CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN MUSIC MAKING:
Understanding How Songwriting Can Develop Character

by

Justina Mei Yin So

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Abstract

Music is often used by its advocates as a vehicle to promote positive changes in students, academically, emotionally, and socially (Catterall, Chapleau & Iwanaga, 1999; Fiske 1999). In this study, I examined the implementation, in my own public elementary classroom, of a five-month Character Really Matters! songwriting program that I developed. The study is designed to provide insight into the potential impact of such songwriting music programs on students’ character development.

The study examined the connections students made between the songwriting program and their lives. The data for this study were derived from a guided student reflection form used as a normal part of teaching. To provide further elucidation of the impact of the songwriting program on students’ character development, I supplemented the reflection-form data with my direct classroom observations using field notes and a character-tracking checklist. Findings from the research revealed connections between songwriting and its impact on developing children’s work habits in collaboration, cooperation, commitment to quality work, and in turn, character development. By writing songs, students were able to tell stories and reflect on their learning from their songwriting experiences. The findings from this study inform the justification and improvement of the program and contribute to the school board’s body of evidence used to examine its character education program.
Acknowledgements

In recent years, I have often found myself on an unexpected path in life. Perhaps it was because working in the real world has been so different from my sheltered years as a student. The writing of this thesis has provided me a significantly special experience and has taught me the meaning of perseverance for my passion to share and to inspire. As one of my middle school teachers once wrote in my yearbook, “Go for it without stopping!” By it, she meant my goals, my dreams, my passion.

My interest lies in the topics of music and character development. I consider character development to be an important aspect of human development. Music can play a central role in development; it allows us to be human, to recognize beauty, be sensitive, have something to cling to, have more love, more compassion, more gentleness, more good, and more life! This interest and passion of mine has been blossoming over the past few years. It has, in fact, taken a lifetime to develop, and is still in the process of germinating. There are many people along my life path who have influenced me, shaped me, supported me, and loved me, and to whom I am grateful.

To my family and friends, I am grateful for all that we have experienced together. Every piece of happiness and sadness we have shared has shaped me into the person I am today. To my mom and dad, I am so grateful for your continual support in my education, and for always being there, through the laughter and the tears. I feel so blessed to have such unconditional love and support from you. To my school administrators, colleagues,
and friends, thank you for being there during difficult times in my life and for supporting and encouraging me in everything I do!

I am also very blessed to have such support from the Faculty of Education, especially Dr. William Egnatoff, first as my individual study supervisor, then as my thesis supervisor. It was he who believed in me and encouraged me to pursue the thesis route as a part-time student. He has guided me through the Master’s program and has been with me on every page of this thesis. Thank you for your patience and encouraging words, even when I was experiencing a challenging time balancing work, study, family, and life all together.

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Further, this thesis would not have been possible without the helpful support of the library staff at the Education Library, in particular, Brenda Reed, who has gone out of her way to help me with all the particular and peculiar searches for relevant materials. I am also grateful to the administrative staff in the Education Graduate Studies Office for their many helpful communications. And to my fellow student colleagues with whom I interacted throughout my courses, I thank you for your friendship, support, and academic inspiration.
Lastly, I would like to thank the research participants, my students, for teaching me to be a better teacher. Thank you for the challenges, support, and inspiration for my teaching and for this study. We are all life-long learners together.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Character development is the deliberate effort to nurture the universal attributes upon which schools and communities find consensus. These attributes provide a standard for behaviour against which we hold ourselves accountable. They permeate all that happens in schools. They bind us together across the lines that often divide us in society. They form the basis of our relationships and of responsible citizenship. They are a foundation for excellence and equity in education, and for our vision of learning cultures and school communities that are respectful, safe, caring and inclusive. Excellence in education includes character development. Through character, we find common ground (Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 3).

Character education is commonplace in American schools, and support for character education is strong and growing across Canada (Winton, 2008). The Ontario (Canada) Ministry of Education required all public schools to implement character education by 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2006). As a result, school boards across Ontario developed programs to infuse character education into all aspects of students’ learning. For example, The York Region District School Board (York Region District
School Board, 2010) derived its mandate to deliver character education directly from educational and social policy directions of the provincial government. The 1999 Ontario Speech from the Throne (Eves, 2003) highlighted the need to foster principles of tolerance, civility, and good citizenship among Ontario’s youth. Ontario’s Education Act (Government of Ontario, 1990) identifies the imparting of values as a duty of the teacher. The Ministry of Education’s 1999 guidance policy document, Choices Into Action (Government of Ontario, 1999), directs that students must learn to demonstrate self discipline, take responsibility for their own behaviour, and practise and acquire good social skills. In addition, the Conference Board of Canada’s Employability Skills Profile (The Conference Board of Canada, 1996) identifies personal management skills, including honesty, responsibility, initiative, integrity, persistence, and respect, as essential for the workforce of the future.

Due to this growing demand for the inclusion of character education in students’ learning, music education advocates have reviewed (Boyes & Reid, 2005) and conducted (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007; Rusinek, 2008) studies to search for potential benefits of music education on positive character development. For many years, claims have been made about the effect music has in aiding the development of personal and social skills (Boyes & Reid, 2005). Further, investigations have been conducted to understand how an active engagement in music making affects students’ attitudes and perceptions of school. Many of these research studies (Burnard, 2008; Rusinek, 2008) concluded that music
education enhances social skills and builds a strong sense of self-esteem and satisfaction. Kokotsaki and Hallam (2007) argued that music education influences the self in terms of personal skill development, and encourages the development of self-achievement, self-confidence, and intrinsic motivation (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007). Unfortunately, these research studies did not examine character education as an explicit objective of the music interventions they examined. These studies did not label the positive influences they found as aspects of good character or character development.

**My Professional Interest in Character Development Through Music Education**

As an elementary specialist music teacher in the York Region District School Board (YRDSB), I am very much interested in understanding the impact of character education on school-age children. The YRDSB mission statement (York Region District School Board, n.d.) declares, “We unite in our purpose to inspire and prepare learners for life in our changing world community.” The YRDSB believes that the attributes of character are ubiquitous, transcending religious, ethno-cultural, and other demographic distinctions, and that good character forms the cornerstone of a civil, just, and democratic society. The Board sees development of good character as a shared responsibility of students, staff, families, and the extended community. As well, the YRDSB advocates that all members of society should embrace opportunities to model, teach, promote, and celebrate good character (York Region District School Board, 2003). In addition, the YRDSB aims to provide an educational experience that improves student achievement,
increases student engagement, and builds staff capacity. The Board believes that character can be both taught and learned and that its development contributes to the social, emotional, and academic development of the whole child.

In the YRDSB, Character Education has been instilled in all aspects of the delivery of programs and services as a way to support and improve student achievement. As a result, in 2000, through community consultation, ten attributes of character were selected and then endorsed by the Board of Trustees: respect, responsibility, honesty, empathy, fairness, initiative, perseverance, integrity, courage, and optimism (York Region District School Board, n.d.). *Character Matters!* became the title that identified these character development initiatives in the Board. This title has since been used to recognize, honour, and support all initiatives, programs, and activities that contribute to character development.

As a teacher and a role model, I strongly believe in not merely addressing curriculum expectations, but in teaching children the true value of having good character so they can become good people. Applying York Region District School Board’s program on *Character Matters!* is how I pursued this goal. It is important to me that I continue to engage students in the creation of a learning environment that is collaborative, caring, and characterized by high expectations for learning. I aim to assist in creating a school culture that values positive relationships, fosters a sense of belonging, and provides an education that nurtures democratic principles and encourages
student voices in decision making. Embedding character development in all school-related activities is one of my priorities.

In addition, for two years of my teaching career, I was given the opportunity to use the *Literacy Through Music* programme, funded by the YRDSB for 10 of its schools. These schools worked with renowned Canadian songwriter and singer Gregg Lawless to compose an original piece of music that focused on one of the ten previously mentioned character traits. Through this process, students were able to learn advanced musical and lyrical concepts in ways that were relevant to their interests and their lives. At the end of this program, students from all ten schools, along with Gregg Lawless and his professional band, celebrated their learning by performing their compositions for the general public at the Markham Theatre.

My observation of students’ enthusiasm for, and engagement in, learning in the *Literacy Through Music* programme increased my interest in understanding the impact of an integrated music and character education program on students’ behaviour. It was evident that students were more excited and more engaged on the days when Gregg visited than on other days.

A second development increased my curiosity about possible connections between music education and character development. The school at which I work, like many other schools in the York Region, celebrates students’ achievement and recognizes their good character by having monthly “Good News” assemblies. To prepare for these
assemblies, teachers have often asked me if I have a song or character-related material that would be appropriate for the character of the month. Often, I have difficulty finding appropriate materials for school-age children to use. Because of this, I decided to start writing character songs with students at my school, so that they would have something authentic and appropriate to share at the monthly assemblies.

