto, 2010, p. 58).

Shieh (2015) specifically focused on El Sistema’s ability to function as a form of social intervention. The researcher referenced previous El Sistema studies, incorporated transcripts of interviews conducted while in Caracas, and drew on personal experience as a builder of an El Sistema-inspired program to develop a picture of the social intervention process in El Sistema. Shieh noted that El Sistema’s sense of care serves as its main aspect of social intervention. This aspect of social intervention is reinforced through the organization’s creation of free music centers, regularly located in or near low-income neighborhoods. Similar to previous researchers, Shieh asserted that the adherence to the traditional large-ensemble model combined with the programming of predominantly Western classical music is cause for real concern. Commenting on a statement made by Jose Abreu, El Sistema’s founder, about the impact of Western classical music on low-income youth, Shieh (2015) asserted that “the idea that ‘everything begins’ with exposure to Western European cultural practices, and that this leads to non-acceptance of poverty— as if it were a cultural choice—is grotesque” (p. 574).
Shieh also took issue with the fact that El Sistema programs transport its students to a parallel world, noting that outreach and attempts to improve the surrounding community outside of the El Sistema bubble are practically non-existent. He found comfort in the recent progress El Sistema has made by including folk and popular musics and non-Western instruments into the programming. Finally, Shieh (2015) proclaimed that future work “must also include greater engagement with the musics’ histories and contexts, empowering students to recognize, respond to, and interact with a variety of musical traditions.” He continued, “it involves responding to individual students and their identities with both care and critique—at a determination that they not be rescued so much as empowered” (p. 577).

Need for the Study

Analysis of the related literature indicates that arts program involvement impacts participants in myriad ways—social, emotional, musical, identity, personal, external. However, there is a lack of research specifically examining the community children’s choir experience, especially investigations of ensembles that have been created with a mission to develop children both musically and socially. While Bartolome’s (2012) study revealed social benefits of participation, the people in charge of the ensemble in her study did not voice social development as one of their objectives. There is even less literature concerned with underserved populations involved in community children’s choirs, and how those community choir experiences might impact people’s social and musical growth.

Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) posited that a majority of empirical research in the behavioral sciences is based on participants drawn entirely from what they call WEIRD populations (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic). The researchers
specifically highlighted issues when comparing among subpopulations of American children, stating, “Although studying young children is one important strategy for discerning universals, it does not completely avoid these challenges, as developmental studies are frequently biased toward middle- and upper-class American children” (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010, p. 77). They cited several studies involving children in which the variation in the environment due to a difference in SES highly impacted the results of the studies. Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan (2010) concluded that it is imperative that researchers begin to incorporate populations outside of the WEIRD people if we are to begin taking “the difficult steps to building a broader, richer, and better-grounded understanding of our species” (p. 83). This study fills a need by focusing on the impact of community choir participation on lower-SES American children.

With the increase of El Sistema-inspired programs in North America and the associated implication that El Sistema programs will “[save] our children from the horror of violence, drugs, and material and spiritual poverty” (Borzacchini, 2010, p. 7), more research is needed to determine the role these programs play in all aspects of children’s development. El Sistema's focus on social change through musical excellence may hold even greater promise in the United States where neighborhoods are becoming increasingly diverse. This growth in diversity warrants the support of programs that instill notions of acceptance, collaboration, and kindness. This study provides evidence of a program supporting these goals. Moreover, the El Sistema philosophy responds directly to issues of segregation still present in the Baton Rouge community, but more research is needed to determine the impact of programs like these on their
participants and the surrounding community. In addition, there is currently no research focusing solely on an El Sistema-inspired choir.

Finally, researchers have not fully investigated the musical lives of children—lives that arguably encompass a multitude of possible musical interactions. In one study focusing on this topic, Griffin (2011) found a disconnect between children’s out-of-school music experiences and their in-school music experiences. He noted that lessening the gap “could lead to advancing thinking and enhancing understanding of social justice in elementary music education” (p. 87). The researcher suggested that music educators draw upon children’s out-of-school music experiences to provide more opportunities for interplay between the two. Facilitating activities in music class that recognize and honor children’s personal music interests could lead to greater awareness of social justice issues in music education. Snead (2010) found “adolescents and music teachers alike portrayed and experienced musical life and school music-learning culture as largely non-intersecting” (p. 186). He observed the development of musical capital when teachers facilitated musical experiences that directly connected with the adolescents’ “genuine affinity for music” (p. 215). The researcher suggested that music educators “must undertake more critical analysis of adolescents’ fundamental affinity for music and consider how music educators’ assumptions and practices may foster continuing intrigue and inquiry that nurture young people’s deep and fulfilling passion for music participation and learning” (p. 232). Further analysis is necessary to determine the ways children’s multiple musical interactions may uniquely intersect and augment/detract from each other.

Wyness (2012) emphasized the importance of examining children’s experiences through research, resulting in “[capturing] a new epistemological interest in children’s knowledge and
understanding, prioritizing the idea that children have subjective worlds worth researching” (p. 203). Therefore, this dissertation will expand research on El Sistema-El Sistema-inspired programs (specifically El Sistema-inspired choral ensembles), extend previous research focused on perceived values and benefits of choir participation, and offer a new perspective of the lived musical experiences of children.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine Kids’ Orchestra’s philosophy of social development through musical experiences and document the teaching and learning paradigms associated with this philosophy. I explored the impact of Kids’ Choir participation on the choristers from the perspective of teachers, staff, parents, and the children themselves. In addition, I investigated more deeply the relationship between three choristers’ Kids’ Choir experience and their musical lives outside of the organization. Primary research questions were: (1) What is the Kids’ Orchestra philosophy and how is it manifested?; (2) What are the perceived values and benefits of participation in Kids’ Choir for child participants from the perspective of choristers, teachers, parents, and staff?; and (3) How do three choristers in Kids’ Choir describe their lived musical experiences both in and out of Kids’ Choir? I employed an intrinsic case study design to seek answers, and in Chapter Three, I detail the specific research design and provide information concerning participant selection, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and the potential for findings.
Chapter 3: Method

Intrinsic Case Study Design

I employed an intrinsic case study design (Stake, 2003) to investigate the impact of Kids’ Choir participation on the choristers through the perspective of teachers, staff, parents, and the children themselves. This investigation focused on Kids’ Choir, a community choral ensemble in Baton Rouge, Louisiana that aims to address social development through musical experiences. Yin (2003) defined case study as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p. 13). My desire to capture a naturalistic representation of the Kids' Choir experience from the perspective of its participants aligns directly with Yin’s description. Further, case study represents a single case within a system bounded by time and place (Creswell, 2012); in this situation, the case was the choral ensemble experience within the overall Kids' Orchestra organization during the 2016-2017 school year.

Case study is a versatile research method, customizable based on the researcher’s needs. It can focus on a single person, an event, an organization, a program, or even multiple entities. “The advantage of large samples is breadth, whereas their problem is one of depth. For the case study, the situation is the reverse. Both approaches are necessary for a sound development of social science” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 241). Barrett (2014) posited:

Aspects of the lived experience of music teaching and learning are often too nuanced, contextualized, and interdependent to be reduced to discrete variables. The dynamic intersections of subject matter, learners, teacher, and educational milieu are vital to our professional understanding; case study reports can aptly convey the multifaceted ecologies of life in music classrooms. (p. 114)

Through this study, I explored the multifaceted ecologies of life taking place in the musical experiences of children, focusing on their involvement with Kids' Choir.
Stake (2003) described an intrinsic case study as one “undertaken because, first and last, the researcher wants better understanding of this particular case” (p. 134). Intrinsic case study is not selected in order to learn something representative of other cases, but rather to more deeply understand something unique that exists within the selected case itself. Flyvbjerg (2006) noted “generalization is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas ‘the force of example’ is underestimated” (p. 228). He claimed there is great power in studying one case, especially if it represents a distinct and rare experience.

**Intrinsic case study exemplars in music education.** A number of researchers have utilized intrinsic case study to examine a variety of situations. Sweet (2010) used intrinsic case study to learn about her own eighth grade choir students’ perceptions of singing and participation in choir. She looked specifically at three areas: (1) the reasons why her eighth grade boys sing and enjoy singing, (2) perceptions of singing in a daily choir class, and (3) perceptions of singing in an auditioned after-school choir. Data collection techniques included one formal group interview with five of the nine boys enrolled in the daily choir class, informal field notes, and the author’s personal insights and observations as the boys’ choir teacher and participant observer. Findings revealed the boys enjoyed singing and viewed it as “an emotional outlet and form of self-expression” (Sweet, 2010, p. 9). The boys highlighted the importance of teamwork and dedication developed in the after-school men’s ensemble. Sweet also discovered that the boys’ choir involvement provided positive and negative experiences with students outside choir in the form of cheering and teasing. Using silliness as a defense mechanism against the teasing “indicated that, no matter how confident the boys overtly appeared, their peers’ comments bothered them” (Sweet, 2010, p. 11).
In another intrinsic case study, Parker (2012) investigated two homeschooled undergraduates’ decisions to become and remain music education majors. Data collection included individual interviews with the two senior music education participants, 23 journal entries submitted by the participants weekly, and four observations with field notes of each participant throughout the student teaching semester. The data from both participants was analyzed together, holistically, as the main unit of analysis to thoroughly understand this particular circumstance. Parker chose to provide detailed participant profiles in the article to further immerse the reader into the study. Three themes emerged during the analysis of the data: (a) remembered moments and the desire to facilitate those experiences for others; (b) parents, teachers, and other important role models within musical and teacher development; and (c) personal qualities and overcoming obstacles.

Parker (2016) employed intrinsic case study when she explored four midwestern choral teachers’ experiences of creating and sustaining community within their public school choirs. Inspired by the writings of Edith and Victor Turner, Martin Buber, and Nel Noddings, Parker (2016) chose to use a relational definition of community “to focus on the importance of interdependent connections between individuals” (p. 223). This theoretical lens provided a point of convergence when analyzing the data. The data collection included 20 observations, 12 interviews with choral teachers, 16 student interviews, and items of material culture. Four themes developed from inductive analysis: (1) support and care, (2) fostering a sense of belonging and acceptance, (3) quality creates and inhibits community, and (4) program legacy and vision.

The studies I have chosen to include here are well-designed and thoughtfully executed examples of the ways previous researchers have navigated the waters of intrinsic case study.
research. Ultimately, the work of these researchers assisted in refining my own study design, with the aim of leading to a document that is both meaningful and beneficial to the research community.

**Data Collection**

Specific data collection strategies included: (1) participant observations (Spradley, 1980) of all Kids’ Choir rehearsals and performances with field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995); (2) semi-structured interviews with child participants, teachers, parents, and staff (Fontana & Frey, 1994); (3) a qualitative questionnaire completed by all Kids’ Choir members; and (4) analysis of material culture relating to Kids’ Choir (Hodder, 2008). While the community (Baton Rouge, Louisiana), local university (Louisiana State University (LSU)), organization (Kids’ Orchestra), and ensemble (Kids’ Choir) have been identified in the document, all participants have been given pseudonyms to maintain anonymity.

Over the course of ten months, I observed approximately 48 hours of rehearsals and approximately six hours of performances. I focused on all aspects contributing to the overall Kids’ Choir experience (e.g. literature choices, rehearsal activities, environment, teacher-student interactions, student-student interactions, etc.). Due to the nature of participant observations and the probable difficulty of perceiving all aspects of the rehearsals—especially while conducting the ensemble—I understood the possible need to return to certain points in the observations. Therefore, select observations were video-recorded to provide the option to revisit certain moments.

Because Kids’ Choir has co-conductors, there were times within rehearsals when I was able to dedicate my senses to the observation alone. As Spradley (1980) cautioned: “the more
you know about a situation as an ordinary participant, the more difficult it is to study it” (p. 61).
Therefore, despite the fact that I was the conductor and was familiar with the program, I worked to observe with fresh eyes and ears as if everything I experienced was new. I recorded my digital field notes immediately following rehearsals and included activity descriptions, my personal reflections, emerging questions/analyses, and plans for future actions.

I conducted semi-structured group interviews with 16 of the 20 singers (n=16), interviewing approximately three singers at a time. These interviews resulted in approximately two hours and nineteen minutes of audio and after transcription, totaled 14,336 words. Hill (2006) suggested that children prefer group interviews due to a sense of equality, peer support, and security. He concluded that, for some children, peers may reduce the adult–child power dynamics, creating a safe peer environment. Roberts (2016) identified the possibility of trustworthiness issues when children provide answers they believe will please the researcher. He utilized a number of techniques to address this issue including telling students there were no wrong or right answers and emphasizing to the students that they were the experts on the topic and their responses would help to inform future children’s music experiences. My incorporation of these techniques helped to promote a comfortable and safe atmosphere for child participants and encouraged honest and thoughtful responses. In order to further mitigate any power dynamic issues, I remained seated during interviews to minimize the size discrepancy between adults and children that can represent a power imbalance (Wyness, 2006). The interviews also took place in a neutral space separate from the rehearsal room to minimize hierarchical roles of “teacher” and “student. During the interviews, everyone sat in the same size chairs at a rectangular table with no one at either head.
In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers involved with the ensemble (n=3), parents of choristers (n=7), and Kids’ Orchestra staff members (n=4). Teacher interviews resulted in approximately two hours and six minutes of audio and after transcription, totaled 17,827 words. Parent interviews resulted in approximately two hours and fifteen minutes of audio and after transcription, totaled 13,280 words. Staff interviews resulted in approximately three hours and fifty-three minutes of audio and after transcription, totaled 36,299 words. Specific staff members included in the interview process were Dr. Eisman (Kids’ Orchestra Program Director), Mrs. Hebert (Kids’ Orchestra Executive Director), Mr. Sharp (Kids’ Orchestra Program Manager), and Mr. Thraves (Kids’ Orchestra Education Director). The interviews were audio recorded for future transcription (see Appendix F for interview protocols). Interview questions were also sent via email to parents unable to meet in person allowing each parent the opportunity to contribute their voice. One parent chose to respond to the interview questions in written form and return by email. Parental permission forms, child assent forms, and teacher/staff permission forms were completed as required by the Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board prior to conducting interviews (see Appendices B, C, and D).

Further, I designed a qualitative questionnaire to be completed by all Kids’ Choir members (see Appendix G). The questionnaire allowed students that may have had difficulties verbalizing their thoughts to express themselves on paper. Fifteen children completed the questionnaire, including the three students that were not able to complete the interview. In addition, since the interviews were completed in groups of three, the questionnaire provided an opportunity for students to respond individually, eliminating any effect resulting from the presence of their peers. The questionnaires were comprised of short answer questions designed to
elicit the choristers’ perceptions of the choir experience. Questions included, “How does singing in Kids’ Choir make you feel?” and “What is your favorite thing about Kids’ Choir?” I analyzed the questionnaires prior to conducting the interviews to inform possible interview questions.

Finally, analysis of material culture (Hodder, 2008) included an examination of concert programs, music worksheets used in rehearsals, the organization’s website including the mission and vision statements, and paper/digital communication to families and the community. This examination was designed to highlight the organization’s discourse and allow for comparison between words and actions.

**Data Analysis**

Following the digital collection and organization of all transcribed interview material, qualitative questionnaire responses, field notes from observations, and personal reflections on the information, I first read through the data employing a process of open coding. Specifically, I read the information line by line and applied a single code to a logical amount of text (i.e. group of words, sentence, or conglomeration of sentences). As Saldaña (2016) elaborated, “open coding is an opportunity for you as a researcher to reflect deeply on the contents and nuances of your data and to begin taking ownership of them” (p. 115). Then, I went through a process of axial coding, examining the codes and identifying broader categories within which each code could be grouped. My second read-through of the data utilized a closed coding approach, keeping the broader categories in mind as I analyzed each line. This phase of coding served to solidify the broader categories as themes and to determine if additional themes should be considered. A final analysis of the data utilized selective coding, focusing on the research questions themselves and
specifically seeking out any material that could directly connect to the overall goals of the project.

**Portraiture Design**

In order to further investigate the musical lives of Kids’ Choir participants, three choristers were selected through purposeful sampling to be represented in the individual portraiture included in the document. Portraiture has been described as “designed to capture the richness, complexity, and dimensionality of human experience in social and cultural context” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). It is devised to both “[tell] the story faithfully” and “resonate beyond the particular” (p. 37). Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) elaborated that the intention of portraiture is not to describe a participant’s experience verbatim, but to capture the essence of that experience—“to document the beautiful/ugly experiences that are so much a part of the texture of human development and social relationships” (p. 9). Similar to narrative inquiry, portraiture involves thoughtful interaction between researcher and participant in order to create a written account that illuminates and honors the participants’ musical lives. The goal of the individual portraiture was to reveal the children’s unique musical lives through their personal stories and experiences.

The individual portraiture explores the similarities and differences between children’s in-school music experiences and out-of-school music experiences by detailing the selected participants’ experience in the Kids’ Choir ensemble as well as other musical experiences outside the organization.

**Portraiture participant selection.** When selecting students to be part of the portraiture, third, fourth, fifth, or sixth grade was preferred based on the greater likelihood of obtaining
deeper responses from slightly older children, and also because of their ability to maintain focus throughout longer interviews. In addition, due to (a) the varied experiences provided by the Baton Rouge school systems (public, magnet, private, and charter), (b) the Kids’ Orchestra organization’s emphasis on social development, and (c) a desire to provide an accurate description of the full range of experiences Kids' Choir facilitates, I chose students who represent unique and contrasting paths. I achieved this by considering a number of variables such as age, sex, family structure, SES, school enrollment, race, and church membership. Ultimately, the three portraiture participants consisted of one third grader and two fourth graders; two girls and one boy; two two-parent households and one single-parent household; lower-SES to middle-SES backgrounds; one public school student, one private school student, and one magnet school student; two Black students and one White student; and one Catholic student, one Baptist student, and one student with no church affiliation (see Table 3.1). This assisted in illuminating the students’ Kids' Choir experience and other music experiences, and the ways they may or may not relate. Parental permission forms, child assent forms, and teacher/staff permission forms were completed as required by the Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board prior to conducting interviews (see Appendices B, C, and D).

Table 3.1. Portraiture Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Family Structure</th>
<th>SES</th>
<th>School Enrollment</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Church Membership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sofie</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Two-Parent</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Two-Parent</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simone</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Single-Parent</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Magnet</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Baptist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Portraiture data collection.** In addition to the data collection for the larger study, data collection for the portraiture chapter was augmented in two ways. First, for two of the three portraiture participants, I completed passive observations of the participants’ school music experiences, which involved visiting their elementary school and sitting in on their music class. Spradley (1980) described passive participation as occupying the role of “bystander, spectator, or loiterer” (p. 59). For the third portraiture participant, I was denied access to the school music class. I compensated for the loss of this observation through the completion of lengthier individual interviews with the student and prior knowledge of and experience with this student through her participation in Kids’ Choir for two consecutive years.

Second, I conducted an extended version of the chorister interview from the larger study as well as one additional semi-structured, in-depth interview to illuminate the thoughts and perceptions of the participants’ musical lives. The second interview followed the passive observation of the school music class and interview questions were informed by the observation itself. Seidman (2006) stated “At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (p. 9). In addition to the in-depth interviews completed with the portraiture participants, the parents of the three selected choristers completed an extended version of the parent interview from the larger study. This extension focused on their child’s musical experiences outside of the Kids’ Choir ensemble.

**Portraiture data analysis.** I examined the coding from the portraiture participants’ data separately. I then determined in what ways the data intersected and/or diverged through a cross-case analysis. Khan and VanWynsberghe (2008) provided this description:
Cross-case analysis enables case study researchers to delineate the combination of factors that may have contributed to the outcomes of the case, seek or construct an explanation as to why one case is different or the same as others, make sense of puzzling or unique findings, or further articulate the concepts, hypotheses, or theories discovered or constructed from the original case (section 1, para. 2).

An exemplar of cross-case analysis can be found in Standerfer’s (2008) multiple case study which examined the influence of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) process on three choral music teachers. The full portraiture is presented in Chapter 6 along with a portraiture synthesis examining how the perceived values and benefits of participation in Kids’ Choir connect to the individual portraiture participants’ lived musical experiences in and out of the ensemble.

**Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research requires as much rigor and attentiveness when it comes to trustworthiness as any other research paradigm. Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) viewed validity in qualitative research through an interpretive lens and offered four primary criteria: (1) credibility, (2) authenticity, (3) criticality, and (4) integrity. In addition, they named explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence, and sensitivity as secondary criteria. I utilized this interpretive approach to validity to inform all aspects of this research.

In this study, a prolonged engagement in the field due to my involvement with the organization served as a form of credibility. My investigator expertise (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1991) in the form of my history and association with the ensemble resulted in the development of trust with the members and knowledge of the choir’s culture. Triangulation was achieved through the use of various sources to obtain data (observation, qualitative questionnaire, interview, and analysis of material culture). I also utilized member checking by providing the Kids’ Choir
teachers, parents, and Kids’ Orchestra staff copies of their interview transcripts and asking them to review the documents for accuracy and to provide comments. As an added layer of trustworthiness, I sent the finalized sections in Chapter Four titled, “The Kids’ Orchestra Mission and Vision Statements” and “Achieving the Mission and Vision” to a Kids’ Orchestra staff member to confirm accuracy. After reading the sections, the Kids’ Orchestra staff member stated that no changes needed to be made and that the sections accurately represented the Kids’ Orchestra organization.

Flyvbjerg (2006) acknowledged “case studies often contain a substantial element of narrative” and that “good narratives typically approach the complexities and contradictions of real life” (p. 237). I worked to present the real life experience of the choristers through the use of rich and thick description in my presentation of the findings so the detailed nature of the narrative could assist the reader in transferring concepts to similar situations.

Potential for Findings

Based on the Principle of Proximal Similarity (Shadish, 1995), it is likely that the findings have some transferability to situations that are similar in nature to that of Kids' Choir. Guba (1978) proposed treating such transferable concepts “as a working hypothesis, to be tested again in the next encounter and again in the encounter after that” (p. 70). Creswell (2013) described the development of naturalistic generalizations developed from analyzing the data. These generalizations assist the reader to “learn from the case either for themselves or to apply to a population of cases” (Creswell, 2013, p. 200). Through the use of rich and thick description, narrative vignettes, and direct quoting, I have provided a detailed illustration of the Kids’ Choir experience, allowing the reader to make judgements for themselves if the situation is similar
enough to apply findings. Comparable contexts where findings might inform future investigations could include community choirs, children’s choirs, after-school programs, and El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired programs in the United States. Additionally, any of the aforementioned contexts that incorporate underserved and/or marginalized populations could be included. In Chapter Four, I discuss the Kids’ Orchestra philosophy and its manifestation in Kids’ Choir. I then present Kids’ Choir as an alternative model for El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired programs.
Chapter 4: The Kids’ Orchestra Philosophy and its Manifestation in Kids’ Choir

In this chapter, I focus on the Kids’ Orchestra philosophy and how it manifests through the actions of the Kids’ Choir ensemble directors. I begin by discussing the evolution and implementation of the Kids’ Orchestra mission and vision statements from the founding years of the organization to the current versions in place. Next, I focus on the manifestation of the Kids’ Orchestra philosophy and, specifically, how the mission and vision are achieved. Finally, I present the Kids’ Choir experience as a counter-narrative to current El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired organization critiques.

The Kids’ Orchestra Mission and Vision Statements

In order to explore how the Kids’ Orchestra philosophy manifests itself through the actions of the Kids’ Choir ensemble directors, I examined the Kids’ Orchestra mission and vision statements as a formal declaration of the philosophy. When Kids’ Orchestra was founded in 2011, the board of directors crafted mission and vision statements to inform and guide all decisions regarding the organization as a whole. These statements also served as a method of communicating what Kids’ Orchestra was all about to the community. The inceptive statements were:

Mission: To bring K-5 children of all backgrounds together using music education as a vehicle to teach homework, develop understanding, and emphasize excellence.

Vision: To increase cultural and interracial harmony in South Louisiana through the language of music by engaging our children.
As the organization grew and evolved, the mission and vision statements did as well, going through four iterations prior to the conclusion of this research. The versions that were in place at the beginning of the data collection for this research (the second iteration) were as follows:

Mission: To bring children of all cultures and backgrounds together using music education as a vehicle to foster teamwork, develop understanding, and emphasize excellence.

Vision: To bring communities together by offering all children in Louisiana the opportunity to play in an orchestra.

This second version of the vision statement removed the phrase “increase cultural and interracial harmony” and replaced it with the phrase “bring communities together.” Mrs. Hebert, the executive director of Kids’ Orchestra, reflected on the metamorphosis of the original mission and vision statements:

We’ve had a lot of discussion about the mission statement because I’m looking at this [second version] and it’s like, what does “understanding and emphasizing excellence” really mean? And “develop understanding?” And what was happening here was we were using soft words to describe what we were trying to say—interracial. . . . We were trying to be community-friendly.

Mrs. Hebert’s use of the phrase “soft words” indicated a dissatisfaction with the second version of the vision statement and an implicit desire to more directly state the end goal of improving race relations in the Baton Rouge community. Additionally, this second version referenced playing in an orchestra as the only musical activity in which children would engage, obviously a relic from the years prior to Kids’ Orchestra’s inclusion of the choir program.

The third versions of the mission and vision statements were created by an outside party hired by Kids’ Orchestra and put into place near the middle of the data collection phase of this research. The statements were designed with an end goal of securing more grants and reaching
more donors. Each staff member interviewed for this study expressed dissatisfaction in the third versions since they left out so much of what the organization’s true mission and vision were. Due to the short-lived nature of the third versions and the Kids’ Orchestra staff’s consensus as to their incompatibility with the organization’s philosophy, the statements are not presented in this document.

Near the end of the data collection for this research, the organization decided it was time to revitalize the mission and vision statements once again. As Mr. Thraves, Kids’ Orchestra’s education director, explained:

No one really brought up that we need to collaborate on the mission statement together. I mean, many of us had mentioned that . . . we wanted to change it, but that was kind of singularly popping up. Then we realized that, ya know, we had so many people interested in our administration—what this said—which is great! Everyone cares about the mission statement, that’s awesome, and we needed to collaborate on it.

Mrs. Hebert recalled the initial meetings with the original Kids’ Orchestra Board of Directors when the first mission and vision statements were conceived. To her surprise, she was able to locate the self-stick wall pad page that was used to brainstorm the vision statement in those initial meetings (see Appendix I). In the early phases of my data collection, Mrs. Hebert called a staff meeting and said, “let’s go back to our roots and let’s work on our roots.” And that’s exactly what they did. They spent several months refining the statements to more accurately reflect the organization’s intent. The organization also expressed their desire to involve as many people connected to Kids’ Orchestra as possible in the finalizing of the statements. They reached out to people connected to the organization in myriad ways including site coordinators, instrumental teachers, choral teachers, and community members. So, it was not just a select group of people
that worked on the project; the statements represent the perspectives of teachers, parents, coordinators, donors, administrators, and many others.

After this collaborative effort, in the summer of 2017, the fourth (and current) versions of the mission and vision statements were finalized.

**Mission:** To impact children’s lives by creating a sense of community through after-school musical training and enrichment programs.

**Vision:** To increase inter-racial and cultural harmony in Louisiana by engaging children through music.

Mr. Thraves stated that the newest versions “speak to what’s really going on. . . . They leave their mark on people and they’re user-friendly. . . . They should speak to anyone so being universal is a big part of it.” He emphasized the importance of their universality due to the fact that the statements are seen by a large number of people, both directly and peripherally connected to Kids’ Orchestra. They are printed on organizational ephemera (e.g. Kids’ Orchestra brochures, Kids’ Choir neighborhood flyers, etc.); utilized for television, radio, and newspaper advertisements; and highlighted on the website. These statements are meant to speak in a meaningful way to parents curious about the organization, students already involved, donors deciding whether or not to invest, general community members, and anyone else who stumbles upon them. The organization emphasized the fourth iteration of the statements do just that. Mr. Thraves and I concluded our conversation about the mission and vision statements by considering the bigger picture:

Mr. Thraves: It’s (Kids’ Orchestra) becoming its own thing now.
JB: And in a place that really needs something like it.
Mr. Thraves: My god, yes.
JB: I mean, it would be beneficial to any community, but when you see such stark separation of groupings of people—race, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, religion—I
mean there’s so much separation in the community that it (Kids’ Orchestra) works to heal and bring together.

Mr. Thraves: Yes. As stereotypical as it is, it always remains true that music is that common language that most people don’t discriminate against. They get it.

This exchange refers to the historically segregated nature of Baton Rouge as well as the continued racial tensions that plague the metropolis. Considering that school desegregation was not mandated in Baton Rouge until the 1982-1983 school year (28 years after the supreme court decision stated segregated schools were unconstitutional in 1954), it is not surprising that issues of segregation still plague the community today. In 2015, utilizing the integration-segregation index, Silver (2015) found that Baton Rouge was the eighth most racially segregated city in the United States and second most racially segregated city in the southern United States.

In addition to the issues of segregation still present in Baton Rouge, the summer of 2016 was marked by a series of violent race-related incidents in the Baton Rouge community. On July 5, 2016, two White Baton Rouge police officers shot Alton Sterling, a 37-year-old Black man, several times at close range while he was being held to the ground in front of a convenience store. The shooting was filmed by several bystanders and immediately gained national attention, inspiring a series of protests in the Baton Rouge community (Associated Press, 2016). Twelve days after the Alton Sterling shooting, on July 17, three Baton Rouge police officers, one Black and two White (Brad Garafola, Matthew Gerald, and Montrell Jackson), were killed when responding to a call of shots fired in the parking lot of a Baton Rouge shopping center. The shooter, Gavin Long, had posted a video on YouTube just three days after the Sterling incident stating, "I want to let ya'll, if anything happens with me . . . don’t affiliate me with nothing . . .
I’m affiliated with the spirit of justice, nothing more, nothing less” (Carrero, Fieldstadt, & Gutierrez, 2016).

In response to these traumatic events that took place within the span of two weeks in the summer of 2016, LSU Manship School of Mass Communication designed a community resilience study. The study, released April 19, 2017, specifically highlighted a widening gap between Blacks’ and Whites’ perceptions on the worsening of race relations in the Baton Rouge community and a significantly lower percentage of Blacks who believe police treat Blacks and Whites equally (LSU Manship School of Mass Communication, 2017). The Kids’ Orchestra mission and vision statements respond directly to the issues of segregation still present in the Baton Rouge community. Programs that strive toward this goal are sorely needed in a place like Baton Rouge. A desire to better understand Kids’ Orchestra’s possible impact on its participants and the community itself served as the inspiration for this research.

Achieving the Mission and Vision

The Kids’ Orchestra staff has always been committed to the manifestation of its mission and vision through the various programs offered. This manifestation has evolved over the life of the organization and continues to improve. The following sections highlight the Kids’ Orchestra staff’s current and future plans toward achieving the mission and vision of the organization.

Professional development. The growth of Kids’ Orchestra over the past seven years has led to increased demand for qualified teachers. While a majority of the teachers employed by Kids’ Orchestra are music majors at LSU, a large percentage are performance majors without any prior teaching experience or music education coursework. It is possible to be a fantastic violinist that performs all around the country and still fail miserably when you are put in front of a class
of 20 third graders and asked to teach foundational violin skills. Not only are the Kids’ Orchestra students young, but they are also at different levels of performance ability. Some of them may have been in the program for three years while others are brand new on the instrument. Differentiating instruction to this degree is difficult for teachers that have music education backgrounds, let alone musicians that do not.

The Kids’ Orchestra staff came to this realization just prior to hiring Mr. Thraves as the education director. One of his first tasks, he stated in our interview, was to create a curriculum for each of the instrument offerings so that teachers could follow a prescribed curriculum in their lessons. The staff put together a basic outline for the various curricula and then brought in their strongest teachers on each instrument. They asked them things like, “What do you need when you’re in the classroom? What would you like to see more of? What works for you? What doesn't work? What do you like about this method book? What do you not like about this method book?” This led to the development of their current curricula. Mr. Thraves stated teacher response has been good. The teachers have access to more materials and are able to utilize as much or as little as they need in order to be successful in the classroom. The next phase of refining the curricula is to work toward aligning each of the instruments in terms of music literacy approaches. Alignment will ensure that when students come together to play as an ensemble, the director is able to employ one approach and all will understand.

The organization also provides paid professional development sessions twice a year. These sessions cover topics such as creating a positive learning environment, developing a classroom management plan, motivating your students, and refining your pedagogical approach. The most recent professional development offering also included a break out session where
teachers divided into groups by instrument family (brass/woodwind, strings, percussion, and foundations) and were able to spend an hour with a music education specialist in that area. These break out sessions allowed for discussion about the technical aspects of playing the instruments in conjunction with pedagogical approaches more appropriate and successful for the age of the students. To supplement these sessions, Mr. Thraves offers additional support through opportunities for Kids’ Orchestra teachers to be observed by a staff member. The staff member is then able to give specific one-on-one feedback concerning the teacher’s strengths and weaknesses in the classroom and offer suggestions for improvement.

In order to further support the Kids’ Orchestra mission and vision, the Kids’ Orchestra staff recently partnered with an organization called “MentoringBR” to provide its teachers with cultural competence training. MentoringBR describes itself as “a network of entities dedicated to strengthening the quality of mentoring provided to African American males” (Mentoring Baton Rouge, n.d.). Kids’ Orchestra teachers were paid to attend a six-hour training session described as “[providing] mentors and those who wish to mentor with culturally competent training to positively impact the lives of African American males.” The training sessions consisted of three modules: (1) developing cultural competency and developing critical consciousness for the mentor and Black males that they mentor, (2) identifying social capital for young boys and men of color, and (3) developing a positive racial identity through a growth mindset. This opportunity further supports Kids’ Orchestra’s commitment to honoring the mission and vision of the organization and its founders.

Connection to community. With the inherent connection to LSU through Kids’ Orchestra teachers and Kids’ Choir’s involvement with LSU concerts like Concert Spectacular,
the Kids’ Orchestra staff continues to foster and nurture their relationship with LSU, the flagship university of the state. The general Baton Rouge community has great affinity for LSU, quite possibly because of the football team, but for other reasons as well. When community members learn that Kids’ Choir directors have been teaching at LSU for several years or their child’s Kids’ Orchestra trumpet teacher is working on a master’s degree in music at LSU, their faces light up.

There is a positive reaction to the LSU community because of its symbiotic relationship with Baton Rouge. This knowledge also results in humanizing LSU, which like most universities suffers from a perceived “town and gown” mentality. The students and professors at LSU are people, too, and they live in the same community as the parents of Kids’ Choir and Kids’ Orchestra participants. The connection between Kids’ Orchestra and LSU, therefore, helps to reduce stigmas that may exist for the university and dissolve some of the invisible barriers between university and community.

Kids’ Orchestra’s partnership with area schools is another important connection to the Baton Rouge community. As it currently stands, both parties—Kids’ Orchestra and the schools—benefit from the relationship. Kids’ Orchestra is able to exist through access to students and utilization of school facilities to house their programs, and schools are able to supplement their music programs with an after-school option. With the precarious nature of school funding, many schools are not able to offer instrumental programs because of instrument costs. Students are able to experience an elementary general music offering during the school day and, through Kids’ Orchestra, an instrumental-specific offering in the afternoon. The Kids’ Orchestra staff continues to strengthen their bonds with area schools and is working to increase the number of schools with which they are able to partner. A possible next step might be to align Kids’ Orchestra and the
schools through some type of social education or character education. Inviting the schools to play a more active role could increase their involvement in the organization and reinforce both entities in the process.

The Kids’ Orchestra staff would like to develop its connection with the Baton Rouge Symphony Orchestra (BRSO). Currently, there is little to no relationship between the two organizations, which is surprising since most El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired organizations are intimately connected with the city’s symphony orchestra. The BRSO has relied on LSU students and faculty, for the most part, to fill their instrumentalist positions. Allowing the BRSO to see the benefit of Kids’ Orchestra as outreach could increase the opportunities available to instrumental students (specifically string students) in Kids’ Orchestra. This collaboration could inspire the creation of a BRSO youth orchestra, eventually training students to take spots in the BRSO itself.

With increased collaboration with other community organizations, the Kids’ Orchestra staff would like to see more side-by-side concerts. These concerts might involve the BRSO, the Baton Rouge Symphony Chorus, the LSU instrumental or choral ensembles, the Baton Rouge Community Band, or even school music ensembles that share student personnel with Kids’ Orchestra and Kids’ Choir. The result would be strengthened music-making at all levels: K-12 students, college students, adults, and even senior citizens. Intergenerational performances like these work to unite different segments of the population through music.