Initially, this songwriting initiative was mainly intended to support one of the focuses in our School Plan for Improvement. After putting some thought into my initiative, I decided to share this character songwriting idea with Curriculum Service Canada (CSC). CSC approved my proposal on sharing my lesson plans so that generalist elementary music teachers across the country, who might not be comfortable teaching the music curriculum, could also make use of the character education activities in a regular classroom while incorporating music. I was privileged to be provided a grant by CSC to create this user-friendly teacher resource. At the same time, I tested my lessons with my students to make sure they were feasible and age-appropriate. Then, with the encouragement of Queen’s professors with whom I was working, I decided to examine whether teaching character education through music would have impact on students’ behaviour in learning. As well, I wondered if what I had started at school would enable students to make connections to real-world situations. For example, how would students learn to develop collaborative skills and demonstrate good character in their interactions with others?
Purpose

Due to my passion for music teaching and my strong belief in character education, I linked this research closely with the YRDSB’s policy on character education. Many school boards have their own such policy (Winton, 2008). Character education is a deliberate effort to cultivate positive personal attributes and civility among students. It is a whole-school effort to create a community that fosters positive attitudes, values, and behaviours (York Region District School Board, n.d.). As previously mentioned, some school boards may promote universally desirable qualities such as respect, responsibility, honesty, and integrity (York Region District School Board, n.d.). The character education mission statement from the YRDSB states that in order to foster these positive attributes in schools, character education should not be seen as a separate subject, but rather it should be interwoven into every aspect of school life. As a result, it is important to see how character development can be incorporated into, and developed through, everyday interactions within the classroom.

The broad purpose of this research is to advance understanding of the impact a character songwriting program can have on student engagement and character development. This research examines the researcher’s and students’ perceptions of the impact over a five-month period of a character songwriting program. Previously, I conducted a similar three-month case study (So, 2009) with the finding that students were able to make connections between their daily lives and the character education content
they had learned through the songwriting process. I also found that over the course of the three-month program, students who were formally identified with special needs became more engaged and motivated to work cooperatively and to finish assigned tasks on time. In the longer study, I sought to provide more detailed and substantial evidence for such findings.

**Research Questions**

My work has two specific purposes: first, to understand how songwriting engages students and promotes positive character development, and second, to provide a basis for improving and justifying my music program. The corresponding research questions are:

What connections do students make between the character songwriting program and their lives?

How do I, as a teacher, interpret, evaluate, and justify this songwriting program from the results of this study?

**Thesis Overview**

This thesis is organized into five chapters. This first chapter introduces the study and its purpose, provides a background on character education, explains my interest in studying the impact of a character-songwriting program, and provides an overview of the thesis. The second chapter first reviews the existing literature on the impact of music education on students’ engagement, motivation, and character education. Second, it examines the impact of current character education programs and their connection to
creating compliance and conformity in students’ behaviour that may be based on a number of strategies including extrinsic motivation (Winton, 2007). Third, it situates my study in relation to the existing literature.

The third chapter describes the qualitative case-study methodology used to answer the two research questions. The data include students’ responses on reflection forms, the researcher’s field notes, and the researcher’s ratings of students using a character-tracking checklist. The chapter gives details of the methods for data collection and analysis.

The fourth chapter lays out the findings. Data were analyzed and sorted based on the ten character traits from the YRDSB. The chapter provides findings of students’ views and interpretations of the value of the character songwriting program. The researcher’s field notes and character-tracking checklists provide insight into, and specific concrete evidence of, the impact of the character songwriting program on students’ engagement, motivation, and behaviour.

The fifth and final chapter addresses the two research questions of the study. It includes a synthesis of the findings presented in Chapter Four, comparing the program’s impact with those of common approaches to character education. This chapter also provides insight into the value of the character songwriting program and its positive impact on students’ behaviour without necessarily using extrinsic motivation. The chapter concludes with reflections on the limitations of the study and implications for educational practice and further research.
Chapter 2

Literature Review

The thesis draws upon literature concerning the impact of music education on students’ engagement, motivation, and character development. This chapter begins with a comprehensive review of this literature. The review then examines literature on the impact of current character education programs, including some literature that is critical of such programs, especially when they cultivate behaviour that is compliant and extrinsically motivated. The chapter concludes with a review of the literature that led the researcher to study the impact of a songwriting program on character development.

Impact of Music Education

This study is informed by literature linking school music experience to particular benefits: engagement and motivation in learning, and character development. Research studies have indicated these and other types of benefits of participating in music education, including development of reading skills, cognitive flexibility, speech skills, and the reduction of attention-deficit disorder symptoms (Catterall, 1998). Other research was conducted to understand how active engagement in music making affects students’ attitudes and perceptions of school (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007). Still other claims have been made about the effect of music in aiding the development of personal and social skills (Boyes & Reid, 2005; Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007). Of some relevance to the thesis,
Kokotsaki & Hallam (2007) found that music making in a group builds a strong sense of self-esteem and satisfaction. They also found that music making can help build personal skills by facilitating one’s sense of identity, and that music making encourages the development of self-achievement, self-confidence, and intrinsic motivation.

Assessing the relevance of these studies to my own required further analysis because the interventions examined in these studies did not have character education as an explicit objective. The researchers did not label the positive influences they found as aspects of good character or character development. To clarify the relevance of these studies to my own study, I inferred connections between the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) character attributes and research studies in which evidence of character development was found. Table 1 gives the connections I inferred together with brief descriptions of the research, for the studies of most relevance to my study.

Table 1: Connections inferred by the researcher between the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) character attributes and research studies in which evidence of character development was found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Traits from YRDSB demonstrated in the research study</th>
<th>Studies presenting evidence of character development</th>
<th>Brief Description of the Research Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Respect, Responsibility, Initiative, Perseverance</td>
<td>Burnard, 2008</td>
<td>Qualitative case study: four teachers from four countries, insight into ways of working with young people on the margins of society and ways of creating a learning environment in which students can succeed musically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect, Responsibility, Initiative</td>
<td>Burnard, 2008</td>
<td>Multiple case study: secondary-school music teachers in poorly-performing and under-achieving schools in England, three music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ beliefs and approaches to inclusive teaching and learning with disengaged youths</td>
<td>Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Initiative, Perseverance, Courage</td>
<td>Kokotsaki &amp; Hallam, 2007</td>
</tr>
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<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect, Responsibility, Initiative, Perseverance, Optimism</td>
<td>Rusinek, 2008</td>
<td>Case study in a compulsory general music class at a Spanish public secondary school, examined why adolescents who failed in all other subjects could be highly engaged with music learning; the group of students rejected the school academic culture but worked diligently to be included in the school musical culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perseverance, Initiative</td>
<td>Hidi, 2000</td>
<td>Review examination of the connection between interests and goals; argues that the polarization of situational and individual interest, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, and performance and mastery goals should be reconsidered; urged educators and researchers to recognize the potential additional benefits of externally triggered situational interest, extrinsic motivation, and performance goals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**New Initiatives to Address Diversity of Learning Needs**

Various initiatives have been developed to improve practices and methods to meet the needs of a diverse student population. These programs, although not all arts-based, provide insights on ways school boards have attempted to find and share teaching practices that will improve students learning. Many school boards have attempted to address the diversity in education needs and language background. In 2007, the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) hosted a National Inner City Conference to help educators,
students, and community organizations to attend to the learning needs of inner-city students. Through workshops, discussions, and guest speakers, the conference had participants collaborate to develop a national action plan for inner-city education while at the same time challenging current practices, policies, and programs (Abbott & Leduc, 2006). The TDSB stated that it was committed to leveling the playing field for its students. By hosting this conference, it hoped to share best practices that would lead to greater success and improved outcomes for students and communities.

Similarly, the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) has worked to align its goals to improve test scores with those of the Ministry of Education. The YRDSB took the province’s expert panel report (Grades 4-6) that outlined best practices and translated it into professional development for individual schools in the district (Datoo, 2006). In some schools, principals have tried to hire more male staff members to help encourage boys to read, as well as attempting to acquire more funding through the help of parent councils to provide teachers with Tribes Learning Communities training, which is a research-based process that creates a culture that maximizes learning and human development (Tribes Learning Community, n.d; Datoo, 2006). In some schools, principals have sent out surveys to better understand the needs of the community in an attempt to reach every student in as many ways as possible. In further pursuance of better practices and methods to address the diversity in learning needs, it is useful to look at the effect the arts, and music in particular, may have on students’ attitude toward learning.
Impact of Music in Keeping Students in School

In order to understand why adolescents who failed in all other subjects can be highly engaged with music learning, Rusinek (2008) conducted a case study in a compulsory general music class at a Spanish public secondary school. In the context of this study, the students’ general disengagement from learning seemed to be a reaction to teachers’ declarative, textbook-based teaching strategies. In contrast, the music teacher generated student enthusiasm through an inclusive pedagogy for which, in keeping with the principle of “music for all,” students in each class created orchestral percussion performances of arrangements of pop, classical, and film music. The subject narrative, “the goal is the concert,” was shared by both teacher and students, and had been widely accepted as an important part of the school culture. Through observations and video-stimulated interviews with the teacher, the students, parents, and administrators, the researcher found that although the group of students rejected the school academic culture, in the end they decided to work diligently, cooperatively, and positively to be included in the school musical culture. The improved co-operation was caused by the motivational strategies in school music education. It was found that preparing for a musical performance such as a concert was motivating because concerts provided short-term goals that were visible and achievable (Rusinek, 2008). Preparing for a concert provided an authentic learning situation where students were required to think and act like
professional musicians, building a sense of responsibility and accountability to their groups (Rusinek, 2008).