The Kids’ Orchestra staff is also working to increase community connections by recognizing, honoring, and sharing the music genres that are present in southern Louisiana: Cajun, Creole, and jazz, for example. They plan to capitalize on the culture of southern Louisiana by providing access to information about the music, increasing opportunities for students in the
organization to perform those types of music, and bringing in culture bearers to offer authentic representations of performance for the students. The staff hopes to engage the community further by embracing the unique culture of southern Louisiana in a way that respects and pays tribute to its rich and vibrant history.

**Program development and organization expansion.** The Kids’ Orchestra staff is committed to finding ways of continually improving the program and its offerings. The organization has financed two separate research studies to investigate the attitudes of people connected to the organization and the organization’s student impact in various areas. The studies involved a number of data collection techniques including the completion of surveys by parents, teaching artists, classroom teachers, students, and administrators. The studies, while allowing the organization to assess their progress and inform them of ways to advance, also assisted in Kids’ Orchestra’s selection as a 21st Century Community Learning Center. The Kids’ Orchestra staff plans to further analyze the immense data sets resulting from these studies to continue to enhance the program.

In an effort to expand the reach of the Kids’ Orchestra organization’s mission and vision, Mrs. Hebert, executive director of Kids’ Orchestra, hopes to be able to augment Kids’ Choir to include pre-k, kindergarten, and 1st grade students and eventually incorporate 7th and 8th grade students. Serving children from pre-k through 8th grade would result in more comprehensive musical training opportunities for students who chose to participate for multiple consecutive years. In addition, this expansion would allow for the creation of more choral ensembles, organized based on a combination of age and skill level. This ensemble structure would result in the possibility of a more differentiated approach to curriculum. The inclusion of 7th and 8th
grade students would also provide a community choir option for boys that are either going through the first phase of their voice change or are well into the voice change process. By singing through the voice change, under the guidance of knowledgable choral instructors, boys will develop confidence in their ability to utilize their voice as a musical instrument into adulthood.

The Kids’ Orchestra staff would also like to not only see an increase in the number of students involved in the choir program, but also involve the instrumental students in some type of vocal training. Mr. Thraves, education director for Kids’ Orchestra, cited Gustavo Dudamel’s Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles (YOLA) as a possible model for achieving this goal. Students that are involved in YOLA are required to be a part of the choral ensembles before funneling into the other ensembles in the organization. The Kids’ Orchestra staff knows learning to properly utilize your voice in a musical way is an integral part of being a musician. If it is not feasible for all of the students in Kids’ Orchestra to experience Kids’ Choir, Mr. Thraves would like to identify ways to incorporate vocal activities into the instrumental ensembles. He hopes to educate the instrumental teachers to see the importance and relevance of using the voice and to think about how vocal musicianship runs parallel to and extends upon instrumental musicianship.

In terms of expanding the organization as a whole, the staff is working to incorporate more school partnerships and reach more students. As of now, they are limited by two things: funding and access to quality teachers. Grant-writing is becoming a normal part of their process as they seek additional ways to fund programs. As for locating more quality teachers, a majority of their current teaching staff is made up of students from LSU, both undergraduate and graduate. The Kids’ Orchestra staff is trying to think out-of-the-box to discover untapped music
educator resources such as retired music teachers, current music teachers with after-school availability, and music students from local universities other than LSU.

In addition to expanding the organization internally, there are discussions of external expansion in the future. Currently, Kids’ Orchestra only serves the city of Baton Rouge. Kids’ Choir is open to any 2nd grade through 6th grade student, but because transportation is not provided, the ensemble is limited to children whose parents are able to manage transportation to and from rehearsals and performances. The staff hopes to someday expand to incorporate additional cities, beginning with satellite towns immediately surrounding Baton Rouge including Gonzales, Central, Baker, and Zachary. Eventually, they could increase their range even further to include Lafayette, Monroe, and New Orleans. While it is difficult for the Kids’ Orchestra staff to fathom the possibility of expansion to this extent, they have already begun developing partnerships and connections with people outside the Baton Rouge community. They employ a luthier in New Orleans for their string instrument repairs and a large number of their teaching staff play in orchestras outside of Baton Rouge such as Acadiana Symphony Orchestra in Lafayette, the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra (LPO) in New Orleans, and Rapides Symphony Orchestra in Alexandria. Orchestral musicians in south Louisiana are a highly connected group due to the small number of them in conjunction with the community’s great demand. They regularly perform with one another at various musical events throughout the southern region of the state. As a result, the Kids’ Orchestra instrumental teachers could serve as connections for external expansion.

**Achieving the mission and vision in Kids’ Choir.** The Kids’ Orchestra philosophy informs every decision the Kids’ Choir directors make. During the conception phase, Kids’ Choir
directors and Kids’ Orchestra staff members considered many options for the location and times of the rehearsals. In order to minimize issues of transportation for parents, everyone felt it was important to find a place centrally located in the community, away from typical heavy traffic patterns, and near other facilities beneficial to parents (e.g. grocery stores, civic centers, gas stations, etc.). Similarly, a rehearsal time was selected to allow parents to travel from work, but also retain ample time after rehearsal for family meals. As one of the Kids’ Choir co-directors, we work to respect families’ time and do not over-commit the ensemble for performances. In order to recognize diversity on a global scale, we purposefully program diverse literature selections and provide historical backgrounds of the pieces during rehearsals. We also utilize varied pedagogical methods during rehearsals, making sure to prioritize student-centered approaches such as supporting collaborative learning groups, providing opportunities for students to lead in some way, and regularly incorporating questioning throughout the rehearsal. In terms of socialization, we include opportunities for social development before, during, and after rehearsals, both by encouraging interactions between students and implementing rehearsal activities that require student communication and collaboration. To honor and nurture the surrounding community, Kids’ Choir always provides a neighborhood concert at the end of each semester that is held in the Kids’ Choir rehearsal space and invites the community to a potluck dinner following the performance. More specific details regarding the teaching and learning paradigms present in Kids’ Choir and the manifestation of the Kids’ Orchestra philosophy in the Kids’ Choir ensemble will be featured in the next section, which presents Kids’ Choir as an alternate model for El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired programs.
Kids’ Choir as an Alternative Model for El Sistema/El Sistema-Inspired Programs

The various iterations of the Kids’ Orchestra mission and vision statements, including the most current version, describe the guiding philosophy of the organization itself. Its goal is to increase inter-racial and intercultural harmony in Louisiana (and in a more local sense, Baton Rouge) through children’s involvement in an after-school musical training and enrichment program. As a self-proclaimed El Sistema-inspired organization, Kids’ Orchestra’s mission and vision statements directly relate to El Sistema’s guiding principles of transforming children’s lives through music education. Kids’ Orchestra takes it one step further by specifically highlighting the larger-scale goal of also changing the community.

Research on El Sistema/El Sistema-inspired (ES/ESI) programs is plagued with a plethora of critical analyses indicating little evidence of benefits for participants. Researchers from numerous countries—including Canada, Costa Rica, England, Ireland, the United States of America, Scotland, Sweden, and Venezuela—have published studies highlighting the negative impacts of ES/ESI programs on students and communities across the globe. Despite the existence of such research, ES/ESI programs continue to develop and spread on nearly every continent. In the following section, I outline five current critiques of ES/ESI programs: (1) authoritarian, teacher-centered approach, (2) salvation narrative, (3) privileging Western Classical music, (4) discord stemming from dual aims of social development and musical excellence, and (5) lack of community impact. I situate Kids’ Choir as an alternative model which seeks similar goals, but achieves them in ways that counter current critiques. For each of the five critiques, I provide research highlighting and clarifying the ES/ESI critique and present Kids’ Choir in contrast to the
critique. I also provide specific pedagogical approaches and activities that can be utilized in similar choral settings and adapted for instrumental settings.

**Authoritarian, teacher-centered approach.** ES/ESI programs have been criticized for their authoritarian, teacher-centered approach. The rehearsal design, mainly structured in conductor-ensemble, direct instruction format, leaves little room for utilizing and enhancing children’s creativity or developing children’s autonomy (Dobson, 2016). This hierarchical rehearsal structure limits opportunities for collaboration and dialogue (Baker, 2012, 2014). In addition, the programs have been described as working to assimilate children into a middle- to upper-class elitist’s version of good citizens.

Observing a Kids’ Choir rehearsal provides evidence of multiple pedagogical approaches, a majority of which are not authoritarian or teacher-centered. Rehearsals rarely maintain the same arrangement for longer than 15 minutes. Children spend time seated in rows of chairs, standing in rows, seated cross-legged on the floor, seated and standing in a circle with the teachers, organized in collaborative learning groups to focus on a specific task, spread out randomly in the room to create and perform choreography, leading the ensemble from the front, and every possible arrangement in between. They are also regularly interacting with each other and with the teachers. While a teacher-centered approach is occasionally incorporated during rehearsal, we regularly employ questioning to maintain student engagement and encourage input. Students are asked to respond to questions in a variety of ways including the traditional raised-hand approach, telling their neighbor their thoughts, showing the answer on their hands using numbers or gestures, drawing a picture of their ideas, and even utilizing their entire bodies to reply.
Developing good citizenship habits is an objective of Kids’ Choir; however, the concept of good citizenship is defined very broadly and could easily be adopted by students of all cultures and backgrounds without sacrificing their individuality. Qualities that Kids’ Choir deems part of good citizenship include kindness toward others, acceptance of people both alike and different, respect for everyone, and helping those in need. Students are taught to honor each other in the way they treat one another. In our role as co-directors, Dr. Burns and I purposely recognize students’ differences as strengths that make the ensemble unique and vibrant and share these ideas with the students through their interactions, comments, and behaviors.

**Salvation narrative.** ES/ESI programs have been faulted with using culture as a tool to change a society which they deem in need of improvement. Researchers articulated it as attempting “to ‘civilize’ or ‘improve’ social or ethnic Others” (Baker, 2016, p. 14) or “as a middle-class civilizing mission” (Bull, 2016, p. 121). This belief that the community being served needs to be rescued or saved from poverty, violence, or a lack of culture portrays the community within a deficit model. In other words, it fails to recognize the rich culture that is already present in these communities, believing instead that the program will satisfy their cultural dearth and better the community as a result.

Along with cultural fulfillment, researchers that claim ES/ESI programs capitalize on the salvation narrative have identified these programs professing to be the sole refuge for children. Allan (2010) found that El Sistema programs in Scotland were advertised as the only place where children could be happy and safe from violence. Kuuse, Lindgren, and Skåreus (2016) identified similar findings in Sweden. Bull (2016) argued that describing communities served by El Sistema in England as deprived or anti-social “echoes common stigmatizing discourses about
class that circulate within policy and the wider public sphere” (p. 120). In a study completed in Argentina, Wald (2011a, 2011b) noted that communities were opposed to media portrayal of them as disadvantaged and vulnerable. He shared participant comments such as, “they talk about us as if we were wild—instead of having a bow and arrow we have a violin” and “we do not feel vulnerable because we are strong, we live here and we work, study, get ahead” (Wald, 2011a, p. 5). It is problematic for ES/ESI programs to make assumptions about the communities in which they serve. Describing the communities as in need of salvation with participation in the ES/ESI program trumpeted as the only solution is self-serving and elitist.

As co-directors, Dr. Burns and I not only work to honor the individual students in the ensemble, but we also recognize the diverse cultures represented by the families of its participants. Parents are invited to observe rehearsals and, in some cases, they also participate. Regularly, the parents in attendance during rehearsal get to play the role of audience as the children imagine themselves in the actual performance. During the “informances” at the conclusion of each semester, parents are included in the show through requests to demonstrate dance moves for the choir to mimic during their song, opportunities for the kids to quiz the audience on various rhythmic or solfege patterns, and through the chance to ask questions about instruments being utilized or songs being performed.

Another way of honoring the various cultures represented in the ensemble is through the potluck meals that follow the “informances.” Food is an important part of a family’s heritage no matter where they are from, but it is one of the greatest ways that families in southern Louisiana commune with each other and find common ground. Whether it is through a crawfish boil at a local church; a wedding reception with fried catfish, boudin balls, and a zydeco band; or a simple
family gathering on a Monday evening with a pot of red beans and rice, food unites southern Louisianians in a way that nothing else can. Families take pride in sharing their food and their recipes as it represents a piece of who they are. Walking through the food line during the potluck meals and surveying all of the different offerings, tasting and talking with all of the families present, and asking about/commenting on the delicious dishes is a powerful way Kids’ Choir shows appreciation for the diversity present.

To further acknowledge the importance of the cultural diversity present in Kids’ Choir, the students are given many opportunities to share information about their families, their culture, their perspectives, and their experiences throughout the rehearsal. This contribution comes in the form of writing activities, questions, partner and/or group collaborations, and conversations before and after rehearsal. As co-directors, we make sure to listen to students as they share, understanding that they bring such important cultural resources—information, ideas, and perspectives. By increasing students’ awareness of the power they possess through their contributions of these resources, students are further empowered. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) coined the term “funds of knowledge” to describe the “ample cultural and cognitive resources” (p. 134) present in households of any socioeconomic status. The researchers identified these resources as having “great, potential utility for classroom instruction” (p. 134, emphasis in original).

Dr. Burns and I also emphasize the importance of students listening to each other, allowing each person the opportunity to share without obstruction. Teaching students to listen to understand, rather than listening to solve or respond reinforces the idea that everyone present has something important to contribute.
Privileging Western classical music. In conjunction with the salvation narrative, researchers’ criticisms identified ES/ESI programs claiming to fill the communities’ “cultural void” through the programs’ use of Western classical music (Baker, 2016; Bates, 2014; Fink, 2016; Hunt, 2014; Logan, 2016; Shieh, 2015). Logan (2016) described this approach as “cultural domination” where adopting middle-class culture is viewed as “steps away from under-achievement and deviancy and steps up the social ladder” (p. 60). Bates (2014) expressed a similar sentiment, deeming it “cultural colonization of local people and places” (p. 310). Western classical music is regularly associated with the middle- and upper-class and has connections with colonialism. By privileging music with negative socio-historical contexts and ignoring a majority of all other musics, ES/ESI programs are reinforcing an elitist agenda in the communities they serve.

As referenced in the “Kids’ Choir Context” section of Chapter One, we are proactive in our efforts to program diverse literature representing various genres and cultures. In addition, we purposely include engagement with the musics’ histories and contexts. Students are made aware of the musics’ location of origin, the translation of the text (if necessary), the possible meanings of the text, and any other pertinent information based on the specificities of the piece itself. We do not privilege any one type of music, other than ensuring the pieces are appropriate for the age and skill level of the ensemble. Pieces that we view as highly beneficial to the ensemble, but out of reach due to difficulty, are sometimes lightly arranged in order to make them more attainable.

Kids’ Choir is also responsive to local musical cultures, continually working to fully recognize the importance of and to celebrate the music practices of southern Louisiana—its past, present, and future. The students have been given opportunities to recognize, respond to, and
interact with Cajun, Acadian, and Creole music as well as jazz, blues, spirituals, and other Louisiana folk musics. Kids’ Choir members have also collaborated with local musicians specializing in various Louisiana musical genres.

**Discord stemming from dual aims of social development and musical excellence.** ESI programs have a dual mission to develop its members both socially and musically; however, researchers have found that achieving excellence in musical development requires sacrifices in social development (Baker, 2012, 2014; Borchert, 2012; Majno, 2012). The staff are hired based on musicianship and not social development skills. Once hired, professional development focusing on activities and approaches to increase students’ social development are rarely provided. The programs also tend to recognize musical achievements over social development achievements (Borchert, 2012) with great emphasis placed on producing a high level of performance with popular appeal (Majno, 2012). While assessing musical achievement is much more objective than assessing social development, programs claiming to provide both should be held accountable through some type of evaluation process.

While Kids’ Choir directors are also hired for our level of musicianship, a strong background in education is required as well. Through our coursework in education and music education, and our previous teaching experience in school settings (currently totaling 22 years of combined public school teaching experience), we are able to provide a balanced approach to music making, incorporating both musical development and social development. We avoid creating a culture of competition, understanding that this approach can serve to divide the class into winners and losers. We instead utilize a team mentality. While all students are working to achieve the same goal, some may reach it sooner than others. It is everyone’s responsibility to
offer assistance and help to ensure that no one is left behind. Individual students are measured by his/her previous achievements, not the achievements of others in the ensemble. As co-directors, we are also committed to the inclusion of social development activities and understand that not all pedagogical approaches are created equal in those terms. Therefore, we purposely stray from typical hierarchical ensemble rehearsal approaches, preferring approaches that allow for teacher to student and student to student interaction and collaboration.

**Undermining school music programs.** Several researchers have criticized ES/ESI programs for undermining school music programs (Allan, 2010; Kenny & Moore, 2011; Morin, 2014). One obvious way is that community music programs of any kind create competition for funding, student participation, and community support (Allan, 2010). ES/ESI programs also tend to hire expert musicians as full-time teachers and/or guest artists while under-utilizing local music educators (Kenny & Moore, 2011). Finally, two separate studies from Ireland and Canada identified a tension between ES/ESI programs and school music program curricula, noting that the aims of the ES/ESI programs did not always integrate well with the goals of school music programs (Kenny & Moore, 2011; Morin, 2014).

Kids’ Choir, while essentially creating competition for funding, student participation, and community support, has always celebrated and continues to strengthen its connection with local schools. Last summer, I organized a professional development session, free of charge, to any area music educator at the elementary or middle school level. The session was sanctioned by the local school system as an official professional development opportunity for the teachers, allowing them to leave their campuses for the event. During the session, teachers were able to introduce themselves, share information about their programs and their goals for the future, and chat
informally as they enjoyed a box lunch provided by Kids’ Choir. They also received pamphlets and flyers with information about Kids’ Choir and other Kids’ Orchestra programs and how they and/or their students could become involved. Following the opening portion, attendees experienced a workshop on African drumming and improvisation led by a current LSU graduate student originally from Uganda. At the conclusion of the event, the teachers were all entered into a raffle where several were selected to receive prizes including a wall-sized notepad with a selection of colored markers, a music software program, and an authentic djembe.