Similarly, recognizing the increasing importance of developing inclusive pedagogies in music education, Burnard, Dillon, Rusinek, and Saethe conducted a study (2008) that offered a wide variety of ways of promoting positive learning experiences and reaching learners who are most at risk of exclusion. The findings reported in their article came out of a wider comparative research project investigating the pedagogies of music teachers working in challenging contexts. Their project involved the study of teacher perspectives from accounts of pedagogy documented through interviews and observations. The complex ways in which music teachers achieved “inclusion,” according to Burnard et al. (2008), a term that referred to all children achieving and participating despite challenges stemming from poverty, class, race, religion, linguistic and cultural heritage, or gender, is best understood in connection with the interplay of policies, structures, culture, and values specific to schools. This qualitative case study of four teachers from four different countries—Spain, Australia, Sweden, and the UK—provided insight into ways of working with young people on the margins of society and methods of creating a learning environment in which students could succeed musically. Accounts offered by these four exceptional music teachers included particular teacher and school strategies, management practices that promoted pupil-to-pupil relationships inside and outside the classroom, and how the school connected with its musical
community. The authors challenged educators to consider how inclusive their music pedagogies were and concluded with suggestions about what educators could learn, as practitioners and researchers, from comparative accounts of pedagogy. The findings showed that an inclusive music program can help keep teens in school. In an interview, the associate head teacher of the school stated that some children would have dropped out had they not been obliged to stay until age 16. Such students would only get enthusiastic with certain things and music was one of them. “Watching themselves in the concert, doing it well, being applauded… is a great way of motivation for them” (p. 117).

Burnard’s other study (2008), a multiple-case study, found, similarly, that an inclusive music program is effective in keeping disengaged low-achieving students interested in school. According to Burnard (2008), the drive for inclusion has become a prominent feature in UK educational policy agendas and school improvement programs. The term “inclusion” here refers to all children achieving and participating, despite challenges stemming from poverty, class, race, religion, linguistic and cultural heritage, or gender. While much has been written about inclusion, less thoroughly explored is how teachers perceive inclusive education practices among young people who are disengaged from learning and from educational opportunity, as manifested by non-attendance or under-achievement at school. Burnard’s multiple-case study (2008) drew on research on secondary school music teachers in poorly performing, under-achieving schools, including three comprehensive secondary schools in the east and southeast regions of
England. It reported on the three music teachers’ beliefs and approaches to inclusive teaching and learning in their pedagogical settings. A phenomenological approach utilizing semi-structured interviews was employed to explore music teachers’ perceptions of what they did in responding to and overcoming the challenge of re-engaging disaffected youth, and their perceptions of their own inclusive pedagogical practices. In order to explore the teachers’ perceptions further, some artifacts such as curriculum planning documents were used as interview prompts to provide an opportunity to discuss key factors concerning the content of the music courses. The researchers emphasized that, for these teachers, inclusive pedagogies involve more than the accumulation of teaching strategies employed by teachers for supporting troubled and troublesome learners. These teachers' pedagogies were informed largely by particular views of music, views of music learning and learners, and views of the kind of knowledge that was created and the educational outcomes that are desired in overcoming the particular challenges of attuning to and re-engaging disaffected learners. Inclusive pedagogical practices reported in this study were framed by focusing on re-engaging disaffected learners by: (a) democratizing music learning as social practice; (b) emphasizing high-status creative projects; and (c) using digital technology as pedagogic levers for re-engaging learners. These findings provided a preliminary basis for theorizing about the role of music education and approaches for teachers to reach disaffected youths.
Furthermore, Kinder and Harland (2004) reviewed some key findings from the National Foundation for Education Research (NFER) in two major research areas: strategies to address pupil disaffection, and arts education, focusing on overlap and commonality in reported effects and effective practice. The researchers’ central questions focussed on whether, how, and why arts education might make a contribution to those strategies aimed at addressing or preventing young people's disengagement from learning and educational opportunity. The findings showed that the inclusion of disengaged learners might keep them out of trouble. For example, one youngster in Harland, Kinder, and Hartley’s study (1995) of young people’s participation stated, “[I]f I wasn’t here doing the art project, I’d be out stealing cars and doing drugs” (p. 118). Supporting this, Boyes and Reid reported (2005) that some students, particularly those labeled as “troublesome,” had a change in attitude after participating in an integrated arts program. Burnard (2008) also found that inclusive music education was often used as a successful vehicle to re-engage unmotivated learners in UK secondary schools. Burnard further concluded that students were re-engaged in music because they were able to develop a mutually respectful relationship with their music teacher. Researchers reporting in Champion of Change (Fiske 1999) found that the arts provided a reason, and sometimes the only reason, for engaging in school activities or in extra-curricular programs (Burton, Horowitz, Abeles, Catterall, Chapleau, & Iwanaga, 1999; Heath & Roach, 1999). Burton et al. (1999) examined young people who were considered classroom failures and found
that these students often became the high-achievers in arts learning settings. I, too, have seen this phenomenon in my own teaching. Those students whom homeroom teachers labeled as “trouble-makers” were often the most engaged, motivated, and talented musicians in my instrumental music classes. In addition, Catterall et al. (1999) found that students were motivated to learn not just for tests results or other performance outcomes, but also for the learning experience itself.

**Music Education and Engagement in Learning**

Further studies have looked at the positive effect an arts education can have on students’ engagement. In a study on Learning Through the Arts (LTTA), a Canadian school-wide arts-education approach where the arts were integrated in the teaching of other subject areas (e.g., making a quilt stitched with facts about Canada, lantern making as an introduction to geometry, or designing and using raps to learn times tables), it was found that involvement in the arts went hand in hand with engagement in learning at school (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). One teacher reflected that students were very attentive during the artist day and therefore learned more (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). A parent stated that her child became more diligent about completing homework and remembering important information, and that her child became more excited about school and her subjects, even the ones of which her child was not fond (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). The Learning Through the Arts final report to the Royal Conservatory of Music reported that, after three years with the program, the Grade 6 LTTA students were more engaged and
motivated to learn at school and scored higher in tests of computation and estimation than the control group, which indicated a gradual, longitudinal effect (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). In addition, Grade 6 girls in LTTA schools stated that they were happier to come to school than did their peers in the control-group schools, which was a difference that did not exist at the beginning of the study (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). Smithrim and Upitis (2005) also speculated that LTTA students scoring higher in computation tests may have been due to their higher level of engagement.

Upitis (2011) explained the intrinsic and extrinsic benefits the arts offer to elementary students. Intrinsic benefits include opportunities to explore creativity and imagination, and see the beauty and to enrich the quality of our lives, as well as to develop effective ways to express thoughts, knowledge, and feelings. Upitis (2011) further explained the extrinsic benefits of learning in, about, and through the arts. They include increased engagement in learning in other subject areas, and development of students’ self-confidence, social skills, and metacognition.

Furthermore, Platz and Collins (2007) noted that students were more engaged in learning in schools in which the arts were evident; in these schools, students were able to find connections to all subjects, because the arts provided them with another way to learn and communicate—without words. For example, in Wilson, Macdonald, Byrne, Ewing, and Sheridan’s study (2008), one secondary arts teacher noted that the students who obviously thought themselves bad at descriptive writing were producing things that were
quite inventive with the help of the arts. This teacher stated that these students would not have had an opportunity in other subjects to express themselves in such a way, because in those subjects there was more of a right and a wrong way to write in English compared to the creative opportunity allowed by the arts. In support of this, Fiske (1999) stated that the arts reach students who are not otherwise being reached. When well taught, the arts provide young people with authentic learning experiences that engage their minds, hearts, and bodies. Furthermore, music making was seen as both meaningful and expressive for all (Burnard, Dillon, Rusinek, & Saether, 2008). The teachers recognized the power of musical activity to connect them with students, and its inherent capacity to engage in ways that were relevant to the learners and the communities in which they lived. So far, the literature review has examined the impact of music education and other arts programs and their potential to keep disengaged students at school. In light of these findings, the review continues to make connections to my research study and to examine how music, and, in particular, songwriting, might positively engage students in their learning at school.

**Impact of Music Education on Building Personal and Social Skills**

For young people who are in some way at risk of not developing a sense of self-worth and agency as learners, simply being allowed to participate in a musical group may provide the opportunity needed to build talent, self-confidence, and mutual respect. This is a view firmly espoused by Fraser (1997). When working in a musical group, students
are given responsibility and are held accountable for their learning. The earning of respect and recognition, according to Fraser (1997), occurs through self-development in music and working on musical talents (self-respect); through care of the musical self (musical honour); and by giving back to others (mutual respect). Furthermore, Kinder and Harland’s (2004) review on Kinder and Wilken’s two-year study of effective strategies for disengaged pupils summarized that arts education provides the opportunity to establish positive personal relationships with an adult who can represent and model pro-social values and offer respect to the young person.