The Kids’ Choir directors, despite having changed personnel over the years, have always had either a past or current local music educator on staff. In doing so, the goals of local music educators have always been at the core of what Kids’ Choir strives for. In the future, the Kids’ staff hopes to engage with school music programs in more direct ways through shared learning experiences and performances. As for funding, Kids’ Orchestra is a non-profit organization funded partially by student tuition, but mainly by grants. State funding of school music programs would never be affected due to Kids’ Orchestra. The Kids’ Orchestra organization has always viewed itself as an extension and supporter of school music programs, not as a replacement or substitute for them. In Chapter Six, “Portraits of Three Participants,” I include information about three choristers’ school music experiences and how they relate to the Kids’ Choir experience.

**Lack of community impact.** Due to their design, ES/ESI programs have been faulted for making little to no impact on the surrounding community. By requiring students to be on-site for many hours a week, they are disconnected from their families and surrounding communities. While providing a positive and consistent experience for children to engage in during out-of-
school hours, the organization does not seek to provide outreach to the larger community (Shieh, 2015). As a result, they are criticized for having self-serving intentions and failing to appreciate, undergird, and utilize the resources available to them locally.

Kids’ Orchestra’s mission to positively impact the surrounding community has resulted in it being driven from the grassroots. We, as Kids’ Choir directors, especially, work to be responsive to local community needs through the decisions we make. Rehearsal times were selected based on the needs of working parents and traffic patterns in Baton Rouge, and a rehearsal location was chosen based on its centrality in the community. Awareness of financial difficulties for Kids’ Choir families led to our providing uniform t-shirts and maintaining flexibility regarding what students wear in addition to the t-shirt. In our role as co-directors, Dr. Burns and I also offer assistance if there are still financial issues when securing uniform items. Before confirming performance commitments, we make sure that the schedule is not overly demanding for singers and their parents. We also provide all performance information early in the semester so that parents have ample time to make necessary arrangements.

In response to a multicultural and pluralistic surrounding community, we also attempt to incorporate global ideas into our lessons while still celebrating the uniqueness of the local context. DeSilva and Sharp (2013) coined the term “glocalization” to describe this type of approach. They stated that adaptations of El Sistema may require glocalization at the national and state levels as well as at a more “micro” level within communities. Kids’ Orchestra would not exist without the strong community partnerships at the heart of the organization. In the next chapter, I address the perceived values and benefits of participation in Kids’ Choir as they relate
to the manifestation of the Kids’ Orchestra philosophy, highlighting the emergent themes of resilience through holistic education and a cycle of giving.
Chapter 5: The Perceived Values and Benefits of Participation in Kids’ Choir

In analyzing the data concerning the perceived values and benefits of participation in Kids’ Choir, two main themes emerged, each with three subthemes. The first main theme, resilience through holistic education, is supported by three subthemes: (1) increased confidence, (2) maturity development, and (3) social development. The second main theme, a cycle of giving, is supported by three subthemes: (1) access, (2) encouraging acceptance and compassion, and (3) community education and enrichment.

Resilience through Holistic Education

The concept of resilience—“the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties” (Resilience, n.d.)—emerged in the data analysis. Participants highlighted instances of misfortune and/or change for choristers: relocating from a different country, dealing with bullying at school, acclimating from home schooling to a large group activity, grieving for lost loved ones, and adjusting to new family dynamics when siblings move away. No matter the severity of the experience, all participants found comfort and strength in their Kids’ Choir family, resulting in an individual resilience not present prior to their involvement in the ensemble. The American Psychological Association’s Task Force on Resilience and Strength in Black Children and Adolescents (2008) described a portrait of resilience encompassing four themes: (1) critical mindedness to protect against discrimination and understand social conditions; (2) active engagement through positively impacting their environment in school, at home, and with peers; (3) flexibility to adapt to situational demands such as fluency across multiple cultural contexts; and (4) communalism by understanding the importance of social bonds and connection within
and across diverse groups (pp. 2-3). The data from this study resonate with the aforementioned portrait of resilience.

Holistic education began to take form as a recognizable field of study and practice in the mid-1980s in North America (Miller, 2004). It addresses the broadest development of the whole person at the cognitive and affective levels (Singh, 1996). Forbes (2003) stated that the goals of holistic education include: (1) educating the whole child (all parts of the child), (2) educating the student as a whole (not an assemblage of parts), and (3) seeing the child as part of a whole (society, humanity, the environment, some spiritual whole, etc.) from which it is not meaningful to extract the student (p. 2). Three categories emerged which highlight participants’ increased development of resilience through holistic education: (1) increased confidence, (2) maturity development, and (3) social development.

**Increased confidence.** Increased confidence surfaced in the analysis as a major area contributing to the development of resilience through holistic education. Participants from all groups (choristers, parents, staff, and teachers) commented on an increased confidence for themselves/choristers in the ensemble. Dr. Burns, one of the ensemble directors, described this confidence development as an opportunity for the choristers to fail at something, be given another chance to succeed, and to improve the next time. She stated, “that kind of learning cycle for students I think is super important, especially if they've come from maybe a home life where it doesn’t change and get better—they don't see it that way.”

Participants recounted a number of specific instances of increased confidence, illustrated through choristers’ involvement in various aspects of the ensemble including rehearsal activities, performance experiences, and performance opportunities outside of the ensemble. In rehearsal,
the ensemble members were regularly asked to complete activities in either small groups or individually. When students participate individually, it is typically on a volunteer basis; however, over time the students become very comfortable with the directors and their fellow singers and eventually every student is eager to volunteer for solo-type activities. They learn that there is strength in vulnerability. Ms. Castillo, one of the ensemble pianists, described her perception of this phenomenon: ”with the music, you’re asking them to come up with ideas and not only the songs, but in warm-ups and in all activities, they create and they help to come up with ideas.” She viewed this as a way for them to “[overcome] when they are shy so if they have to speak during class or they have to create something or they have to do gestures . . . it creates confidence.”

Performances offer unique experiences for choristers to step into the role of a professional musician/performer and encounter the struggles and fears that are a part of that process. With students this age (2nd grade through 5th grade), performances are a combination of a number of “firsts.” Many have never been in a performance venue as an audience member or performer. Others may have never been in front of an audience where they were asked to sing and do choreography. The addition of stage lighting and applause engages their senses in new and sometimes distracting ways as well. As with any new experience, the process of completing it with a certain degree of success leads to a reduction of apprehension when asked to approach it again. Peter, one of the choristers, described a performance experience and the resulting satisfaction:

When I first walk on the stage, I’m kinda nervous because all the people out there are looking. I'm kinda nervous. Then, when we start singing, I start to not get nervous that much and then at the end of the song I’m like, “I did it! Yes!”
Another chorister, Simone, described it perfectly:

What’s challenging about being in [Kids’ Choir] is that we be pressured to have to be like the best, but that’s kind of good so that way when you are later in life and you’re being pressured for something you can think back and be like, “Yea. I remember being pressured like this before.” So, you already be getting it.

This echoes Dr. Burns’ discussion of the learning cycle. Overcoming nervousness through the process of performing successfully results in increased confidence—not only for future performances, but also for life in general.

Two parents of choristers described events in which they were surprised by the level of confidence displayed by their children in performance opportunities outside of Kids’ Choir. Mrs. Paulus mentioned that both of her children were not involved in the children’s choir at their church, but recently volunteered to sing a duet during one of the services. She recounted the event: “They were not shy. They just got up there and sung and engaged the audience and I was like, ‘Wow!’ Ya know?” This led her to enroll her son, Peter, in a music theater camp the following summer. Another mother of a chorister, Mrs. Shelton, shared an example of her son’s increased confidence where the entire family was at a community event:

They had a talent show—a karaoke. He said, “Mommy, I wanna go up there and sing.” I’m like, “You know, you have the time.” So he actually went up there and started singing. He had to read the song and whatnot. It was about 20 adults and kids and when he did it I was like, “Oh my god! He can actually sing and his voice, whatever.” So, he ended up winning. They gave him $40 and now Jamal is like, “I want to do this some more. I can win money.”

These events highlight the parents’ surprise at their child’s increase in confidence evidenced by successful solo public performances. Both parents attributed this increase in confidence to their child’s involvement in Kids’ Choir. Developing confidence falls within the goal of holistic education to educate the whole child. Through this increased confidence, participants develop a
stronger sense of resilience, allowing them to more quickly recover from the challenges they face in their day-to-day lives.

**Maturity development.** In addition to increased confidence, maturity development is another aspect contributing to the development of resilience through holistic education in choristers. The evidence for maturity development manifests itself in a variety of ways. One father of a chorister, Mr. Barthel, noted that his goal when enrolling his daughter in Kids’ Choir was to develop her as a whole person with the hopes that through diverse learning experiences, she matures into a well-rounded adult. He tries to expose her to as many different types of activities as possible to assist in her development. Her experience at school is focused on academics so he seeks opportunities for her to be involved with sports, music, art, etc. He was excited when Kids’ Choir became an option because it offered another avenue toward that development.

Another father of a chorister, Mr. Choi, described an increase in his son’s emotional maturity. Emotional maturity “reflects increased emotional adjustment and emotional stability and the attainment of emotional self-regulation” (Shamsudheen, Appu, & Appu, 2017). In the previous year, Mr. Choi and his entire family had moved to the United States from Beijing, China. Mr. Choi noticed an abnormal amount of anger in his son following the relocation. After joining Kids’ Choir, he noticed that his son was much calmer and less angry. He believed it to be a result of his son’s experience in the ensemble. His son’s ability to manage his emotional state, while still developing, was positively influenced through his Kids’ Choir involvement.
Another way Kids’ Choir seemed to impact choristers’ maturity development was through an increased sense of independence outside the ensemble. Mr. Barthel described it in terms of his daughter, Jasmine, making choices and asserting herself more at home:

She’s more independent in terms of, you know, she knows what she wants now as opposed to like when she was younger and she would ask, “Daddy, I’m hungry. Can I eat?” Now, she's like, “I’m hungry. I wanna eat.” “OK. What do you wanna eat?” Then, she fixes it. As opposed to when she was younger and like what do you want and she just shrugs her shoulders like I don’t know. It’s like now she’s more, I think she gets out of her shell now just because I think she gets exposed and that’s I think the reality of being an only child that you really tend to be spoiled by your parents and stuff, but with other kids she’s like, “Oh, they’re doing it. Why can’t I do it?”

I noticed Jasmine’s transformation, personally, as she progressed across the year in the ensemble. She entered an extremely shy, quiet, and introverted little girl and gradually blossomed into a more social being, willing to volunteer to play percussion during certain activities. The fact that she was an only child magnified the impact of her Kids’ Choir experience on her maturity development.

Mr. Sharp, one of the Kids’ Orchestra staff members, shared a similar sentiment pertaining to the choristers’ maturity development, specifically citing one of the benefits of the program due to its existence outside of school hours:

It offers them the chance to be unique, to be more than just a number, or just another body in a seat. Ya know, they’re actually getting to interact one on one with their teachers and we are seeing the individualities in them. They’re eccentricities are popping out through these one-on-one, unique interactions that they get to have with us that they don’t get to have during their normal school day.

The experience choristers are able to have with adults/teachers in Kids’ Choir contrasts with their experience they are able to have with adults/teachers at school for a number of reasons. For one, the rehearsals—while still having structure, procedures, and guidelines—tend to have a more
relaxed appearance due to the type of activities, the encouraged interaction between choristers, and the environment itself (a large, carpeted, multipurpose room outfitted with chairs, a table, and a keyboard with large windows to a treed area). The choristers also have a different relationship with the directors because there is time before and after rehearsal to engage with students and their parents/guardians on a personal level. Finally, the lack of a formal grading system reduces the effects of an hierarchical structure present in most school settings. This contrasting Kids’ Choir experience contributes to the students’ maturity development.

The Kids’ Choir experience also seems to play a role in the choristers’ goals for themselves as developing young adults committed to music. Many spoke of continuing musical activities in middle school and high school, but there were also comments regarding their musical goals into adulthood. Simone specifically mentioned that her experience in Kids’ Choir has inspired her to audition at Juilliard. She believed her involvement had given her a lot of singing and performance experience and would help her in that future pursuit. Jasmine was overcome by a choir performance with a university orchestra. She later had a conversation with her father about it:

She even asked, “Like, dad, if I practice well, could I be in the orchestra?” and I say, “Yea and you could go around the world performing if you’re really, really good. You know that could be your job and even with the singing you know,” although she’s like, “I don’t think I’m gonna go there yet,” but, you know, something to think about and to look forward to.

I was reminded of the choristers’ youth and the early phase of development they were still in when I asked Penelope, one of the singers, whether Kids’ Choir had an impact on her. She simply stated, “Had an impact on me? I don’t know. I don’t think I’ll ever know. It’s just weird.” This research provides countless pieces of evidence highlighting the profound impact Kids’ Choir
participation has on its singers and the community; however, it is interesting to note that the children themselves find it very difficult to identify specific ways participation impacts them. Maturity development, as a part of holistic education, further contributes to the students’ development of resilience.

**Social development.** Along with increased confidence and maturity development, social development also played a role in the students’ evolving formation of resilience. Social development occurred in Kids’ Choir through the characteristic of resourcefulness. Resourcefulness can mean knowing when to reach out for help, who to reach out to, and how to navigate that interaction. For children between the ages of seven and eleven, this type of interaction is either completely foreign to them or in some phase of infancy, still developing. The Kids’ Choir environment provided opportunities for students to cultivate positive social interactions between student and student and between student and director through questioning, interactive activities, and built-in time for informal conversations. In an ensemble where most students attend schools with children of similar backgrounds or are homeschooled, the chance for them to engage with students of diverse backgrounds in a setting which strives for the achievement of group goals is invaluable. Dr. Burns spoke to this idea:

> I see them interacting better and more fully and with different kids. . . . They’re not just staying with kids from their school or whatever it may be and so I think that social piece still has a ways to go, but again I think it’s taken a step, in what I would say is a fruitful direction.

One example of this interaction occurred as members of the ensemble were gathering for rehearsal one Monday evening. The weather had been temperamental all day, resulting in horrible traffic conditions. With only two minutes until rehearsal was supposed to begin, there
were only two singers present. Dr. Burns and I were discussing something at the front of the room and the two girls decided to start a clapping game with a song. As Dr. Burns and I continued to chat, I inconspicuously observed the two girls’ interactions as one of them taught the other the song and the clapping pattern. As more singers arrived, the girls called them over until there was a small circle seated on the floor of about seven or eight members. With each addition, the players became immersed in the experience and learned the game by rote. There were never any issues with the fact that the group was mixed between boys and girls or private school, public school, magnet school, and homeschool students or Black, White, Hispanic, and Asian students; they were perfectly content teaching, learning, and playing together without any adult supervision whatsoever. Dr. Burns and I allowed the game to go well into the beginning of rehearsal since the importance of the interaction was obvious.

Despite the difficulties people have discussing race and ethnicity, one parent reiterated this idea, albeit with some difficulty, by stating, “She’s just got to get used to different cultures. I mean you have different, like, I don’t know. Just getting along with other kids, too.” Even though she did not fully explain her thoughts, the sentiment is clear. She believed her daughter needed to interact with children of different backgrounds and Kids’ Choir provided that opportunity.

Mr. Sharp described the process of social development he observed in the students as a whole:

They go from kids who are more socially interested in themselves in a selfish way and also, as an age thing, they’re only interested in students their own age and they’re only worried about their own problems and they go to actually interacting with kids who are two, three grades apart and they are talking about what’s happening in each other’s lives instead of in their lives.
This awareness of humanity outside the bounds of themselves is the first step to becoming part of an interconnected community—specifically, one that is able to support its members through difficult times.

While interviewing the two pianists for Kids’ Choir during the time of this research, it became clear that they were in a unique position to observe interactions between the students due to the fact that they were present for all of the events, but not in the same type of leadership role as the directors. They were able to monitor the ensemble from the side without influencing the environment since they were a constant fixture in the rehearsals and performances. Ms. Castillo recalled a time when the students were asked to complete a theory worksheet. She noticed they were working together and helping each other through the activity. She sensed the students had developed good relationships with each other.

Mr. Garcia, another pianist, noticed that students would support each other as they were learning new music. He specifically cited an example when one student was singing a phrase incorrectly. He noticed the student sitting next to her say, “It’s this and the melody goes like this and not that.” He was happy to see one of the children correcting another one “in a good way, like being discreet, ya know, so I think that’s a very good, good thing.” Mr. Garcia also discussed the student’s social development through their involvement in activities during rehearsal that allow them to express their individuality. Regularly, the students are given opportunities to lead an activity or perform something in front of the ensemble. Mr. Garcia observed that some singers are very eager to get in front of the group while others are more reserved. However, he believed seeing their fellow singers excel in front of the group encouraged the less eager students to volunteer.
They don’t know who they are yet, so yea, so, but I think you manage it in a good way because you do some activities that puts them in front of the others, puts them to conduct, puts them to sing and they like, they like to go there and shine. Some of them don’t, some of them are afraid of that, but very few. . . . You offer this to all of them so at the same time that they feel like they are shining at that moment, they know that in two minutes, their colleague will be there, too, doing the same thing.

Kids’ Choir is designed to allow students that are interested a chance to step into the spotlight, while others can remain in the background. Yet, they all contribute to the same culminating performance. Mr. Garcia described the balancing of individual student comfort levels and the resulting support system it creates:

Some of them want to appear more, some of them want to stay in their place, some of them barely talk, but at the end of the day, they all have to sing the same music, they all have to do the same thing, and together, one depending on the other to do it. It’s a good thing, but it’s challenging for them because of their own ways of life.

By providing equal opportunities for students to participate at varying degrees of involvement, the ensemble experience encourages students to take more risks in social settings, leading to a more collaborative and socialized approach to life.

Several Kids’ Orchestra staff members and directors mentioned the benefit of learning how to “fit in” or how to be “part of a whole,” but one parent, Mrs. Paulus, noted the opportunities for discovery and creativity Kids’ Choir provides. She stated, “It’s not always about singing. They’re all just learning together, exploring, and having fun together.” School is highly structured: minimal breaks, test prep, tutoring, and direct instruction during class time. Kids’ Choir supports and nurtures kids being kids. They get the chance to make up a dance move with a new friend and create a rhythm with their body and draw an image that comes to mind when singing a folk song. Social development through holistic educational approaches is another way that resilience is strengthened through participation in Kids’ Choir. Students are attracted to
the positive musical interactions with others and the enjoyment of being a part of something that feels important... human. The next section highlights the second broad theme, a cycle of giving, that emerged during data analysis.

A Cycle of Giving

Analysis of the data revealed benefits to all parties involved with Kids’ Choir (students, parents, teachers, and community members). In addition, participants speculated and held aspirations for benefits to society as a whole. Evidence of this cycle of giving—i.e. the community giving to Kids’ Choir and Kids’ Choir, in turn, giving back to the community—manifested itself in many ways. The three categories in which the cycle was most prevalent were (1) access, (2) encouraging acceptance and compassion, and (3) community education and enrichment. Each of the three categories supporting a cycle of giving begin with a narrative vignette that highlights an important moment in the life of the Kids’ Choir ensemble. The vignettes are designed to fully immerse the reader in the Kids’ Choir experience—the sights, sounds, smells, textures, and even tastes associated with the ensemble.

Access.

Vignette 1: Concert Spectacular. In mid-December, I received an email from Dr. Gilbert, Professor of Jazz Studies at Louisiana State University. For several years, he had been in charge of putting on a variety show highlighting the performance groups in the School of Music called “Concert Spectacular.” He was in the middle of composing an arrangement of “Let There Be Peace On Earth” to serve as a finale for the concert and had an idea: “I wonder if I could find a group of children from the community to perform with the university ensembles for the finale.” His email highlighted all of the above information and concluded with an invitation for Kids’
Choir to be that group of children. I became nervous and excited simultaneously. The choir had never performed for such a prestigious and highly attended event. In addition, they would be singing with the auditioned, advanced university choral ensemble and the full university orchestra. They would be highlighted individually during one section of the piece and the remainder would be an “all stops pulled” climactic presentation from every musician on stage. After weighing the pros and cons, Dr. Burns and I decided it would be in the best interest of the ensemble to accept the gig.

I began preparing a rehearsal plan for the spring to incorporate time each week devoted to the piece for the concert. In preparation for the performance, it was challenging for the students to visualize the final product since rehearsals were held in their typical rehearsal space and their singing was accompanied by a recorded version of the piece played by an old-school boombox. The dress rehearsal offered a glimpse of what was to come, but still did not compare to the reality of the actual performance.

On the night of the performance, the newly renovated, state-of-the-art theater was standing room only—1,269 seats. While waiting for the finale in the holding room, the kids played board games and chatted with the college students in the advanced choral ensemble. There was a palpable energy in the room as we neared performance time. During the penultimate number, the students were led through a maze of underground halls and stairwells until they reached the stage right wing and quietly awaited their cue to take the stage. The performance was glorious. While conducting, I became overwhelmed at the experience of seeing all the kids perform alongside musicians that had chosen to dedicate their lives to the art of performance and for an appreciative audience representing the surrounding community. I could see how proud the
students were as they made their way off the stage. They walked with an air of confidence as they fielded compliments and high-fives from various performers and members of the audience.

Access for all. Having any type of connection to Kids’ Choir resulted in some form of access. Mr. Thraves, a Kids’ Orchestra staff member, boiled the entire experience of Kids’ Choir down to this one word—access. He stated it was essentially “accessibility to strong teachers educationally, hearing good music, being around great community members, and then being able to share that stuff with people through community performances, site concerts, all that stuff.”

For students, it was access to quality music education provided by highly skilled music educators, rich and varied musical experiences through rehearsals and community performances, and interactions with students of varied backgrounds and diverse music literature resulting in greater cultural understanding. Parents gained access to a segment of the community—musicians and music-lovers—many had not interacted with previously. Teachers gained access to students, allowing them to put into practice their skills as educators. They also developed relationships with community members that support Kids’ Orchestra that then, in turn, support the teachers when seeking music professionals to satisfy certain needs.

Dr. Burns spoke specifically about the access students were able to gain to teachers at various levels of development. Other than the two Kids’ Choir directors (both highly qualified music educators with advanced degrees), the ensemble regularly welcomed visiting artists to collaborate during rehearsals. During this research alone, four guest artists with different skill levels and backgrounds participated in rehearsals—two students working on their undergraduate degrees in music education, one PhD student from Uganda with a background in world drumming, and one music education professor specializing in elementary general methods. These
guest artists added to the richness of the ensemble experience through their diverse backgrounds and offerings. The two undergraduate students were able to visit several times and led the ensemble through various warm-ups, rhythm and sight-singing activities, and songs with choreography. The PhD student planned an entire rehearsal around storytelling, dancing, improvisation, singing, and playing countless African percussion instruments. The music education professor led the ensemble for an entire rehearsal as well, incorporating activities focused on dancing, singing, chanting, movement, and even creating a soundtrack for a black and white Charlie Chaplin film. Reflecting on the experiences the children were able to have with the guest artists, Dr. Burns stated:

I think it’s really good that they can experience other people and other ways of teaching and other musics and see that people are excited to meet them, to work with them, and they can do what they’re asking them to do. They’ll often ask about those people, which I think is pretty neat.

Accessibility to teachers with such diverse backgrounds provided a highly enriching experience for students involved in the ensemble.

**Access through performances.** In addition to the guest artists, students and parents gained access to new and varied musical experiences in the community. During this research, the ensemble performed five times for different gatherings of people. Two of the performances were site concerts, meaning they took place in the same space as the rehearsals. As co-directors of the ensemble, Dr. Burns and I recognized that students were very comfortable in the space and that many of the parents had observed rehearsals there in the past. We took full advantage of the site concerts as opportunities to not only have the ensemble perform for the audience, but also to allow the audience a chance to see the process by which learning occurred.
The choral ensemble also participated in a Kids’ Orchestra performance, involving students from the instrumental ensembles at various other sites as well. This performance was held in a large middle school auditorium, which was practically full, and gave the students a chance to display what they had learned for other parents and community members. It was handled more like a traditional choir, band, and orchestra performance in that various ensembles made their way on and off the stage in an organized manner and performed three to five pieces.

The Kids’ Choir ensemble was invited to perform at two special events during this research—a fundraising breakfast for Kids’ Orchestra and a variety show organized by the local university to highlight the many performance ensembles in the School of Music. The fundraising breakfast was held at a local banquet hall and catered by a well-known Baton Rouge company. In attendance were a number of people from local school boards, educators, university representatives, philanthropists, the East Baton Rouge Parish School System superintendent, the Mayor of Baton Rouge, and even the Governor of Louisiana himself. The students marched into the dining area in the style of a second line¹, tossing beads to the audience and following a number of traditional New Orleans jazz instrumentalists. They performed two pieces and then made their way to a holding space where parents could retrieve them. The experience was very positive and the students were giddy that they were able to perform for the governor. When asked if the Kids’ Choir experience was what she expected it to be prior to participating, one singer, Ashley, stated, “I had thought we were just going to sing songs and have concerts and stuff, but I

¹. The term “second line” comes from the New Orleans brass band tradition. The main line consists of the actual performers in the parade, while the second line is made up of the people following behind the parade, enjoying the music and dancing. It has been called the “quintessential New Orleans art form” (Baum, 2009).
didn’t know that we were going to like perform for the governor!” Mrs. Payton, one of the Kids’ Choir parents, described a similar sentiment:

The experiences, especially the different activities, y’all have—getting to go and perform in front of different people especially like the mayor and all that stuff—to her, it’s just exciting to be able to see new people. . . They can be outside of school or go different places and feel involved with the community, so I like that part.

This connection to the community was mentioned numerous times by adult participants in the study. It is clear teachers, staff members, and parents have a strong desire for the singers to develop an identity within the community—one that both serves the students and the community itself:

The impact of access. It wasn’t until I began the interview process for this project that I became fully aware of the extent of the impact of this event on the singers and their families. Mrs. Shelton commented specifically on the exposure to different types of music:

When he was with the LSU performance at the Union, he was like really amazed and then he was excited to see other people singing, different types of singing—you know, just—how can I describe it—I guess different forms of like jazz, like opera-type singing and then they had music being made with instruments. . . . Those were benefits for him to see other things.

Mr. Barthel echoed this idea, expanding it to include the heightened senses present and emotional impact of the performance on his daughter:

And I’m glad you expose them like when we went to the LSU performance. That’s her first time singing in a concert with the orchestra and I think she was like, “Wow, dad! You know, that’s really neat.” I know she’s exposed to violin and all that stuff, but she was like, “Wow! The orchestra sounded great.” Those experiences we never could have imagined that we’d get to be part of. That’s something new to her eyes, ears, all the senses and she appreciated that. She was like giddy and happy when she went on the stage. So, kudos to you guys for exposing her to that. That’s just something different that you don’t get to go to everyday.
Mrs. Hart, another parent of a chorister, described the event as an “experience for our family.” She explained that they had never been to the theater on campus before and expressed how beautiful they found it to be. She concluded, “It was nice just enjoying it so that gives us something different. Hey, we got something else that we can go to. I really enjoyed it.” Mr. Thraves beautifully described the connection between access and community, stating, “It’s access to something that is part of the community, that manifests in community. . . . I think that’s the essence of a lot of it. And it’s as simple as that and as complex and magical as that.”

Encouraging acceptance and compassion.

Vignette 2: “Shake the Papaya Down.” In the spring semester, our pianist from the fall ended up taking a more demanding job and we were left to find a replacement for her. As luck would have it, her boyfriend at the time, Mr. Garcia, was also a pianist working on his doctorate in piano performance. Mr. Garcia was a native Brazilian with shoulder-length brown hair, slightly dark skin, and a noticeable accent. He had worked as a pianist for a children’s choir in Brazil prior to coming to the United States. After meeting him in person, Dr. Burns and I decided he would be a wonderful addition to the Kids’ Choir team. When spring rehearsals began, the students immediately attached themselves to him. They were constantly at the piano before and after rehearsal pleading for the “Piano Man” to play things for them or begging to push a key themselves. While a part of this fascination probably stemmed from their curiosity about the piano, a larger part had to do with Mr. Garcia’s likable personality and his gift for interacting with children of this age.

For the final concert of the year, Dr. Burns and I selected a piece in the style of a calypso titled, “Shake the Papaya Down,” arranged by Ruth Dwyer and Judith Waller. As with all of the
pieces she and I programmed, we spent time talking about the text and specifically discussed the
origin of papayas and how they grow. The students were fascinated when we projected images of
papaya trees on the wall and they gasped when we showed them an image of a papaya that had
been sliced open. They were shocked at how orange the flesh was and how black the seeds were.
Dr. Burns, Mr. Garcia, and I chatted that evening after rehearsal about bringing real papayas in
and letting the kids taste them. Mr. Garcia commented on the prevalence of papayas in Brazil and
how common it was for him to eat them as a child.

At the next rehearsal, Dr. Burns brought two papayas in a bag with plates and napkins. In
the middle of the rehearsal, prior to singing “Shake the Papaya Down,” we stopped and had the
kids gather around the table. Dr. Burns pulled the papayas out and Mr. Garcia talked about the
papayas and demonstrated how to cut them. The students were in a frenzy over the foreign fruit
before them. Mr. Garcia and Dr. Burns passed out small segments of the fruit on plates while I
took pictures of the interactions. All of the kids wanted to make sure they got to hold one of the
small, black seeds from the center of the fruit. A few of them decided they would take a seed
home and try to plant it in their backyard, in hopes that the tiniest sprout of green would emerge
and eventually become a full grown papaya tree. Through this sharing of cultures, the students
experienced a new piece of music, had an intimate interaction with an unknown food, and
learned more about the “Piano Man,” their talented Brazilian friend.

Honoring ensemble and music diversity. In addition to providing access, participation in
Kids’ Choir encourages acceptance and compassion for people of similar and different
backgrounds. As expressed in the Kids’ Orchestra mission statement at the time of this research,
one goal of the organization was to “develop understanding.” While several of the Kids’
Orchestra staff members admitted that developing understanding was a rather vague component of the mission statement, they each defined it as relating to social development/change. Kids’ Choir worked to achieve this goal through a variety of approaches. The makeup of the ensemble itself helped encourage students’ acceptance of and compassion for people from different backgrounds than their own. Kids’ Choir membership included students from low SES to middle SES, students attending public schools, magnet schools, private schools, charter schools, and being homeschooled, and students representing Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, and mixed heritage. This combination of students with diverse backgrounds coming together weekly to sing, dance, play instruments, and work toward common goals was the largest contributor to the students’ development of acceptance and compassion.

In addition, the directors strived to choose literature from various cultures in the world in order to expand the students’ knowledge and perspective to include things outside of their typical experience. During this research, the ensemble practiced and performed two Puerto Rican folk songs, several Ugandan folk songs, a traditional Ghanaian song, an American spiritual with Christmas text, a vocal jazz piece with scatting, a Cajun folk song, and a Calypso song (plus several others). Time was always set aside in rehearsals to discuss the background of the pieces and explore textual interpretations.

_Creating better citizens through acceptance and compassion._ The concept of bringing people together is a common theme in the Kids’ Orchestra organization. Dr. Eisman, a Kids’ Orchestra staff member, described the goal of the organization as not to produce the next great famous musician, but rather to “create better citizens. We’re trying to cross the racial divide,
cross socioeconomic divides, ya know, get kids together.” He went on, detailing his beliefs on inspiring social change through the organization:

They learn how to be human beings, first and foremost. . . . It’s more important to be a good musician than to be a good trombone player and it’s more important to be a good person than to be a good musician. . . . First and foremost, they learn how to be better human beings.

Mr. Thraves spoke about the ripple effect that occurs when students leave an organization having been changed for the better:

I also like to think that anyone that’s leaving us, Kids’ Choir or Kids’ Orchestra, is that they leave us being better people, people that wanna share what music is with other people. I think sharing and providing access to other people that weren’t with us, with what they experienced, and then maybe that carries down to someone else that hasn't had access and maybe would look us up or try to be involved somehow. They become ambassadors of what we are here.

The data from this study support Mr. Thraves’ comments about Kids’ Choir’s ability to reach beyond the scope of its participants to people peripherally connected to the ensemble. Interviews with parents and choristers revealed several examples of students’ music-making outside of the ensemble in various community settings and the resulting impact on people with no attachment to the organization. This positive impact contributes to the development of good citizens throughout the community who become more aware of the accepting and compassionate nature of the children involved.

Community education and enrichment.

Vignette 3: Chicken, and pizza, and cake balls . . . oh, my! Dr. Burns and I decided early on in the spring semester that our concert in May would be more of an “informance” than a performance. We wanted to provide the audience with a “behind-the-scenes” look at the rehearsal process and allow the kids to show off some of the musical knowledge they had gained. During
the concert, the audience saw warm-ups, pitch and rhythm echoing, rhythm-counting activities, solfege games, collaborative encounters between students, and some traditional performances of songs. Mr. Garcia performed a Chopin étude, giving some background information about the piece in advance, while the students sat cross-legged on the floor in awe of the sounds coming from the same keyboard they heard at every rehearsal. We even invited audience members to come up and create simple choreography for the kids to include in one of the pieces.

For three weeks prior to the concert, Dr. Burns and I had informed the parents that a potluck meal would follow the event and that they were welcome to sign up on a sheet to bring something. At the conclusion of the concert, we thanked everyone for coming and invited the audience to join us in the tiled art room next door for the meal. As the audience moved into the next room, I helped put away the materials we utilized for the concert and conversed with students and audience members in the performance space. Once I made my way into the art room, the potluck meal was in full swing. It was clear that the sense of community among people involved with Kids’ Choir was strong. An outsider looking in might have easily confused this event with an annual family reunion—children were sitting on the floor with plates full of fried chicken, pizza, cake balls, and innumerable other food times while adults sat around the room in chairs, carefully balancing their plates of food while chatting to one another about current events, family matters, or just general chit chat. There were younger and older siblings of choristers mixed into the crowd. A huddle of three to four dads stood in one corner expressing their anticipation for a good season for the Saints (New Orleans’ professional football team), while simultaneously eyeing the crockpot of meatballs at the adjacent table. People young, old, and in between, with skin colors covering the spectrum from pale white to darkest black, from various
sections of the community were all together in one room, sharing a meal—laughing, talking, enjoying . . . just being.

When the food had been fully consumed and everyone was satisfied (in more ways than one), a group of five to six adults began cleaning up the space, voluntarily. One mom found a custodian’s closet full of cleaning supplies and began delegating to several of the children. In a brief span of time, two girls were wiping off tables, one boy had a broom and was sweeping food remnants into a small pile while a girl held the dustpan for him, two moms were covering the leftover food and trying to find homes for it, and the remaining people were rearranging the chairs into a single row lining the walls of the room. When everyone had completed their tasks, the space was exactly as we had found it earlier that afternoon.

**Educating the community.** Along with providing access and encouraging acceptance and compassion, another piece of a cycle of giving came in the form of community education and enrichment. Just prior to this research, Kids’ Orchestra realized they were missing out on a huge educational opportunity simply because of the hierarchical ensemble structure in place. At that time, the instrumental groups were organized by skill level and assigned a color (orange, green, and red). They decided, instead, to organize the groups into traditional instrumental ensemble groupings (percussion ensemble, wind ensemble, string orchestra, and symphony orchestra). This allowed for more literature choices and opened up the possibility of educating students, parents, and audiences about the different ensembles and their origins and histories. The organization had the chance to start that conversation purely because they named ensembles differently.

It was also at this time that the organization chose to shift their approach toward performances to include an educational aspect for the audience. Both the choral and the
instrumental ensembles began incorporating audience music education into their performances. Imagine a mini version of Benjamin Britten’s *The Young Person’s Guide to the Orchestra*. During the performance, individual students and/or sections would be asked to play the theme of the piece and the conductor would discuss the composer’s intentions. Then, when the full performance of the piece occurred, the audience could recognize the theme and had additional information to further engage them. For one of the instrumental performances, the students ran the entire event. They had worked on group compositions and spoke to the audience about the creation process prior to the performance of their pieces, including information about pitches, rhythms, articulations, dynamics, etc. Not only did the audience gain knowledge about the compositions, they were also able to see the children’s growth through the program.