This position was further supported by Wilson, Macdonald, Byrne, Ewing, and Sheridan’s study (2008) of the views of Scottish teachers concerning the delivery of arts subjects within the 5-14 curriculum. Data were gathered through focus group interviews with primary, secondary, and primary head teachers, and a questionnaire survey of 232 teachers in 10 schools. Research issues included the balance of the curriculum, assessment, the specialist knowledge required to teach each subject with confidence, how the arts were valued by parents and schools, and the benefits that may accrue to pupils and the school through participation in the arts. The study compared findings from primary teachers with those from secondary teachers. While differences were apparent in terms of confidence with teaching and assessing the arts and in how teachers felt arts subjects were valued, all participants strongly endorsed the benefits of arts education, particularly in terms of pupils' personal development.
When teachers were asked, regarding their view on teaching the arts, how the arts were valued and what the benefits of the arts were, the three statements that were most popularly chosen were: (a) Arts education promotes individual achievement; (b) Arts activity in school provides a foundation for lifelong interest and participation; and (c) Arts involvement develops imagination, sensitivity, and responsiveness in individuals. In short, it was found that encouraging students to develop an interest in the arts not only helped keep ‘notorious’ teens out of trouble by providing them with a consuming interest in an activity, but that arts subjects were seen as offering particular personal benefits in terms of individual development. Both primary and secondary teachers spoke of the confidence that their students had gained through arts learning and personal development. A secondary teacher stated, “We had to open up some of the parts to first and second years, and they were brilliant. Two second year boys who were considered trouble in school, just … went for it, they were the star of the show…” (p. 48). Therefore, the arts subjects were also seen as an arena in which children with difficulties in other subject areas could shine. In addition, the teachers that were interviewed saw their students as having considerable potential for demonstrating self-expression and emotional response, at the same time developing social skills. The researchers reported that drama at one secondary school was a subject where students learned transferable skills such as communicating with people, negotiating with people, organizing, and meeting deadlines. Respondents in the research indicated that, through the arts, children experienced
teamwork and cooperative endeavours; improved individual discernment; developed citizenship values, particularly through public projects in the community; and gained an improved understanding of others in society, particularly other cultures or people with disabilities.

In addition, Burnard et al. (2008) found that in UK secondary schools, pupils’ engagement with music was shown to enhance awareness of others, social skills, well-being, confidence in performance, group work, and self-expression. Similarly, instrumental teachers believed that the benefits of learning to play an instrument included the development of social skills; gaining a love for, and enjoyment of, music; developing teamwork; a sense of achievement, confidence and self-discipline; and cultivating physical co-ordination (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007). Further research studies have also shown that the arts help students to develop positive behaviours, self-confidence, self-control, discipline, collaboration, empathy, and tolerance (Platz & Collins, 2007; Rusinek, 2008).

Boyes and Reid’s (2005) literature review focused on whether and to what extent arts participation can be shown to advance cognitive, personal, and social outcomes for participating school pupils, and the possible subsequent positive effects on the more academic aspects of school life, such as achievement and attainment. The generally held belief that the “arts are good for everyone” was a powerful concept for those working in education who, in addition to wanting developmental outcomes for individual pupils, also
see arts participation as instrumental in raising educational standards via the increased motivation, confidence, and transferable cognitive skills nurtured by the arts.

Music was also sometimes seen to aid in the development of critical thinking skills and character. Through interviews and observing day-to-day classroom practice, Wong (2005) explored the perspectives of 10 music teachers in elementary schools in Vancouver and Hong Kong regarding the value and impact of music education on the psychological and character development of students. The participating music teachers of the two localities held similar beliefs about the essential elements of music education; however, they held different beliefs about the value or impact of music education on the psychological or character development of students. Vancouver music teachers were found to be more student-centred than their counterparts in Hong Kong, and this is reflected in both the curriculum and activities selected for classroom teaching. Although both groups of teachers placed similar emphasis on western music, in Canada, more classroom activities were based around the student’s personal enjoyment and expression. In Hong Kong, music education was viewed as a means of nurturing the student’s temperamental development. While students in Vancouver were allowed to express their personal musical preferences in classroom activities, in Hong Kong, students were required to perform according to prescribed standard indicators of success. Teachers reported that music encouraged students to develop critical and analytical thinking and the ability to discuss issues in a rational way. Such school environments bestow upon
students the freedom to develop their individuality, self-expression, and self-reliance. Wong (2005) noted that, sometimes, besides pure enjoyment, music education was also seen as a means to nurture one’s temperament (character). An elementary teacher in Hong Kong stated, “I think music education is to nurture one’s temperament. To allow students to reduce stress, alleviate the pressure that they experience from other subjects” (p. 408). Other teachers, drawing up their teaching experience, believed that music education could help students to develop their patience.

This section reviewed reports and research studies that provided supporting evidence that music education can provide students with the opportunity and incentive to work hard for a specific purpose (e.g., a performance) and, in the process, develop good learning skills as an individual, and, simultaneously, learn to interact appropriately with others in a group, developing good social skills. Wong’s study (2005) demonstrated that music education can provide students the opportunity to develop critical thinking skills through inquiry and analysis developed through listening to, creating, and performing music. More interesting, music was seen as a way to nurture one’s temperament and character, developing patience. These findings in particular resonate with the purpose of my study; they help me make connections between my songwriting program and its role in providing students with opportunities to take ownership of their work and to develop critical skills and good character.
Impact of Extracurricular Activities and Possible Links to Character Development

According to Moore and Halle (2001), researchers have found that involvement in extracurricular activities is associated with positive development. When undergraduate and graduate students from the Education Sociology classes of New York University were asked to recall from their public-school experience what factors they felt had a lasting influence on their personality, nearly half of the group believed that a vital program of extracurricular activities was important in the development of character (Brown 1936). Furthermore, recent research has shown that involvement in at least one school club decreases the chances of a youth's engagement in risk-taking behaviors (Moore & Halle, 2001) and increases the chance of high-school completion for teens who are at risk for school dropout (Maloney & Cairns, 1997). Because of these findings, efforts to provide youth development opportunities for disadvantaged and at-risk youth have increased in recent years. Still, these approaches have a very long history; organizations such as Scouts, YMCA, and YWCA have been active for many decades. Because there was no reason to assume that some types of activities were inherently superior to others, it was concluded that participation in any array of clubs, teams, and organizations was positive (Moore & Halle, 2001). Still, according to Moore and Halle (2001), marginal membership and inconsistent attendance were not expected to be meaningful. Therefore, the level of participation needs to be considered in examining benefit, as does whether or not a child holds a leadership position. The studies reviewed
provide evidence that extracurricular activities are beneficial to disengaged learners. Extracurricular activities provide a place where students feel comfortable doing what they are good at, where they can interact socially in a positive way with others having similar interests, and where there are opportunities for collaborating, aiming for the same goals, which may encourage students to change their attitudes towards learning and improve their behaviour and character.

**A Closer Look at Character Education and its Impact on Motivation: Forming a Culture of Compliance**

As mentioned in Chapter 1, as a response to government policy, character education is becoming more and more prominent in schools today. In her doctoral thesis, Winton (2007) argues that character education, growing in popularity across Canada, is linked to neoconservative interests and the desire to return to traditional values. According to Kohn (1995), the phrase “character education” has two meanings. In the broad sense, it refers to almost anything that schools might try to provide outside of academics, especially when the purpose is to help children grow into good people. In the narrow sense, it denotes a particular style of moral training, one that reflects particular values as well as particular assumptions about the nature of children and how they learn. Unfortunately, the two meanings of the term have become blurred, and educators who are keen to support children’s social and moral development may turn, by default, to a program with a certain set of methods and a specific agenda that, on reflection, they
might very well find objectionable. Character education is also considered by some to be a mechanism designed to produce compliant workers and to support neoliberalism (Winton, 2007). What goes by the name of character education nowadays is, for the most part, a collection of exhortations and extrinsic inducements designed to make children work harder and do what they are told (Kohn, 1995). The purpose is to drill students in specific behaviors rather than to engage them in deep, critical reflection about certain ways of being. For example, a multiethnic elementary school in Southern California uses a framework created by the Jefferson Center for Character Education. Classes that the principal declares “well behaved” are awarded Bonus Bucks, which can eventually be redeemed for an ice cream party.

This strategy of offering students rewards when they are caught being good is a form of extrinsic motivation, where students are encouraged to perform a good deed for the purpose of getting something in return, and for which otherwise, they might not have been motivated to perform (Deci & Ryan, 1985). However, what may seem an immediate result to encourage good acts may not be successful in the long term. According to Kohn (1995), the more we reward people for doing something, the more likely they are to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward. Extrinsic motivation, in other words, is not only quite different from intrinsic motivation but actually tends to erode it. A person's kindness cannot be bought (Kohn, 1995). The same applies to a person's sense
of responsibility, fairness, perseverance, and so on. The lesson a child learns from this kind of extrinsic motivation is that the point of being good is to get rewards.