*Celebrating Louisiana culture.* Kids’ Orchestra’s commitment to celebrating the culture of Louisiana is another way the community becomes more enriched. Kids’ Choir has performed several Louisiana songs including one in Cajun French. In addition, the choir brought in a local accordion player to accompany one of the Cajun folk songs. During one of the summer camps that Kids’ Orchestra offered, the organization invited a Cajun fiddler and a banjo player to educate the students about music from southern Louisiana. They also brought in Preservation Hall Jazz Band, a traditional jazz band based in New Orleans that has been in existence for over 50 years, to further educate summer camp participants on the vibrant musical history present in this area of Louisiana. Southern Louisiana maintains a unique culture, especially in terms of music, due in part to the influx of diverse people through the port of New Orleans. Embracing that heritage and working to keep it alive for future generations creates a sense of pride in the community, hopefully resulting in a more positive atmosphere overall.
Final Thoughts

The cycle of giving makes an impact in ways that may never be measurable, but is evidenced in the fact that the children involved in Kids’ Choir will ultimately grow up and become adult members of the community. By providing access, encouraging acceptance and compassion, and educating and enriching the community, the philosophy of the organization begins to trickle into society in small doses at first, but eventually in waves. As Mr. Thraves stated, “Even if it’s not a financial gain for the community, it far exceeds what that would be in the fact that the community works together as a whole much better.” Mr. Thraves asserted everything folds back into the community of Baton Rouge . . . it’s nothing but giving back in the end. . . . I think it is very much a cycle that connects, maybe not perfectly all the time, but I think that’s what it is. I think that’s why I really like what I do. I’ve found something that’s bigger than me and more important.

In the next chapter, I offer portraiture of three Kids’ Choir members to delve more deeply into the lived musical experiences of the choristers.
Chapter 6: Portraits of Three Participants

The portraiture (Sofie, Peter, and Simone) are designed to provide a deeper look at three Kids’ Choir members’ lived musical experiences both in and out of the Kids’ Choir ensemble. They also offer further insight into the complex, dynamic, and rich environment that is the Kids’ Choir experience. For complete demographic details on the portraiture participants, see Table 3.1.

Sofie

Sofie is a fourth-grade White girl that lives in a middle-SES, two-parent household. She attends public school and is not a member of a church. Sofie is quirky and inquisitive and bounces into rehearsal each Monday with a huge smile on her face. Upon arriving, she makes her way to myself or Dr. Burns to ask a question or offer a greeting. Sofie can become easily excitable when speaking, regularly exploring a wide range of dynamics and pitch. Her past educational experiences include being homeschooled, attending a Montessori school, and most recently, attending public school in East Baton Rouge Parish. Despite being very playful and curious, it seems as though her time being homeschooled has led to a level of maturity not normally seen in children her age. When answering questions in rehearsal, her responses regularly evolve into lengthy and complex descriptions. Sofie also finds comfort being in close proximity to the directors while casually conversing, indicating an ease around adults.

When determining Sofie’s reasons for participating in the ensemble, it doesn’t take long to reach a conclusion: she is obsessed with singing! In fact, Sofie has gone so far as to consider Kids’ Choir a “BFFEF.” She had to translate for me: “Best friends forever ever forever.” When asked about her favorite thing in Kids’ Choir, she immediately proclaims, “Singing! I love
singing! I’m crazy for singing!” When probing deeper concerning her reasons for involvement, it becomes clear that a love of singing barely scratches the surface of her motivation for being in the ensemble. Sofie has, what I would term, an artistic yearning. She craves interactions with the arts. This is evident through her behavior in rehearsal as well as her discussions surrounding artistic experiences.

**Sofie’s artistic cravings and friendships.** Sofie insisted on explaining her school schedule, pointing out that her class only participate in music once a week. When asked if she wished she had music class more often, she simply stated, “Yes. I just enjoy it so much.” She explained that last year, her class also had dance every Friday, but this year they have taken that away. I inquired as to whether she was upset about that and she bombastically proclaimed, “Yes! I wish there was a rule that we had dance!” When prompted to explain her feelings upon arriving at home following Kids’ Choir rehearsal, she said, “Well, I kind of feel sad because I left. So, when I get home, I’m like, um, can we go back tomorrow?” Sofie’s need to experience the arts supersedes all other thoughts.

Sofie’s obsession with singing is just one of her reasons for involvement. She also views her participation in Kids’ Choir as an avenue to maintaining current friendships and fostering new ones. Sofie knew only two friends in the choir before joining, but she has been able to make new friends throughout the semester. She specifically mentioned how great it was to see so many different kinds of people in Kids’ Choir. Sofie alleges she is shy when meeting new people (although shy is not a word I would ever use to describe her), but within one or two rehearsals she becomes comfortable with them. “I got fully adjusted to all of the people in choir so now I’m all like, ‘Hey! What’s up, guys?’ I’m comfortable with them,” she proclaimed. Sofie is unable to
pinpoint the element of Kids’ Choir that led to her social comfortability, but she thinks it could be the experience of making music with each other. Sofie also feels that Kids’ Choir provides opportunities to explore her creativity. She regularly uses songs she learns in choir to inspire new compositions of her own—as she puts it, “different words, same rhythm.” In addition, these new verses allow her to draw upon her emotions, “sometimes sad, happy, mad, crying, all different kinds of emotions.”

**Sofie’s musical experiences outside of Kids’ Choir.** As for Sofie’s musical experiences outside of Kids’ Choir, they reinforce and supplement the choir experience. Her school music class is similar to her Kids’ Choir experience, specifically through the teacher’s inclusion of rhythm-building activities, opportunities for experimenting with various instruments, and the use of solfege. The racial demographics of her school also mirror those of Kids’ Choir, indicating consistency in her experiences with racial diversity. Sofie’s involvement in Kids’ Orchestra as a flutist provides an opportunity for musical engagement of a different kind. She is gaining technical skills on the flute and learning to play in an instrumental ensemble. Kids’ Orchestra also serves as a connection to her family. Sofie has a close emotional bond with her aunt, a flutist as well. Sofie views her aunt as a loved one and a private flute teacher who helps her practice the flute at home. This familial intergenerational collaboration is unique to Sofie’s Kids’ Orchestra participation.

Sofie’s love of singing, appreciation of diverse student interactions, and need for creative outlets have resulted in an overwhelmingly positive experience in Kids’ Choir. She is unable to identify anything she would change about the ensemble and views it as extremely meaningful:

**JB:** What do you dislike about being in Kids’ Choir?
Sofie: Oooooh! I got it. NOTHING!!!
JB: What does Kids’ Choir mean to you?
Sofie: Everything in my entire life.
JB: Anything else?
Sofie: I love it! I love it!

This brief exchange perfectly sums up Sofie’s energy and spirit regarding her participation in Kids’ Choir.

**Peter**

Peter is a third-grade Black boy that lives in a middle-SES, two-parent household. He attends private Catholic school and is a member of a Catholic church. Peter and his younger sister, Sally, have been in Kids’ Choir for two years now. They consistently attend rehearsals and performances and their mom, Mrs. Paulus, is committed to Kids’ Choir and the experience it provides her children. Peter is a third grader who alternates between two contrasting dispositions. He is either introverted and observant—almost invisible to those around him—or he is chatty and squirmy, seeming to dance about in his chair. He stands at about four feet tall and can’t weigh more than 60 pounds. He wears very thick glasses due to vision problems and, to avoid losing them or breaking them during physical activities, has them secured to his head with a black athletic strap. Peter is usually very happy and respectful and has a general curiosity for life. In addition to Kids’ Choir, Peter is a boy scout and occasionally has to come late to Kids’ Choir rehearsal due to his boy scout meetings taking place on the same night. He splits his time between the two commitments, though, and his mom provides transportation to both events.

Peter claims he recently “started getting musical” and didn’t know anything about Kids’ Choir until his mom signed him up for it. He enjoys singing, drawing, and writing (i.e. practicing handwriting)—all of which he has been able to do in Kids’ Choir. As a memorization tool, Kids’
Choir members were given worksheets with the text from the choral pieces provided and certain words replaced with blank lines. The students were asked to fill in the blanks with the correct words. Peter thoroughly enjoyed this activity, meticulously writing in the blank words and regularly asking about his spelling accuracy.

**Improved vocal technique and creative outlet.** Peter also talked about learning how to sing very well in Kids’ Choir, specifically through improved breath support. He attempted to describe the process of breathing for singing and how he has learned to implement the technique: “When we have to learn to go sing like “La” (Peter sings a sustained high note), it’s like I’m trying to like hold my breath for very long . . . because if I try to breathe, I kinda get it.”

Dr. Burns and I occasionally utilize drawing in Kids’ Choir rehearsals as a creative outlet for the students and also to help them visualize the meaning of the songs. For one of the pieces, “Trouble, Fly,” by Patricia McKernon Runkle, we asked the students to draw an image of what they believed the text meant (see Appendix H for text). Peter took this task very seriously and drew a detailed house with bat-like creatures flying out of the open window into the dark night. He included his family in the house as well, observing as the trouble departed their home. Peter’s mom, Mrs. Paulus, described an interaction she had with Peter and Sally in the car not long after that rehearsal:

[Kids’ Choir] takes them away from other distractions because they’ll sit in the car and they’ll just sing. They’ll sing some of the songs that they learn. They were singing this song this morning and I said, “Well, what exactly are you all saying?” and so my daughter said, “Trouble, fly away. Troubles in your house fly away.” And they were just singing and singing. Peter said, “Well, you know if you have troubles in your house, fly away.” So, I think being in choir . . . has definitely added to their whole minds and their thought process. I can’t really explain, but I’m seeing growth.
Peter expressed enthusiasm for learning how it feels to be on stage. He spoke of the wooden stage at his school and how he was always afraid it would collapse while they were singing. This fear, he said, is compounded by the fact that there are so many people watching him. However, as the performance continues, he becomes less nervous. When he finishes performing and the applause begins, he is excited that he successfully accomplished something. Mrs. Paulus believes the Kids’ Choir experience, including opportunities to perform in front of large audiences, has enhanced Peter and Sally’s other musical experiences and reinforced their confidence.

**An excited nature.** Peter’s excited personality has resulted in the need for a few behavior corrections during rehearsal. These corrections are usually brought on by activities that include a physical element (e.g. working on choreography for a song or incorporating a kinesthetic addition to a vocalise). Peter provided mature insight into the issue:

What’s hard for me here is when we come from school and . . . we have to be quiet at school and then when we come to the choir, we have to be quiet and it’s like and I really wanna talk because I’ve been at school listening all day.

Dr. Burns and I understand the need for our students to be physically and mentally active during rehearsal, but there are times when quiet focus is required to achieve certain goals. It is during these times when Peter finds it challenging to remain attentive. Mrs. Paulus echoed this difficulty for both Peter and Sally by naming focus as a possible challenge “because they are so antsy and they like to move around a lot.” She continued by stating that she sees improvement in that area: “I see that they’re getting better with that. That’s what they need—they need something where they have to use their minds to focus.”
When asked about how he feels when singing in Kids’ Choir, Peter described a complex emotional experience to the best of his ability: “It makes me feel like I really wanna sing when I hear music. I start getting used to it and I really wanna sing it, but I can’t. I gotta wait for my turn, but I really wanna sing it!” The impatience and excitement Peter mentioned is evident in his rehearsal behavior. He gets worked up during peak moments of singing and dancing and it is difficult for him to rein in the emotion of the activity. Peter also talked about how singing in Kids’ Choir has changed the way he listens to music in general.

When we sing, it’s like, it gets good and then when I listen to other songs, it is different than what we sing because we’re using our voice and I know people on the radio are using their voice, but it sounds different than ours, than a group singing together.

Peter is beginning to distinguish the difference between choral music and typical radio music. Even though he is not able to clearly describe this difference, it is obvious his aural skills are developing due to his experience in Kids’ Choir.

**Peter’s school music experience.** Peter’s school music experience, while similar in many ways, has one key difference—Peter attends Catholic school. After observing music class at Peter’s school and speaking with the music teacher, the school’s religious affiliation has a direct and large impact on the music class experience. When entering the class, it resembles a typical general music space. The room is small—approximately 20 ft x 15 ft. One wall is covered completely by windows dressed with wooden blinds that go from waist height to ceiling. Below the windows are space heaters painted white that are attached to the wall resting on the floor. The epoxy flooring has hints of white, burgundy, black, silver, tan, and gold. One wall has a pull-down projector screen with a white board behind it. The opposite wall has closet doors. The main front wall is covered in colorful posters with musical information on them. There are several
acoustic guitars in stands on the floor in the corner. There are also shelves and free standing
drawers full of an assortment of musical instruments including boomwhackers, egg shakers,
guiros, maracas, world drums, ukuleles, and music books. In the front of the room, there is one
table of music currently being utilized in class next to an old upright piano. By the pencil
sharpener attached to the wall hangs a crucifix about a foot in height—the only physical
indication in the room that it is a Catholic school.

Peter’s class—eighteen students equally divided between girls and boys—is made up of
ten white students and eight students of color (Asian, Black, and Hispanic). The boys wear white
polos with the school logo in the upper left corner and blue khaki pants, while the girls wear blue
tank top dresses with orange and white stripes. Under the dresses, they wear white, short-sleeved,
button-up shirts.

Following a student-led prayer that included singing a “Hail, Mary,” the teacher began
warm-ups with stretching, shoulder rolls, and arm shakes. She proceeded to lead the class
through vocal sighs, followed by singing Do Re Mi Fa Sol Fa Mi Re Do on an “ooh” as she
modulated up by half steps. Peter remained focused on the teacher. As she played from behind
the upright piano, he sang the “ooh,” and mimicked the playing of the piano with the fingers on
his right hand.

Throughout the remainder of the class, the students spent a majority of the time singing
hymns from the Catholic hymnal—in English and Latin—and rehearsing their song for
Grandparents’ Day, a choreographed number accompanied by a soundtrack about a red robin
bopping along. The students kept glancing back at me to see if I was impressed by their
performance, Peter included. During class, the teacher referenced “ordinary time” and the “church calendar” regularly.

Despite the teacher’s use of a check mark system to help with classroom management, the students talked incessantly. Random students also left their seats and roamed to the front of the class without any apparent purpose. Compared to the rest of the class, Peter was very well-behaved. He sat with wonderful alignment when singing and raised his hand to ask and answer questions. When the class ended, Peter asked to use the restroom, came over and gave me a hug, and then headed to the bathroom.

After class, the teacher mentioned that Peter had discussed how excited he was about almost getting his violin for Kids’ Orchestra. She was surprised by his comment because she rarely hears students get excited about playing classical instruments. She always hears them wanting to play piano or drums, but violin is something totally different. The teacher also discussed her attempt to expose the kids to as many different types of music-making experiences as possible since “not all of them are singers.” She wants to support the kids that are composers and lyricists and dancers and instrumentalists, etc. She also mentioned that she had a very different experience in elementary school since there was no music education provided at all. She chose to audition for a community children’s choir at a young age and this served as her only music education experience. It was through the children’s choir that she developed the passion and desire to go into the field of music education.

My presence most definitely had an impact on the students; however, when discussing the experience with the teacher after class, she mentioned that my presence might have actually pushed them to work harder. This confirmed my belief that the behavior issues were probably an
ordinary occurrence in the class. For the most part, Peter’s school music class seems to reinforce many of the same musical concepts that are present in Kids’ Choir, but in an atmosphere that is less focused and through activities that need additional refining. It makes me wonder whether Peter can discern the difference in quality between the two experiences. Perhaps, Peter’s excitement and intermittent overactive personality in Kids’ Choir is a result of having a strongly positive musical experience that contrasts his school music class experience.

**Simone**

Simone is a fourth-grade Black girl that lives in a lower-SES, single-parent household. She attends a magnet school and is a member of a Baptist church. Simone is an extremely busy girl. She is involved in Kids’ Choir, Kids’ Orchestra (where she plays trumpet), string ensemble at her school (where she plays violin), Girl Scouts, and her church dance group. Simone’s mom, too, is pulled in many directions due to a full-time job, taking classes to earn her undergraduate degree, and chaperoning Simone to and from her numerous activities. She utilizes rehearsal time to walk next door to the public library and study for her classes. This hustle and bustle in both of their lives results in Simone regularly arriving late to Kids’ Choir rehearsal and often being the last one to be picked up after rehearsal. During rehearsals, she appears lethargic and falls asleep at times.

Simone also becomes easily frustrated when other students have difficulty immediately understanding or succeeding with a given task. As a fourth grader attending a foreign language immersion public magnet school in East Baton Rouge Parish, Simone is well spoken and very respectful. Following rehearsals, she regularly offers to help clean the rehearsal space. Simone consistently uses ma’am and sir when addressing an adult and has a strong relationship with her
mother, evident by their interactions following rehearsals. Simone’s energy level doubles as she runs to the welcoming and open arms of her mom. It is also obvious that Simone is the most important part of her mom’s life. When together, they are always arm in arm and smiling.

Simone decided to join Kids’ Choir after learning about it through her experience in Kids’ Orchestra. She seems to be fine with her busy schedule, but realizes it leaves little down time. After listing the activities she is involved in, Simone simply stated, “I think that’s pretty much it. Yea. But, it’s like all week so technically I have no free time except Saturday.” She admitted that she sometimes falls asleep in rehearsals because she is constantly going from activity to activity.

**Simone’s perspective on the benefits of Kids’ Choir.** Despite her involvement in so many activities, Simone still speaks about her Kids’ Choir experience as a mostly positive addition to her life. Simone believes one of her strengths is her ability to learn songs quickly, which is why it is her favorite aspect of the ensemble. She describes her process of learning new music: “I probably just catch up on it and then quick I’m there like snap and I remember it and then I just sing it and practice it at home.” Based on observations of Simone in rehearsal, she is quick to learn music and concepts and needs regular engagement in order to avoid boredom. This may stem from her experience in a foreign language immersion school where she is required to juggle many concepts at once while also translating those concepts from Spanish to English. Another indication that Simone enjoys opportunities to make music is her sacrifice to be a part of the strings program at school. She chooses to miss lunch or recess twice a week in order to participate in the program since it is only offered at those times.

Simone perceives the social benefits of participation in Kids’ Choir as the most meaningful aspect. Her interactions with friends came up numerous times, supporting her belief
that social engagement was integral to the overall experience. She specifically mentioned break times during rehearsals as key points when socialization could occur. Simone talked about the process of meeting new people: “Like this girl, Samaya, I was looking at her. I was like ‘Hey, Samaya’ cause I didn’t even know her name. I just wanted to say hello ‘cause it’s a friendly thing to do.” Simone also described an interaction with a fellow choir member in which he chose to throw a temper tantrum. “He’s like ‘Ahhh!’ and I’m like ‘Oh, can I just go away from him?’” This event indicates opportunities for social engagement in Kids’ Choir are not always positive. They do, however, begin teaching children how to navigate human interactions, whether positive or negative. Simone stated, “[In Kids’ Choir], I’ve learned how to be calm with other people. Some people get on my nerves.”

Simone also feels the musical knowledge and vocal skills she is learning in Kids’ Choir will help her achieve musical aspirations.

I learned how to memorize the notes like Do Re Mi and I learned how to improve my vocal technique so that way when I get in public I can just be like “Ahhhh” (Simone sings an operatic-style high note) because I wanna be in the opera, too, and broadway.

She has a goal of attending Juilliard for music and dance. She views Kids’ Choir as a way to hone her singing skills so that she is prepared for future auditions. “[Kids’ Choir] means a lot to me because it will help with my Juilliard applications and when I go to high school because that means . . . I already have experience in singing.” Her over-the-top character surfaced when she shared a hypothetical future interaction: “When I win a Grammy, people will recognize me and they’ll be like, ‘Oh, she’s Simone from Kids’ Choir and she sings so beautiful.’”

Another value of Kids’ Choir that Simone mentioned was the sense of belonging. Specifically, she described, “It’s nice to just feel welcome.” When I asked her what she thought
created that welcoming atmosphere, she claimed it started her first moments in Kids’ Choir when the directors introduced themselves to the ensemble. She compared that experience to her experiences with teachers at her school:

Probably the first day . . . when the teachers (Kids’ Choir directors) introduced themselves, I just feel welcome because they’re not like other teachers. They (the school teachers) don’t even introduce their name. They just write it on the blackboard and I’m like “You didn’t even say your name. I don’t feel welcome at all.” I feel like (sigh)—like, “You didn’t welcome me at all. You just did whatever you wanted to do.”

Simone also feels she does not receive respect from her school teachers the way she does from the Kids’ Choir directors. She described one school teacher in particular:

She doesn’t respect anyone but herself and the teachers. I heard her talking about my friend, Seth. She was like, “Oh! He has bad grades!” and she was talking to the other teachers and in my head I was like, “You don’t have to talk about other people like that. Keep it to yourself. That’s between you and Seth. That’s not between you and another teacher.”

Simone went on to say she thinks the Kids’ Choir directors are nice, strict, and responsible. She appreciates those qualities in them. She described a contrasting experience in her Kids’ Orchestra trumpet class where the teacher struggles to keep the students focused:

I play the trumpet and everyone else is always talking and I read my book during class. We waste all our time. . . . [The teacher] gets mad—well, not mad. He gets 50/50 mad, like when everybody is not paying attention and they are not following directions. I always try to follow directions, but everyone is just wasting my time so I just read a book so I can get all my AR (Advanced Reading) points at school.

**Competition and spiritual connections.** It is clear that Simone not only appreciates a challenge, but is also motivated by competition. When describing her strings class, she mentioned she really enjoys playing the violin, but that it makes her fingers hurt and turn red—“it looks like blood to me.” She shared a story about an incident with a rhythm game that we play in choir rehearsal where the group is divided into two teams and asked to count and clap.
various rhythms for points. She recalled that the practice of a certain rhythm was perfect, but the performance of the rhythm began to fall apart. Her team ended up losing which made her upset. At this point in the story, her maturity shone through as she concluded, “I like the kids because we are all learning stuff. We are not all perfect, so it’s nice.”

Simone also enjoys opportunities to connect with the music being performed. She specifically noted a spiritual connection with one of the choir pieces, *Born in Bethlehem*. Her attachment to the song comes from the reference to Jesus’ birth. She believes “everyone should talk about that in this century because some people just don’t act right.” She went on to describe an emotional connection to the choir pieces—making her feel sad and good at the same time. “Like you’re smiling, but you’re sad at the same time. . . . It makes me feel good and bad at the same time, but it’s good.” Despite her difficulty describing the complex emotion, it is clear that she is connecting to the music *and* the music-making in meaningful and personal ways. She stated, “What makes [Kids’ Choir] special is you keep these memories forever.”

**Simone’s school music experience.** Simone’s school music class experience reinforces her Kids’ Choir experience in many ways. Her music teacher, Mrs. Lois, is firm and consistent throughout the class. Her classroom procedures work without stifling the learning environment or feeling dictatorial or military-esque. Mrs. Lois’ transitions are seamless and efficient and the pacing of the class is ideal. The students, a diverse group of approximately 20 5th graders, are making healthy vocal sounds and Mrs. Lois is successfully incorporating many foreign language concepts/elements into the lesson. It is a wonderful example of elementary general music.

My initial thoughts after observing Simone’s school music class are that—due to her older age in comparison with a majority of the Kids’ Choir members—she is probably getting
less, or at least very different, knowledge and skills from Kids’ Choir than she is in her school music class. However, she is probably learning more literature through Kids’ Choir simply because the school music class is made up of a number of activities that are not performance-oriented. It makes me wonder what Simone sees as the benefit of Kids’ Choir in comparison to her school music class. When asked this question in the interview, Simone did not highlight anything in particular except for the difference in the type of interactions she has with her school teachers (lacking in respect and care) and with the Kids’ Choir directors (more respectful and caring). One thing that comes to mind is the idea that she is mixing with students from outside her school while at Kids’ Choir. She is also able to play more of a leadership role due to the fact that she is one of the few 4th graders in the ensemble with a majority of the members being younger than her. I have noticed her taking more of a leadership role in Kids’ Choir so perhaps she consciously, or subconsciously, feels this as well.

**Portraiture Synthesis**

The themes of resilience through holistic education surfaced throughout the portraitures in meaningful ways. Sofie and Simone both cited making new friends (social development) as a major benefit of participation in the ensemble and Peter described his process of becoming more comfortable during performance (confidence), both aspects of holistic education. Simone specifically highlighted navigating positive and negative social interactions as a benefit of participation. Peter also spoke about Kids’ Choir as developing another aspect of his whole self through creativity. In the area of maturity development, Peter’s teacher was very surprised when he told her he had chosen to play the violin over the other instrument options; she believed this
was an indication of his maturity as a musician. Additionally, Simone was able to develop
leadership skills as one of the older members of the Kids’ Choir ensemble.

In terms of a cycle of giving, all three portraiture participants gained access to things that
would not be as easily available without their participation in Kids’ Choir—Sofie was able to
continue fulfilling her artistic cravings through her musicking in Kids’ Choir, Peter was able to
improve his vocal technique through the Kids’ Choir directors’ quality instruction, and Simone
cited preparation for her Juilliard audition as a benefit of participation. Sofie’s newfound
connection with her aunt through musical experiences highlights community enrichment while
Simone’s increased sense of belonging and acknowledgement of the respectful interactions
between herself and Kids’ Choir teachers is an example of encouraging acceptance and
compassion. In the next chapter, I revisit the purpose, research questions, and boundaries of the
study; discuss transforming the individual self to transform the community; and provide
implications for practice, suggestions for future research, and concluding thoughts.
Chapter 7: Discussion, Implications, and Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I revisit the purpose, research questions, and boundaries of the study. Next, I focus on transforming individuals through social development, concerted cultivation, social capital, cultural development, and figured worlds. I then define and utilize interpretive reproduction to support the idea that Kids’ Choir can transform communities. I include implications for practice as well as suggestions for future research and offer some concluding thoughts.

Revisiting the Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine Kids’ Orchestra’s philosophy of social development through musical experiences and document the teaching and learning paradigms associated with this philosophy. I explored the impact of Kids’ Choir participation on the choristers from the perspective of teachers, staff, parents, and the children themselves. In addition, I investigated more deeply the relationship between three choristers’ Kids’ Choir experience and their musical lives outside of the organization. Primary research questions were: (1) What is the Kids’ Orchestra philosophy and how is it manifested?; (2) What are the perceived values and benefits of participation in Kids’ Choir for child participants from the perspective of choristers, teachers, parents, and staff?; and (3) How do three choristers in Kids’ Choir describe their lived musical experiences both in and out of Kids’ Choir?

Boundaries of the Study

As described in the “Potential for Findings” section of Chapter Three, this research provides an in-depth look at one community children’s choir experience in a specific time and place. Therefore, it is not generalizable to all community children’s choir experiences, but may
be transferrable to certain comparable contexts. In addition, due to time constraints, inconsistent student attendance, and various issues with access, four of the twenty choristers were not able to participate in the group interviews; however, they did complete the qualitative questionnaire. For the same reasons, seven parents/guardians completed interviews.

While the research questions focused on the impact of participation in the ensemble on students, it became clear during data collection and data analysis that the impact extended far beyond the students to include teachers, staff members, parents/guardians, and the community. I found the data too compelling to only focus on the impact of participation on the children. Therefore, the results of the study reflect this change. Eisenhart and Jurow (2011) referenced Erickson’s (1986) “natural history of inquiry” which “assumes that qualitative research will take turns that one cannot predict at the start, and from these turns, one will learn new things about the topic under study, but mostly one will earn about him- or herself as a researcher” (Eisenhart & Jurow, 2011, p. 709).

**Transforming Individuals**

While a portion of the findings from this research reinforce the discoveries of previous studies focused on the values and benefits of participation in various types of choral ensembles including musical benefits, personal benefits, emotional development, etc., I have chosen to highlight the findings that, due to the particular nature of Kids’ Choir and the community it serves, are most unique and impactful. Kids’ Orchestra’s manifestation of a philosophy that prioritizes social development through music education resulted in the data revealing a recurring theme of social development. In addition, with the issues of segregation—racial, religious, and
socioeconomic—still present in the K-12 educational system in Baton Rouge, it seemed most appropriate to focus on this area as the anchor of the discussion section.

**Social development.** Corsaro (2005) defined socialization as “the processes by which children adapt to and internalize society” (p. 7). An important question should be, “What version of society do we want our children to adapt to and internalize?” Children that attend public, private, and/or charter schools spend a majority of their childhood and adolescence in the classrooms, halls, gymnasiums, and cafeterias of these institutions. Despite the efforts of school systems to provide equitable educational experiences in microcosms of society that accurately represent the diversity of the community that surrounds them, many K-12 educational institutions in Baton Rouge offer a homogeneous experience in terms of student body diversity. Children grow up surrounded by other children that are like them in most ways—most notably race and socioeconomic status. In addition, a great imbalance exists between public, private, and charter school funding and support, resulting in vastly different experiences based on the number and types of programs/electives offered, the skill levels of teachers, and the condition of the facilities. Kumashiro (2004) also noted that “the norms of schooling, like the norms of society, privilege and benefit some groups and identities while marginalizing and subordinating others on the basis of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disabilities, language, age, and other social markers” (p. XXIV).

Due to the limited number of perspectives present in educational settings like these and the reproduction of existing social order, children are less prepared to become successful collaborators and contributors to society. When students graduate high school, they are thrust into a world where the “other” seems greatly foreign to them (and oftentimes, threatening),
resulting in difficulties with empathy for and understanding of people unlike them. Findings of this study situate Kids’ Choir as an alternative path, molding the socialization process to prepare children for the actual version of society in existence.

**Concerted cultivation.** The parents interviewed for this research identified exposing their children to diverse students, teachers, and experiences as a benefit of ensemble participation. Lareau (2011) investigated social class differences in the ways parents enrolled children in organized activities and developed the concept of concerted cultivation. Lareau described concerted cultivation as the ways in which middle-class families treated childrearing as a development project, aiming to advantage their children economically and socially. While Lareau’s study indicated that middle class parents took a more proactive approach to developing their children into successful members of the community through their involvement in extra curricular activities, Bennett, Lutz, & Jayaram (2012) found few social class distinctions in terms of parental support for extra curricular activities. This research offered an example of families from varied social classes enrolling their children in Kids’ Choir for the purpose of increasing socialization and diversifying experiences. The parents’ choice to support their child through new types of interactions and activities with children of varied backgrounds acts as a form of resistance against an educational system that, in many ways, is failing them.

Mounts (2008) found that parents also support children’s participation in particular extra curricular activities in order to shape a desirable peer group. Kids’ Choir parents provided numerous examples of their desire for their children to be exposed to a diverse population through the choir program. Whether consciously or subconsciously, parents seem to understand
the importance of diverse collaborations and interactions for their children and the scarcity of said interactions through the K-12 education options in Baton Rouge.

**Social capital.** Putnam (2001) described benefits of social development as social capital, or benefits expected to be derived from the engagement of an individual in community, personal, and formal social networks. With a recent study by Putnam (2007) identifying a decrease in social capital, there is a need for activities that can replenish the deficiency. Jones (2010) and Langston and Barrett (2008) indicated that community music programs could offer opportunities to increase the development of social capital. Kids’ Choir serves as a good example of this development. Ensemble members develop friendships through the Kids’ Choir experience and also gain knowledge of appropriate ways of navigating positive and negative social interactions with other children, parents, and teachers. In addition, they are exposed to the world of professional musicians, both traditional and non-traditional, and gain insight into traversing a career path in that field.

Along with the social capital that Kids’ Choir members are able to gain through participation in the ensemble, the findings from this study indicated that Kids’ Choir members’ parents are also able to increase social capital. This increase came as a result of interactions with other parents, teachers, and Kids’ Orchestra staff members; the centrality of the Kids’ Choir rehearsal location in the community as well as its proximity to various facilities including a park with open green spaces, trees, and a walking path, a newly constructed public library with a large section dedicated to increasing children’s literacy and instilling a passion for reading, and a plethora of stores and eateries; and through their involvement in community events outside of their typical routine.
Cultural development. I propose the idea that, through concerted efforts to expose children to diverse people, experiences, music, and perspectives at a young age, children internalize and adapt to a broader version of society than they may experience in their home/school/church/other lives. Matusov (1998) described the participation model of cultural development (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990) as “[considering] individual cultural development as a transformation of individual participation in sociocultural activity” (Matusov, 1998, p.326). Transformation of individual participation simply means that participants in the sociocultural activity are given opportunities to serve in many roles with varying types of responsibility. For example, every Kids’ Choir ensemble member is asked to play the role of follower, leader, collaborator, creator, and evaluator, no matter their background. Through the experience of these “changed responsibilities,” hierarchy dissolves, equalizing power issues at play. Children experience collaboration with reduced levels of privilege and oppression.

The unique sociocultural experiences stemming from participation in Kids’ Choir leave children changed. Whether they are Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, wealthy, poor, or any descriptor in between, their “culture” has been shaped in new ways through the experience, an experience that becomes interwoven into the fabric of their being. Mr. Garcia, one of the ensemble pianists, provided an example of the ways children are shaped through the experience of being exposed to people of other cultures who are achieving success in a professional area of life, like himself. He said, “Seeing somebody from another country—like a little dark skinned, a different accent—mastering an instrument, that serves to help them. I think that’s an important thing.” Through their awareness that successful people don’t have to look a certain way or sound a certain way and don’t have to come from one part of the world, Kids’ Choir singers are molded
to be more aware and accepting of human differences. In addition, they are more able to see themselves, as diverse humans, achieving success.

The cultural development that results from participation in sociocultural activities like Kids’ Choir resonates with Goodenough’s (1971) concept of propriospect. Goodenough defined propriospect as “the totality of the private, subjective view of the world and its contents that each human develops out of personal experience” (p. 36). A key word to note from this definition is “personal,” meaning individual/unique/particular/distinctive. This view defines culture not as something that can be applied to a group of people, but as something unique to each individual based on the culmination of their personal experiences. A child might enter Kids’ Choir with a cultural identity mainly informed by the cultural identities of their family and the teachers and students they interact with at school. However, their participation in Kids’ Choir serves to inform their cultural identity in impactful ways, resulting in a fresh view of themselves as well as the world around them. This new cultural identity is distinctive from those of their family members, their teachers, and their friends at school—it is completely unique to them and makes possible a shift in the cultural identity of those they come into contact with. By providing experiences that highlight the diversity of our world (and the Baton Rouge community), Kids’ Choir contributes to the individual cultural development of its participants and their families.

**Figured worlds.** Holland, Lachiotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) first posed the idea of “figured worlds” (p. 41) in relation to identity development. They posited that individuals are able to form and be formed in collectively realized “as if” worlds. One example of an “as if” world might be, “What if we lived in a world where issues of privilege and oppression did not exist and society was able to coexist and collaborate without prejudices based on racial diversity
and socioeconomic status differences?” Robinson (2007) described this identity development as enabling individuals to “figure out” who they are within certain contexts. Urrieta (2007) took this idea one step further, highlighting that

through participation in figured worlds, people can reconceptualize who they are, or shift in who they understand themselves to be. . . . Through this figuring, individuals also come to understand their ability to craft their future participation, or agency, in and across figured worlds (p. 120).

I am most interested in Urrieta’s belief in the potential for individuals to shift who they understand themselves to be. Could we, as music educators, craft worlds that enable possibility? For example, the possibility of a world where differences are recognized and valued, or the possibility of a world where a diverse group of young learners work together to achieve a goal without issues of prejudice coming into play. Is the Kids’ Choir experience a crafted world that enables these types of possibilities? I cannot say for sure, but I think it approximates that world more successfully than a majority of the experiences currently offered to children in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. It is my hope that, through participation in Kids’ Choir, children come to understand themselves as accepting, caring individuals, appreciative of the people they interact with, no matter their differences. This understanding begins by developing positive relationships within the Kids’ Choir community and then transfers outside the figured world of Kids’ Choir into the individual communities in which the children are involved . . . and beyond.

Transforming Community

One might ask, “How can twenty children involved in one community choir in Baton Rouge, Louisiana transform an entire community?” This is where Corsaro’s (2005) concept of interpretive reproduction comes into play. It states that, “children are not simply internalizing
society and culture, but are actively contributing to cultural production and change” (p. 18). I am immediately drawn to the word “change” in Corsaro’s quote. Understanding that children have the power to change the culture of a community can have great repercussions on the ways adults view children. Corsaro noted that, until recently, children have been marginalized through the insistence that they play a primarily passive role in society. Prior to Corsaro’s work, Qvortrup (1993) argued that “children are themselves coconstructors of childhood and society” (p. 14). Corsaro (2005) elaborated stating that, “children produce a series of local peer cultures that become part of, and contribute to, the wider cultures of other children and adults within which they are embedded” (p. 109).

On February 14, 2018, the world saw an example of the active role children play in societal culture when student survivors from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida came together to fight for stricter gun laws after two teachers and 15 students were killed by a gunman on their campus. The teenagers called on the nation’s leaders to immediately work to enact stricter gun control laws to prevent another massacre from occurring in the United States. One student proclaimed, “We are losing our lives while the adults are playing around” (Segarra, Reilly, Meixler, & Calfas, 2018). These children’s involvement in the politics of gun control may have a lasting impact on gun culture in America and marked a pivotal moment in society’s understanding of children as active contributors to culture.