Exhorting students to be respectful or rewarding them if they are caught being good may likewise mean nothing more than getting them to do whatever the adults demand at the time. According to Kohn (1995), schools are already powerful socializers of traditional values. For example, in most schools, students are taught or compelled to follow the rules regardless of whether the rules are reasonable. They are taught to respect authority regardless of whether that respect has been earned. I have noticed this at the many schools at which I have taught. For example, students are taught to remember certain character values, without really fully understanding them. In our school board, the Character Matters! posters with the definitions for each character attribute are posted in every classroom. An enlarged copy of the poster can be found at the front foyer of every York Region school. Our school board has created programs to provide opportunities for schools to invite artists such as Glenn Marais or Gregg Lawless to perform character songs, talk about the importance of respect and character, or create character songs with students for a nominal fee.

As a result, Winton (2007) saw that this Character Matters! policy advocates a traditional approach to character education. This traditional approach limits opportunities for students to learn to value diverse perspectives and consider the complexity of morality and decision-making. Therefore, Winton (2007) saw that the policy encourages
students to support and perpetuate the status quo rather than prepare them to pursue a more democratic society. Winton (2007) further argued that while Character Matters! claims to be interested in affecting students’ character, its primary interests is changing students’ behaviour. This is evidenced by its emphasis on shared values, conformity to behavioural expectations, conflict resolution, and transcending diversity.

The extrinsic motivation strategies implemented at the particular school at which I teach provide evidence to support Winton’s (2007) point. For example, we have “Character Thoughts for the Day:” each morning our morning announcers are given a script to read containing definitions or examples of the particular character trait of the month. In support of our School Improvement Plan and bullying prevention committee, we created a “catch a star” award, where students are awarded a star with their name, and their good deed on the playground is read out on the next morning’s announcements. As a result of this initiative, teachers noticed its negative outcome as students would sometimes stage themselves doing a good deed in front of a yard supervisor in order to make sure they received a star. In addition, each month, a character assembly is hosted by an assigned class, where they perform a skit, a song, a PowerPoint presentation, or a poem to teach others about the character of the month. At these assemblies, one student from each class is given the “Leader by Example” award for best demonstrating the character attribute of the month.
The definition and meaning of each character trait is repeatedly hammered into students’ heads, month after month. When the next academic year comes along, they are repeated again. September is the month of respect, October is the month of responsibility, November is the month of empathy, December is the month of honesty, and so on. Yet students are not provided the opportunity to think critically about these definitions or to make connections to them. Students happily oblige their teachers, because they wish to receive the star or to hear their names proudly announced for the whole school on the announcements or at the next assembly.

As a result, these incentive-based character education strategies have created a culture of compliance. This culture of compliance, created by the above mentioned common approaches by schools and school boards to character education, is subject to the concerns raised by Ursula Franklin in her Massey Lectures, The Real World of Technology (1999), with respect to what she calls “prescriptive technologies.” According to Franklin (1999), “prescriptive technologies involve distinctly different specializations and divisions of labour, and consequently they have very different social and political implications” (p. 10). It is about what is being done rather than how it is being done, or why. As a result, prescriptive technologies provide a seed-bed for a culture of compliance. As Franklin stated (1999), “It is characteristic of prescriptive technologies that they require external management control, and planning. They reduce workers' skill and autonomy. But they are exceedingly effective in terms of invention and production”
In a way, this is similar to our children being told what to do, what to say, what to write, and how to act, though not fully understanding the purpose of the instruction.

Davis (2011) reviewed research on how children learn good behaviour through practice. For example, one learns to be honest by practising honesty, not merely talking about it. Children practise good behaviour in order to establish good habits and satisfy their parents until they come to understand the value of such good behaviour. Davis’ stated that this process is similar to parents establishing good eating habits for children until they are able to make their own food choices. Davis lamented that there is no such follow up in our current school system because it is continuing to follow a rewards-for-good-behaviour system.

According to Reiss and Sushinsky (1975), rewards do not undermine intrinsic motivation, but only distract from it, unless the rewards are salient. As Deci and Ryan (1985) state, children are intrinsically motivated to learn, to undertake challenges, and to solve problems. Adults are also intrinsically motivated to do a variety of things: they spend large periods of time painting pictures, building furniture, playing sports, whittling wood, climbing mountains, and doing countless other things for which there are no obvious or appreciable external rewards. The rewards are inherent in the activity, and, even though there may be secondary gains, the primary motivators are the spontaneous, internal experiences that accompany the behaviour. As mentioned, Kohn explains (1995), the more people are rewarded for doing something, the more likely they are to lose
interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward. Supporting Kohn (1995), in recent years, many researchers have obtained data supporting the conclusion that adult use of salient external control, such as material rewards, to induce compliance in children may undermine children’s later intrinsic interest or the likelihood of internally guided behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 1985). In Fabes, Fultz, Eisenberg, May-Plumlee, and Christopher’s study (1989) on the effects of rewards on children’s pro-social motivation, it was predicted that children whose parents rely on instrumental rewards to achieve desired ends should be especially likely to lose interest in the previously rewarded behaviour or activity when the reward is no longer available.

A study by Fabes et al. (1989) examined the relation between mothers’ attitudes and practices regarding the use of rewards and children’s susceptibility to the undermining effects of rewards. The researchers assessed the attitudes and practices regarding rewards of 72 mothers and assigned their children to a control condition or to one of four experimental conditions that differed in whether children received rewards for helping and whether children engaged in the helping task or watched other children help. Children were then given an opportunity to help in a non-reward free-choice period. It was found that rewards enhanced helping in the immediate situation. However, rewards undermined children’s helping in the free-choice period, but only for children whose mothers felt positive about using rewards. Moreover, mothers who felt more positive about using rewards reported their children to be less pro-social than children of mothers
who had less positive attitudes. It has been suggested that the children’s responses to rewards depend, in part, on their experiences with rewards. Although a number of investigators have found that material rewards increase the occurrence of helping, sharing, and cooperation in the immediate context, the findings of their study support the conclusion that rewards may also undermine subsequent pro-social motivation in situations where rewards are no longer forthcoming.

How, then, should adults authentically educate children to have good character without the extrinsic motivation or tempting rewards that create this culture of compliance? Kohn (1995) offers a few suggestions. To say that students must construct meaning around moral concepts is not to deny that adults have a crucial role to play. Kohn (1995) suggested holding regular class meetings in which students can share, plan, decide, and reflect together. Adults might also provide children with explicit opportunities to practise perspective talking, imagining how the world looks from someone else's point of view. Activities that promote an understanding of how others think and feel, and that encourage the impulse to imaginatively reach beyond oneself, can provide the same benefits realized by holding democratic class meetings, helping students to become more ethical and compassionate while simultaneously fostering intellectual growth (Kohn, 1995). Adults can also provide students with open-ended stories to teach them to recognize morals and their purpose, rather than telling them the moral of the story.
Davis (2011) studied the power of storytelling and how sharing our stories and experiences can have an impact on character education of children as they reflect on the stories. In her research, Davis (2011) looked at stories of the land and how land moulds people; the stories in her study are of variety ethnic groups and the necessary skills and character developed while living, farming, and gathering on their land. This idea of storytelling can be expanded. For example, when teachers share a story about perseverance or compassion, they are sharing an experience from which students can learn.

Kohn (1995) also advised creating a safe and inclusive classroom for students to learn. Kohn (1995) reasoned that because the proponents of character education say we must make students understand that it is wrong to lie, then we need to teach them about the importance of being honest. But why do people lie? According to Kohn (1995), it is usually because they do not feel safe enough to tell the truth. The real challenge for us as educators is to examine that precept in terms of what is going on in our classrooms, to ask how we and the students together can make sure that even unpleasant truths can be told and heard. Pursuing this line of inquiry does not mean that it is acceptable to fib, but rather it means the problem has to be dissected and solved from the inside out. It means behaviours occur in a context that teachers have helped to establish. Therefore, teachers have to examine and consider modifying that context even at the risk of some discomfort to themselves. In short, if teachers want to help children grow into compassionate and
responsible people, they have to change the way the classroom works and feels, not just the way each separate member of that class acts. The emphasis should not be on forming individual characters so much as on transforming educational structures (Kohn, 1995).

Kohn’s reasoning (1995) is similar to the research studies examined in the beginning of this chapter. By providing an inclusive program for students, teachers are able to engage them to work harder for what interests them (Burnard, 2008; Burnard et al 2008; Rusinek, 2008). In Kohn’s (1995) case, in providing an inclusive learning culture, teachers are providing a safe environment where students can take risks, and explore their understanding of their learning. With this notion, I seek to make connections to the impact of music education, moving away from the common approaches teachers have taken to character education through extrinsic motivation and thus creating a culture of compliance. I wish to examine how students might benefit from a character songwriting program in which students are provided the opportunity to use their critical thinking skills to examine and give voice to their beliefs through creating authentic lyrics and melodies, thus representing their own ideas, not simply what they think others want to hear.

**Discussion**

This section examines the methodologies, strengths, and weaknesses of the studies reviewed and situates my research in relation to those studies.

Burnard (2008) observed noticeable positive change in students’ attitude towards learning that she attributed to the engaging and motivating music program being offered,
which she in turn attributed to the fact that she had selected the best music teachers as the sample. Burnard described these UK teachers as passionately committed leaders who were motivated to make a difference in student learning by meeting individual students’ musical needs. The teachers valued suitably structured musical participation as a vehicle for developing self-worth, identity, and agency for young people who were in some way at risk, as well as for those who were not (Burnard, 2008). The student populations were chosen from highly needy areas where students either lived in local authority housing on the council estates close to the school, qualified for free school meals, had consistent truancy problems, were underperforming academically, or had emotional, behavioural, or learning difficulties. This chosen population was appropriate for research concerned with socially disadvantaged students; Burnard did not use the findings to draw the general conclusion that music education has a direct impact on the development of positive character in all learners. Burnard’s study provides evidence that students of the sort studied became more engaged in their music education and developed a stronger sense of self. Given the specialized population of students in Bernard’s study, one cannot conclude from this study that an engaging music program can have a positive impact on character development. Furthermore, the impact on students is inferred from the music teachers’ perception of the changes they saw in their students. Finally, Burnard concluded that students’ engagement improved in music, as students were staying in school to be a part of the music group; there was no indication of improved engagement in other subject
areas. Therefore, it would not be accurate to conclude from this study that music education has a positive effect on commitment to overall schooling.

On the other hand, Burnard’s study (2008) demonstrated that this opportunity allowed students to experience what it means to be respectful and have good character. This was because, in the learning process, respect and good character were built as students developed good relationships with their music teacher and peers inside and outside of the classroom. Therefore, provided with a respectful, supportive, encouraging, flexible, and adaptive environment where respect and recognition need to be earned through perseverance and hard work (Burnard, 2008), it is possible for character development to be advanced. This kind of environment is ideal for the purpose of my research study because in this kind of environment students are able to experience the true meaning of respect and other character traits such as perseverance and responsibility. For example, in such an environment, students have to consistently put effort into showing respect in order to earn respect from others.

In comparison with Burnard’s study, where she looked at the impact on students that was inferred from the music teachers’ perception on the changes they saw in their students, Kokotsaki and Hallam’s study (2007) aimed to assess the perceived impact of music students’ active engagement in music making. Seventy-eight music students were asked to report on the impact of their participation in music making on their lives. The findings fell within three categories: (a) music making as a musical act, which allowed
participants to deepen their musical knowledge and understanding; (b) music making as a social act, where students felt that they were active contributors to a group outcome, developing a strong sense of belonging, gaining popularity, and making friends with ‘like-minded’ people, as well as enhancing their social skills, and building up a strong sense of self-esteem and satisfaction; and (c) music making influencing the self in terms of personal skill development contributing to the student’s personal identity and encouraging the development of self-achievement, self-confidence, and intrinsic motivation. In this study, instead of interviewing music teachers, the researcher asked students to evaluate the benefits of the music program in which they were involved. This strategy is possibly better than obtaining teacher perceptions to provide valuable information on the positive effects music education may offer, since it asked students to voice how they felt music was beneficial to them. Another strength in the research, in addition to asking students about their perception of what music education meant to them, was the kind of question asked in the questionnaire. Only two very open-ended questions were asked on the questionnaire: “(a) How do you perceive your past or current involvement in musical ensemble?, and (b) What impact did it have on you?” (p. 95). As the researchers noted, these open-ended questions were intended to avoid the influence on respondents by any prompts inferred from the content of the questions. This allowed for a wide range of answers and maximized the flexibility to cover any areas of participants’ experience on which they chose to comment.
Kokotsaki and Hallam’s study (2007), like Burnard’s, employed a specialized sample group, in this case, undergraduate and postgraduate music students who were pursuing music as a profession. Engagement was likely to be high since students were studying music because they chose to be there. For these students, music and character development were related; students indicated a gain in confidence through music making, and an urge to work hard, to contribute to the group, to co-operate, to collaborate, and to exchange ideas in order to maintain standards. These actions provided students empowerment and accountability in their learning. Character building was further evident through participants’ descriptions of the establishment of mutual support and encouragement among musicians. In addition, participants also indicated an appreciation of the community building in terms of the opportunity of making new friends and being in a group with a common goal. Being able to compare their own performance against those of their fellow musicians enabled them to gain self-confidence or to become motivated to put more effort into improving their performance. The findings of this study led me to wonder if the same impact and experience would be possible for school-age students in the mutually supportive and respectful songwriting program that I offer.

In Kokotsaki and Hallam’s study (2007) it was evident that music education played a large role in creating a sense of identity in music students. Students indicated that in order to achieve this feeling, they had to have a good work ethic. In order to achieve confidence and self-satisfaction on a personal level, students took initiative in
becoming responsible for their learning, which is an indication of good character. As well, by participating in a group, students learned to co-operate and compromise, working together to set a standard and a common goal, creating a supportive and respectful community.

These studies indicate positive effects music education has on students’ engagement and provide some links to character development. Music, because of its performance nature, often provides a clear, visible, short-term, achievable goal that inspires students to develop a good work ethic and build musicianship (Rusinek, 2008). The needs for collaboration and teamwork also provide an encouraging environment in which to develop community and a unique culture attuned to the shared goal.

As previously mentioned, it is important to note the characteristics of the participants in these studies. For example, Rusinek’s study (2008) focused on a homogeneous group of Spanish students, while Burnard’s (2008) and Kokotsaki and Hallam’s studies (2007) focused on a homogeneous group of British students. Few studies have focused, as does my study, on the Canadian population. Furthermore, Burnard (2008) and Rusinek’s (2008) studies focused specifically on disaffected learners. My research includes both regular students and disaffected learners in regular classrooms and with a variety of background and learning styles. My research is designed to inform teaching practice and to gain a better understanding of the effect of music education on different types of learners.
Most of the studies reviewed gathered data over a short period of time and most data were qualitative, using interviews, questionnaires, or field notes. The length of observation time may limit evidence of impact on character development. The research comparison of students from the Learning Through the Arts schools and regular schools found higher performance only on the test of computation and estimation, though this improvement did not occur until three years later, at the end of the study (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005). This suggests that the impact of the arts on non-art achievement may be a long and slow process. One question worth investigating is whether this gain in mathematics achievement will continue over time. Davis (2003) supported this by saying character is, by definition, an enduring feature of the person, a settled disposition, something that must exist over more than a small part of one’s life to exist at all. By this, Davis meant character changes very slowly; therefore, further longitudinal research is needed. Another suggestion for future research would be to mix experimental data, such as test scores before and after participation, with in-depth participant self-report and researcher observations of behaviour.

**Implications for My Research**

A few research studies have made claims for the positive effects music education has on behavioural modification (Rusinek, 2008), attitudinal change (Burnard, 2008; Burnard et al., 2008; Kinder & Hartland, 2004; Rusinek 2008) and an enhancement in personal and social skills (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007). Making music also provides a
meaningful incentive for some students to stay in school (Rusinek, 2008). Burnard et al. (2008) stated that when students prepare for concerts, the learning situations are musically authentic. Instead of the conflicting and sometimes violent attitudes groups of disaffected learners display in all other subjects, in music, they are highly motivated and attain self-regulation. It is also seen that music education can increase the social cohesion within class, as well as develop greater self-reliance, better social adjustment, and more positive attitudes in the children (Rusinek, 2008).

Still, despite the research undertaken to date, few research studies have been published that explored the specific outcomes of music education and character development in the Canadian educational setting. According to Kokotsaki and Hallam (2007), some studies have explored social relationships within groups, with trust and respect emerging as crucial for the functioning of small groups working together continuously over long periods of time (e.g., a string quartet), where students develop self-discipline and self-regulation. Wong’s study (2005) expressed a belief that music education can be used as a means to nurture one’s temperament and personality, and to develop patience. In all of these studies, numerous factors and variables were examined, from disaffected learners to general regular students, from elementary to secondary school students, from regular music classes to extracurricular community groups, as well as the quality of the music teachers and the program they offer. Putting this all together with Kohn’s description of the impact of common approaches to character education
today (1995), and its effects on motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985), or functioning as what Franklin (1999) described as prescriptive technologies, I now take a closer look at the design of my study.