Based on the ideas put forth by Corsaro and Qvortrup, children in Kids’ Choir have the power to take their newfound understanding of themselves as accepting and compassionate beings into their communities and begin a larger transformation of the culture of the community. While it may begin as a single ripple in the water, the impact gradually grows to cover the entire
lake. It may start with one family member—a mom, a brother, an auntie—and then grow to encompass the culture of the entire family unit. This single family unit then joins with other family units and the change expands until eventually one small group of children have positively impacted the community in profound ways.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study offer numerous implications for practice. In terms of communities that wish to begin a community children’s choir with similar aims, this research provides a working model for the overall design of the program. While each community is unique and will have specific goals and needs, the basic structure of the organization could be implemented anywhere. When working on the details of the program, modifications and adaptations might be necessary to fully realize the program’s potential. This research also highlights areas in which organization improvements/refinements are needed. The knowledge of areas that may be lacking in the Kids’ Orchestra organization during its seventh year of existence can prove to be invaluable for communities wishing to engage in a similar venture. Not only will those communities have foresight into possible issues when designing the program, but they can also brainstorm possible solutions based on the resources and specificities of their unique situation. For communities in which a comparable ensemble is already in existence, this research offers a new perspective that could possibly inform a re-organization of their program or simply offer suggestions of other approaches that might also be successful.

Other ES/ESI organizations around the nation and world might specifically focus on the “Kids’ Choir as an Alternative Model for El Sistema/El Sistema-Inspired Programs” section of this document. Through the clear and concise description of the current critiques of ES/ESI
organizations, and the inclusion of the approaches taken by Kids’ Choir which counter those critiques, other organizations could begin to assess their current status in regards to the critiques and take the necessary steps to remedying their approach.

For ensembles (both community and in-school), music classrooms, and childhood educational environments in general, this research asks all educators to consider the impact they could have on students’ development of resilience through confidence, identity formation, and social development. In a society where the ability to overcome challenges is a part of daily life, it is even more important that we as educators provide the necessary tools for all of our students to succeed. This research details pedagogical approaches for use within rehearsal settings that successfully balance musical achievement with social development. Each of the approaches included could be adapted to benefit general music settings, instrumental music settings, and even general classrooms.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Future research should replicate this study with the instrumental ensembles of the Kids’ Orchestra organization. While some of the students overlap between the choral and instrumental ensembles, a majority of the instrumental kids do not participate in Kids’ Choir. Therefore, results from this study cannot be generalized to include the students who only participate in Kids’ Orchestra’s instrumental ensembles. Similar research could offer insight into whether or not the organization is providing a similar experience to all students involved, whether instrumental or choral.

Since this study involved the Kids’ Choir participants during the 2016-2017 school year, a longitudinal study that followed the participants that remained part of the ensemble in
subsequent years might provide further insight into the benefits of participation. In addition, with the organization allowing 2nd grade through 6th grade students, a longitudinal study of this type might also allow researchers to differentiate between student benefits at various age and musical skill levels. This information could advise ensemble directors of strengths and weaknesses regarding musical and social development and assist with informing curriculum decisions.

While an initial study has been completed investigating a possible correlation between Kids’ Orchestra participation and higher grades in school (Brunkan, 2017), further research is needed to determine the extent to which participation in Kids’ Orchestra and/or Kids’ Choir impacts school life, specifically in regards to improved academic performance, attendance, and behavior.

Finally, research on teaching artists in ES/ESI settings is minimal, if not non-existent. Future studies should investigate the benefits of utilizing teaching artists in ES/ESI settings as well as the drawbacks. Based on the uniqueness of the educational environment, what qualifies as best teaching practices in an ES/ESI setting? Furthermore, researchers should explore the types of professional development needed in order to (1) maximize success for teaching artists in ES/ESI settings and (2) ensure students are receiving quality instruction from teaching artists in ES/ESI settings.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The Kids’ Orchestra organization and Kids’ Choir are doing their part to help repair and strengthen a community struggling with issues of segregation, racism, and classicism. Over the past seven years, the organization has made great strides to develop and refine its vision and mission and to design programs that work together to achieve these goals. While there are still
improvements to make, I believe the organization is in an ideal place to move forward in a positive direction. Students who participate in Kids’ Choir are more socially aware, make responsible choices, and engage in healthy social relationships. They are also developing self-knowledge, criticism, and dialogue and negotiation skills. Through an environment that nurtures cooperative learning, students understand that they each possess intrinsic value. This understanding results in students who are more caring, respectful, and sharing with people that are both similar to and different from themselves. Their experience with each other and the selected musics are creating awareness and acceptance of innumerable multiplicities—musical, cultural, social, identity, etc. I believe Kids’ Choir has become and will continue to be a valuable community resource able to transform the individual self, and through the self, the community as a whole. Nurturing positive and meaningful interactions among all peoples in a pluralistic society is necessary for achieving unity and peace moving forward. It is my hope that this research increases awareness in the power of music-making communities to impact society in ways that result in honoring and valuing diversity as a strength and resource.
References


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Silver, N. (2015, May 1). The most diverse cities are often the most segregated [Blog post]. Retrieved from https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-most-diverse-cities-are-often-the-most-segregated/


Appendix A: Louisiana State University Institutional Review Board
Exemption Approval

ACTION ON EXEMPTION APPROVAL REQUEST

TO: Jason Bowers
Music Education

FROM: Dennis Landin
Chair, Institutional Review Board

DATE: March 2, 2017

RE: IRB# E10357

TITLE: Perceptions of Participants Involved with Kids' Orchestra Kids' Choir: A Community Youth Choir in Baton Rouge, Louisiana


Review Date: 3/2/2017

Approved X Disapproved

Approval Date: 3/2/2017 Approval Expiration Date: 3/1/2020

Exemption Category/Paragraph: 1; 2b

Signed Consent Waived?: No

Re-review frequency: (three years unless otherwise stated)

LSU Proposal Number (if applicable):

Protocol Matches Scope of Work in Grant proposal: (if applicable)

By: Dennis Landin, Chairman

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING – Continuing approval is CONDITIONAL on:

1. Adherence to the approved protocol, familiarity with, and adherence to the ethical standards of the Belmont Report, and LSU's Assurance of Compliance with DHHS regulations for the protection of human subjects*
2. Prior approval of a change in protocol, including revision of the consent documents or an increase in the number of subjects over that approved.
3. Obtaining renewed approval (or submittal of a termination report), prior to the approval expiration date, upon request by the IRB office (irrespective of when the project actually begins); notification of project termination.
4. Retention of documentation of informed consent and study records for at least 3 years after the study ends.
5. Continuing attention to the physical and psychological well-being and informed consent of the individual participants, including notification of new information that might affect consent.
6. A prompt report to the IRB of any adverse event affecting a participant potentially arising from the study.
8. SPECIAL NOTE: When emailing more than one recipient, make sure you use bcc. Approvals will automatically be closed by the IRB on the expiration date unless the PI requests a continuation.

* All investigators and support staff have access to copies of the Belmont Report, LSU’s Assurance with DHHS, DHHS (45 CFR 46) and FDA regulations governing use of human subjects, and other relevant documents in print in this office or on our World Wide Web site at http://www.lsu.edu/irb
Appendix B: Kids’ Choir Study-Parental Permission Form

Project Title: Perceptions of Participants Involved with Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir—A Community Youth Choir in Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Performance Site: Independence Park Theatre

Investigator: The following investigator is available for questions, M-F, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Jason Bowers, Music Education Dept., LSU, (225) 229-1289

Co-Investigator: Melissa Brunkan, Music Education Dept., LSU, mbrunkan@lsu.edu

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the impact of Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir participation on the choristers from the perspective of teachers, staff, parents, and the children themselves. The study will explore Kids’ Orchestra’s philosophy of social development through musical experiences and will document the teaching and learning paradigms associated with this philosophy. In addition, the study will examine more deeply the relationship between three choristers’ Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir experience and their musical lives outside of the organization.

Inclusion Criteria: Children who are currently participating in the Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir; parents of choristers; teachers and staff associated with Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir

Number of Participants: approximately 60

Study Procedures: Specific data collection strategies will include: (1) participant observations (Spradley, 1980) of all Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir rehearsals and performances with field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995); (2) semi-structured interviews with child participants, teachers, parents, and staff (Fontana & Frey, 1994); (3) a qualitative questionnaire (completed by all members of the Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir); and (4) analysis of material culture relating to Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir (Hodder, 2008).

Benefits: There are no direct benefits related to participation, however this study may contribute to our understanding of the impact of music on children.

Risks: There is minimal risk involved in this study. If participants become anxious during the interview process for any reason, they will have the option to stop immediately.

Right to Refuse: Participation is voluntary, and a child will become part of the study only if both child and parent agree to the child's participation. At any time, either the subject may withdraw.
from the study or the subject's parent may withdraw the subject from the study without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

**Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

**Signatures:** The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about participants' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Chairman, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I will allow my child to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Parent's Signature:____________________________________________ Date:______________
Appendix C: Kids’ Choir Study-Assent Form

I, ____________________________________, agree to be in a research study about what children like about and learn from choir. I agree to answer some questions about my experience as a member of the Kids' Orchestra Kids’ Choir. I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that make me uncomfortable and I can decide to stop the interview at any time without getting in trouble.

Child's Signature:______________________________ Age:______ Date:__________________

Witness* _______________________________________________ Date:__________________
*(N.B. Witness must be present for the assent process, not just the signature by the minor.)
Appendix D: Kids’ Choir Study-Teacher/Staff Permission Form

**Project Title:** Perceptions of Participants Involved with Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir—A Community Youth Choir in Baton Rouge, Louisiana

**Performance Site:** Independence Park Theatre

**Investigator:** The following investigator is available for questions, M-F, 8:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

Jason Bowers, Music Education Dept., LSU, (225) 229-1289

**Co-Investigator:** Melissa Brunkan, Music Education Dept., LSU, mbrunkan@lsu.edu

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the impact of Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir participation on the choristers from the perspective of teachers, staff, parents, and the children themselves. The study will explore Kids’ Orchestra’s philosophy of social development through musical experiences and will document the teaching and learning paradigms associated with this philosophy. In addition, the study will examine more deeply the relationship between three choristers’ Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir experience and their musical lives outside of the organization.

**Inclusion Criteria:** Children who are currently participating in the Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir; parents of choristers; teachers and staff associated with Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir

**Number of Participants:** approximately 60

**Study Procedures:** Specific data collection strategies will include: (1) participant observations (Spradley, 1980) of all Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir rehearsals and performances with field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995); (2) semi-structured interviews with child participants, teachers, parents, and staff (Fontana & Frey, 1994); (3) a qualitative questionnaire (completed by all members of the Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir); and (4) analysis of material culture relating to Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir (Hodder, 2008).

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits related to participation, however this study may contribute to our understanding of the impact of music on children.

**Risks:** There is minimal risk involved in this study. If participants become anxious during the interview process for any reason, they will have the option to stop immediately.

**Right to Refuse:** Participation is voluntary. At any time, the subject may withdraw from the study without penalty or loss of any benefit to which they might otherwise be entitled.

**Privacy:** Results of the study may be published, but no names or identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.
Signatures: The study has been discussed with me and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the investigator. If I have questions about participants' rights or other concerns, I can contact Dennis Landin, Chairman, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692, irb@lsu.edu, www.lsu.edu/irb. I will allow my child to participate in the study described above and acknowledge the investigator's obligation to provide me with a signed copy of this consent form.

Signature:__________________________________________________ Date:______________
Appendix E: Parent Letter-Interview Request

Dear parents of KOKC members,

I am currently a student at LSU and as a part of my degree I need to complete a study of my choosing. I will, therefore, be conducting a study on the values and benefits of participation in Kids’ Choir. I am planning on interviewing the members of the ensemble. These small group interviews will be brief, but will allow the singers to discuss what they feel they get out of the Kids’ Choir experience. If you would be willing to allow your singer to do a brief interview I will have some forms for you to complete and sign in the near future.

As another piece of the study, I would love to interview as many parents/guardians of the choir members as possible. These interviews could take place before or after any rehearsal, through Skype or FaceTime, over the phone, or even in pencil and paper format. The goal of the study is to put together a meaningful document that can inform future Kids’ Orchestra Kids’ Choir experiences and assist other communities in designing similar programs for children.

If you are willing to give fifteen minutes of your time for an interview, please reply with the method that works best for you (in-person, phone, Skype, FaceTime, or paper form) and the most convenient time. I am so thankful to have the opportunity to work with your children. They are regularly the highlight of my week.

Thank you,

Jason Bowers
jbowe17@lsu.edu
(225) 229-1289

Parent/Guardian name: ___________________________________________________
Phone: ______________________________
Email: ______________________________

I am willing to do a short interview. I would prefer to do the interview by: (please check one)

______ In-person
______ Phone
______ Skype
______ FaceTime
______ Paper form

Preferred day/time of day:
Day of week: _______________________________

_____ Morning  _____ Afternoon  _____ Evening

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Appendix F: Interview Protocols

KOKC Chorister Interview Protocols

1. Why did you join KOKC?
2. What did you expect when you joined KOKC? How was it the same or different?
3. What do you like about KOKC?
4. What is special about your experience in KOKC?
5. What do you value about your participation in KOKC?
6. What is your favorite part of KOKC and why?
7. What is hard about being in KOKC?
8. What is really challenging about being in KOKC?
9. What is your least favorite part of KOKC and why?
10. What have you learned from the KOKC experience?
11. What do you gain from the KOKC experience?
12. How does the music that we sing in KOKC make you feel?
13. Who are your friends in KOKC?
14. Have you made new friends in KOKC?
15. Are the friends you have made in KOKC different from your other friends?
16. What does the KOKC experience mean to you?

KOKC Portraiture Participant Interview Protocols

1. Why did you join KOKC?
2. What did you expect when you joined KOKC? How was it the same or different?
3. What do you like about KOKC?
4. What is special about your experience in KOKC?
5. What do you value about your participation in KOKC?
6. What is your favorite part of KOKC and why?
7. What is hard about being in KOKC?
8. What is really challenging about being in KOKC?
9. What is your least favorite part of KOKC and why?
10. What have you learned from the KOKC experience?
11. What do you gain from the KOKC experience?
12. How does the music that we sing in KOKC make you feel?
13. Who are your friends in KOKC?
14. Have you made new friends in KOKC?
15. Are the friends you have made in KOKC different from your other friends?
16. What does the KOKC experience mean to you?
17. Tell me about your school music class.
18. What other kind of music do you do?
19. Do you play any instruments?
20. Do you compose music and/or song lyrics?
21. Do you sing outside of KOKC? If so, what is your favorite kind of music to sing?
22. What kind of music do you listen to at home?
23. How do you think our choir is similar to the other music that you do?
24. How do you think our choir is different from the other music that you do?

KOKC Chorister Parent Interview Protocols

1. Why did you want your child to join KOKC?
2. What do you value about your child’s participation in KOKC?
3. How has the KOKC experience affected your child?
4. What does your child gain from the KOKC experience?
5. What do you think your child learns being in KOKC?
6. From your perspective, what are the benefits of participation in KOKC for your child?
7. From your perspective, what are the challenges of participation in KOKC for your child?
8. Have you noticed any change in your child’s music habits at home since joining KOKC?
9. What do you see as your role in the overall KOKC experience?

KOKC Portraiture Participant Parent Interview Protocols

1. Why did you want your child to join KOKC?
2. What do you value about your child’s participation in KOKC?
3. How has the KOKC experience affected your child?
4. What does your child gain from the KOKC experience?
5. What do you think your child learns being in KOKC?
6. From your perspective, what are the benefits of participation in KOKC for your child?
7. From your perspective, what are the challenges of participation in KOKC for your child?
8. Have you noticed any change in your child’s music habits at home since joining KOKC?
9. What do you see as your role in the overall KOKC experience?
10. Tell me about your child’s school music experience.
11. Tell me about any other music activities your child is a part of.
12. How is KOKC similar to and/or different than your child’s other music experiences?

KOKC Staff/Teacher Interview Protocols

1. What is your role in KOKC?
2. What are your goals for the children involved in KOKC?
3. What is your philosophy concerning KOKC and how does it manifest itself in your involvement with the ensemble?
4. What benefits do you see for children that participate in KOKC?
5. What challenges do you perceive for children that participate in KOKC?
6. What do you think the kids learn in KOKC?
7. I printed out the KO mission statement. Do you feel like this mission statement influences your involvement with KOKC? If so, describe how.
Appendix G: Chorister Qualitative Questionnaire

Name: _________________________________

1. What do you like about Kids’ Choir?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

2. What do you not like about Kids’ Choir?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

3. What have you learned from Kids’ Choir?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
4. Tell me about any music-making you do other than Kids’ Choir. This could be in Kids’ Orchestra, at home, school, church, etc.

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

5. How are your other music-making experiences the same or different from Kids’ Choir?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

6. Is there anything else you would like to share about Kids’ Choir?

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________
Appendix H: “Trouble, Fly” Text

“Trouble, Fly” by Patricia McKernon Runkle
Text by Susan Marie Swanson

Trouble, fly,
out of our house.
We left the window
open for you.

Fly like smoke from a chimney.
Fly like the whistle from a train.
Fly far, far
away from my family,
mumbling in their sleep.

Trouble, fly.
Let our night
be a night of peace.
Appendix I: Original Kids’ Orchestra Vision Statement Working Document

TO INCREASE RACIAL HARMONY in South Louisiana through the language of music, by engaging our children.
Vita

Jason Paul Bowers, a native of Dallas, Texas, holds a bachelor’s degree in music education (B.M.E.) and a master’s degree in music (M.M.) with an emphasis on choral conducting from Louisiana State University (LSU). Recently, he served as Instructor of Music Education at LSU while completing his Ph.D. in music education. Prior to his work at LSU, he taught in public schools in the Houston and Baton Rouge areas for nine years, focusing primarily on secondary choral music education. His research interests include multicultural music education, supporting inclusive and diverse music classrooms, culturally relevant pedagogies, and critical theory in music education. He has presented research at state, regional, and national conferences.

Jason remains active in the Baton Rouge community as a member of the Kids’ Orchestra staff where he supervises and co-directs Kids’ Choir. He also participates in area choirs and handbell ensembles. Other experience includes teaching private voice and piano, directing church choirs, and facilitating workshops.