As the music teacher and arts leader at my school and an arts leader for the school board, I have seen and have been involved in various initiatives that support our board’s policy on character education. Since its establishment, our board’s Character Matters! policy has set a standard for behaviour across the system for both adults and students. The 10 character attributes were intended to represent many more attributes upon which our local classes, schools, and communities can build. Some of the building principles of the Character Matters! policy include using it as a way to articulate our expectations of ourselves, as well as recognizing, honouring, and supporting all initiatives, programs, and activities that staff have done and continue to do to contribute to character development (YRDSB, 2003). The character education policy also creates guiding principles that state that its effectiveness will only increase with the participation of the entire learning community, that it needs to be practiced by all members, that it should be used as part of the School Plan for Improvement, and that its impact and implementation needs to be assessed. With these guiding principles, it is normal for schools to feel pressured to implement this character education program as effectively as possible. At the same time, it is important that schools are able to provide good results quickly. This may be where the policy has created a certain style for teaching moral values in which such programs as
“catch a star” award, daily character thought for the day, and character assemblies are implemented because these programs require very little preparation, but provide quick tangible results. By inviting artists to talk about character and promote character education, coupled with the daily character thoughts for the day in the announcements, we have trained our students to use a common language that they know is what adults would like to hear, which may be creating acceptable behaviour simply through compliance rather than through moral conviction based on critical thinking about the many experiences of daily life. Simultaneously, the monthly character awards and “catch a star” awards have provided a message for children that a reward or recognition will be given for being good, creating extrinsic motivation where students may not have the opportunity to carefully reflect on what they do and why those are good qualities to have. As a result, after the “catch a star” award is over, without the reward incentive, students may be less prone to behave well.

I designed my character songwriting research study to move away from some of the issues mentioned above. After all, providing students the opportunity to voice their ideas and write their own lyrics will allow them to think critically and reflect deeper into the real meaning of the character attributes we write about. Instead of repeatedly hammering the definitions of respect and responsibility into students, I allow them to make connections to their everyday life and come up with authentic meanings for those character traits, at the same time, providing opportunities for choice, creativity, and
differentiated learning. The character songwriting program provides both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. The extrinsic motivations may include having students walk through the assessment and evaluation process with their teacher, peers, or themselves. The purpose of these checkpoints, reflection point, feedback stop points, or evaluation point are forms of assessment for learning and assessment of the learning. In the end, students may feel motivated because they want to get a good mark or positive feedback, and will adapt their behaviour toward improving their learning or goal setting. These can be seen as extrinsic motivations, but, simultaneously, they can also be seen as an intrinsic motivation if the student’s purpose is to do well in school. Further, this songwriting program could provide other forms of intrinsic motivation by providing students the option to do what they are good at, such as, the opportunity to learn new musical concepts through songwriting and to explore playing a variety of instruments, and a chance for students to express their love of music through creative writing and performance.

I expect, in the end, that intrinsic motivation will outweigh extrinsic motivation because having the opportunity to perform can be seen as both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Performance provides an opportunity for students to celebrate their learning in an authentic way, while being able to take ownership in educating others about good character. Performance also provides opportunities for students who are not academically inclined to shine. Performance is a way to keep students accountable for their work.
In basing the design of my songwriting program on the literature reviewed, I have attempted to address the issues of engagement and building personal and social skills as noted by the numerous researchers (Rusinek, 2008; Burnard, 2008; Burnard et al, 2008; Kokotsaki & Hallam 2007). My program is a deliberate shift away from common prescriptive approaches to character and moral education (Deci & Ryan 1985; Kohn 1995) that can lead to the creation of a culture of compliance (Franklin, 1999). I provided students the opportunity to create their own work authentically through critical thinking and making connections to the real world. My study of the program provides insights on the effects an untraditional approach to character education might have on students’ character development. The next chapter presents the design of my study.
Chapter 3

Research Design and Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology and qualitative approach chosen to research the impact of a character songwriting program on students’ character development. The chapter describes the songwriting program, the rationale for the method, the study design, participant selection, data collection, and the considerations used to enhance the trustworthiness of the study.

Overview of the Songwriting Program

This research study examined the effect of a five-month character songwriting program on the character development of junior-grade students. Within the five-month period, students had the opportunity to create two character songs based on the character trait that had been assigned by the school board for a particular month (e.g., November—Empathy, December—Honesty, January—Fairness). The purpose of this character songwriting initiative was to provide students an opportunity to hone their lyric-writing skills (link to literacy) while exploring and learning about the importance of having good character. Students created their own authentic character songs, which provided them with a sense of achievement and ownership of their learning. In the process, students were able to expand their knowledge of the elements of music and learn advanced musical and lyrical concepts. The songs were relevant to their interests and their lives. In
the end, the goal was to see if students were able to make real-world connections with their learning.

Over the course of five months, three junior-grade classes created two characters songs, one on the character trait of honesty, the other on fairness. The Honesty Song was written collectively as a whole group activity in which students partnered up to brainstorm ideas and write initial verses on the meaning of honesty. Later they shared their verses with the rest of the class and reorganized them into verse-chorus form with a bridge. In groups, the students then decided how they wanted the verse and chorus to sound. With my help as teacher, we constructed chords to go with the Honesty Song. The Honesty Song took a little over one month (about 10 music classes) to complete. The Honesty Song can be found in Appendix A. The audio file of the Honesty Song can be retrieved at: https://qshare.queensu.ca/Users01/1myjs/Gr. 5 Honesty.mp3

For the Fairness Song, with the help of a RAFTS planning sheet (to identify Role, Audience, Format, Topic, and Strong verbs), students were given the opportunity to choose the make-up of their groups and create a fairness song that could be presented in a format of their choice (e.g. a rap, a music video, or a radio podcast) to an audience of their choice (e.g. their parents, their teachers, a peer group, or their friends). Students were provided pitched and non-pitched percussion instruments such as hand drums, djembes, bucket drums, bells, cowbells, xylophones, and glockenspiels, as well as their recorders to create melodies for their fairness songs. The writing of the fairness song took
a little more than three months, which was about 28 to 30, 40-50 minute classes, with regular integration of their recorder and Orff program. Over the course of the three month period, at least 40% of the time was devoted to our recorder and Orff program while the rest of the time was devoted to character songwriting.

My study was qualitative in nature, and involved the participation of 84 grade four and grade five students in the York Region District School Board. The data from students’ reflection forms were recorded and analyzed in conjunction with a character tracking checklist and the researcher’s field notes on the observation of the songwriting process. My study was similar in nature to a smaller pilot study I completed in 2009, which provided valuable insights into specific adjustments that needed to be made when implementing this one. In the pilot study, small positive changes in students’ behaviour were evident within the three-month implementation of the songwriting program, in which students were given the opportunity to create one character song only. For the purpose of this research, I decided to see whether there would be more significant changes in a five-month songwriting program where students would have an opportunity to write two characters songs. To track behavioural changes related to character development, I used field notes on classroom observations as in the pilot study. In addition, I used a checklist of behaviours related to aspects of good character (See Appendix B).
Site

Purposeful sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) was used by collecting data from three junior-grade classes of AA Public School (AAPS) in Markham, Ontario (AAPS is a pseudonym). I chose AAPS in the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) for a few reasons. Firstly, at the time of the study (and at the time of writing) I was working as the music teacher and arts lead at AAPS and believed that the results from this research study might provide insights into how music education might impact our school culture. Secondly, if needed, the convenience in location would allow me to return to the same situation and same informants to seek confirmation to enhance the validity of my data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Lastly, being a member of the Arts Leadership Team at YRDSB, I was working in close proximity with the music consultant and other arts leaders of the board, who I felt might also have interest in the results of this study as well as how these results might be used to inform and improve the development of arts programs across the board.

Participants

The three junior-grade classes of AAPS consisted of 84 students. These students were selected to be invited as participants in this research because they were old enough to articulate their thoughts as good informants but young enough that they were not yet involved in the instrumental strings program at the school, which could have been a major confounding influence. Also, it should be noted that participants were selected
from regular classes rather than from an extracurricular music program to ensure that the findings were not limited to those who elected additional musical activity. Since music is mandatory at the elementary level, student participants did not choose to engage in musical activity, in contrast with those in Kokotsaki and Hallem’s study (2007), where participants were taken from undergraduate and postgraduate music students who chose to pursue music as a profession, and so were likely to be highly engaged in their studies. Choosing regular classes and having 84 participants in the study was intended to provide enough redundancy of data to allow reliable analysis.

**Recruitment**

Since participants were taught music by me, to avoid power imbalance, participants were recruited by their homeroom teachers, who provided them the Letter of Information (see Appendix C) and Consent Form (see Appendix D) explaining the study, and asking them to discuss the letter with their parents. Students who agreed to participate and whose parents granted consent returned the completed consent forms to their homeroom teachers. I did not find out which students were participating until after all data were collected and report card submissions were completed.

**The Creative Process**

The Creative Process found on p. 20 of the Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8, The Arts document (Ministry of Education, 2009) was used as a guide during the writing of the second song in my study, the song on Fairness. Students worked in small groups,
using the RAFTS planning sheet (Role, Audience, Format, Topic, and Strong verbs) as an organizer to help them plan their song. Students generated ideas mainly from their personal experiences but also from Mary Small’s book, *Being Fair: A Book About Fairness*, as an inspiration for their work. To keep students on track, a ticket-out-the-door was provided during every music class, where students were required to provide samples of their work in progress. This was an effective way for me, as the teacher, to monitor students’ work in progress and to provide students with timely feedback to help them generate ideas or edit their work.

Students were required to create their lyrics first. Regular reflections were made based on their lyrics, considering whether they were appropriate for the form and audience, and whether they used strong verbs. During the lyric-writing sessions, students were given guidance and checklists to keep track of such matters as how many lines they should have in their verse, how many syllables they should have in each line in order to avoid choppiness, and whether the number of beats was consistent. We also discussed rhyming words and content of the lyrics.

The RAFTS planning sheet provided students with lots of choice. Students had the choice to choose their role based on their strengths; some students who were confident in singing sang, while others played the recorder, or created borduns (a form of drone based on the musical interval of an open 5th) on the Orff instruments or bucket drums. Others who were creative in drama decided to take on the role of being a radio
program host or a TV host, writing out a script. Because this was strictly a performance-based activity, students were not required to hand in any form of written work. Their RAFTS planning sheets, lyrics, and scripts were occasionally checked so I could monitor their writing progress and provide feedback, but these pieces were never collected or evaluated.

After students completed their verses, they were provided with pitched and non-pitched percussion instruments such as tambourines, claves, bells, lummi sticks, hand drums, and other Orff instruments, as well as their recorder, to help them explore, experiment, and produce preliminary versions of their song. During these exploration classes, I would walk around the classroom to provide students with ideas and feedback on what they could do to make their work more effective based on the choices they had recorded on their RAFTS planning sheets. Students would then make reflections on whether their song lyrics and format of presentation was appropriate for the audience they had chosen. At the end of each class, I would make reflections on the engagement level and behaviour of the students by jotting down anecdotal notes. Later, I would use these notes to help me complete the character tracking checklists.

As we continued through the Creative Process, one class was used for students to present their preliminary work to their classmates, where with the help of a rubric, both the teacher and the peers would provide descriptive feedback to individual groups to improve their work. Students were encouraged to make use of their knowledge in
musicianship and the elements of music when providing feedback. Upon receiving their feedback, students were required to make reflections and provide three things they would do to improve their work. After revisions and refinement, students would perform and share their final product. At the end, students would reflect on whether they have improved based on the look-fors on the rubric, making connections to the role and purpose they had chosen on their RAFTS.

Because this character songwriting was performance based, students were not required to provide a written version of their songs. Other than the use of the RAFTS planning sheets to help them plan, students had the freedom to record their work in whatever way they chose. Most students wrote down their lyrics and their script for their presentation. I noticed that students rarely wrote down the arrangement of their songs; perhaps this was because they had practiced so much that they did not feel the need to write anything down. Using short clips of videos that were taken for reflection purposes, I transcribed one of the student songs (see Appendix E).

**Data Management**

In order to understand the relationship between music education and character development and students’ perceptions of what a character-building songwriting program meant to them, I decided to use a qualitative case study approach (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Qualitative case studies have been effective and successful in other research studies with a similar research problem (Kokotsaki & Hallam 2007; Rusinek,
Data were gathered from three sources: (a) researcher’s checklist for tracking character changes, (b) researcher’s field notes, and (c) students’ written responses to a reflection guide.

The checklist for tracking character changes included indicators that demonstrated whether a student met expectations of the specific character attributes (see Appendix F). A scale of 0-4 was used to measure how consistently a student demonstrated those attributes. The checklist was used three times throughout the study: Before the implementation of the songwriting program, after the first character song was completed, and after the second character song was completed.

To complement the checklist data, field notes were used. These field notes included my observations and interpretations of students’ involvement during the songwriting. These notes were particularly useful, especially when it was difficult to use specific indicators on the checklist concerning the extent to which a student had demonstrated character attributes such as honesty, empathy, and fairness. For example, it was difficult to see whether or not a student was being honest or whether he or she demonstrated empathy unless an unusual situation or conflict occurred (e.g., during group work), in which case it was easier for me to jot down anecdotal notes, since these situations or circumstances were usually unforeseen. Such incidents would have been missed if a general checklist had been used. Field notes were also useful during the data analysis process, since they provided concrete evidence and my interpretations of
students’ involvement during their experience with the songwriting program. As a result, field notes allowed for continuity because they provided examples of specific situations where a student demonstrated a significant behavioural change, which could be used as a concrete example for readers to further understand this study. Some students’ names were used when I recorded my field notes, but they were not used in any presentation of the findings. The confidentiality of students was maintained throughout the study to the extent possible. Completed consent forms with parent information (for receiving a copy of the report) were given to me at the end of the school year after the report card marks were submitted. Field notes about students who did not agree to participate were deleted at that time.

In addition, reflection responses were taken from consenting students at the end of the five-month character songwriting process. These reflection forms were administered by the students’ homeroom teachers during language class, after the students had participated in the songwriting activities and while they were preparing to perform their songs at our school’s Spring Fling Concert. Students were given these reflection forms by their homeroom teachers instead of by me to avoid the potential power imbalance were they to complete their reflections in my presence. Students were not required to write their names on the reflection forms but were identified by being assigned unique participant numbers, which were recorded on their reflection forms before the forms were given to students. The homeroom teachers kept a copy of the student names and
participant numbers. All students were given time to complete a reflection form during their language class and submit it to their homeroom teacher, as this was an activity with education value. Students were reminded that these reflective responses were a normal part of my teaching and student learning at AAPS, as we often practiced making reflections of our learning after a unit of study in music class. Students were also told that their reflections would not be used as formal assessment of their work, since I would be getting them from their homeroom teachers after the reporting period. Furthermore, students were reminded that any suggestions they provided on the form for the improvement or changes of the character songwriting initiative at AAPS in the future would be greatly appreciated. This was a way for me, as the teacher, to demonstrate mutual respect for my students, asking them for feedback on how I could improve my teaching. After completion, the homeroom teacher gave me, the researcher, the reflection forms from students (identified through their unique participant number) whose parents provided written consent. Reflection pieces from students who were not participants were put into another pile by the homeroom teachers, as they were still read to respect the contribution of students as a regular part of my teaching; however, they were not used as research data. Since students were not required to write their names on the reflection forms, the anonymity of students was maintained throughout the study.

When devising the questions on the reflection form, one of my research goals was to ask myself to evaluate and justify the songwriting program I was implementing, so I
could continue to promote engaging music programs. I reflected on Kokotsaki and Hallam’s study (2007), in which, instead of interviewing music teachers, students were asked to evaluate the benefits of music education. As a result, in my research, similar to Kokotsaki and Hallam’s study (2007), instead of asking teachers about the educational value of my music program, I decided to ask students to provide their feedback on the program as one of the questions on their reflection forms. I considered this to be a valid way to provide valuable information on the positive effects music education might offer, since school-age children are usually honest when asked to share their experience on learning. As well, in Kokotsaki and Hallam’s study (2007), only two very open-ended questions were asked on the questionnaire: “How do you perceive your past or current involvement in musical ensemble?” and “What impact did it have on you?” The open-ended character of the questions was intended to avoid respondents being influenced in their responses by any prompts inferred by the content of the questions. This allowed for a wide range of answers and maximized the flexibility to cover any areas of participants’ experience on which they chose to comment. Similar to Kokotsaki and Hallam’s study (2007), I also decided to use open-ended questions on students’ reflection forms.

In my research study, students were presented with six questions on their reflection form: (a) What learning skills and work habits are needed in order to successfully work in a team when creating our own character songs together as a class? (Remember to think about the work you did for both the Honesty Song and your Fairness
Song); (b) How do you feel about preparing and performing your Honesty or Fairness Song in front of the rest of the school, your parents, or your friends at the next concert or assembly? Explain your answer.; (c) When writing our character song, what connections did you make to your life?; (d) How is writing and performing our own song connected to Character Matters?; (e) Do you think we should continue this Character Really Matters! Songwriting Program at AAPS? Why or why not?; and (e) Is there anything else you would like to change about our music class (e.g. compose other types of songs, perform more on recorders/other instruments, play musical games, etc?) (see Appendix G). These questions were structured for students to reflect specifically on their experience in the songwriting initiative at AAPS; therefore, surveys before and after participation of the program, as suggested by Boyes & Reid (2005), were not necessary. Some questions were kept open-ended, to avoid respondents being influenced in their responses by any prompts inferred by the content of the questions (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007). Therefore, validity was added because participants would write in their own words the impact character songwriting had on their lives. Furthermore, according to Moore & Halle (2001), it would be difficult to find appropriate methods to measure character because measurement is hindered by problems of social desirability. For example, it would be difficult for researchers to devise survey questions that measure the possession of the attributes that constitute character because it would be difficult to ask respondents directly if they were persons of particular character. Therefore, questions were kept open-
ended and the character traits limited to those set out by the York Region District School Board in order to avoid confounding influences. The open-ended nature of the questions also allowed maximum flexibility to cover any areas of students’ experience that they chose and to comment on those aspects that they felt had been affected by their participation in the character songwriting program. This was found to be an effective strategy in Kokotsaki and Hallam’s case study (2007) on music students’ perceptions of the benefits of participative music making.

In addition, the storage of information was carefully considered. Caution was taken to ensure the confidentiality of information collected from participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). The data were saved in a password-protected file on my computer and back-up drive. Data will be kept for five years and then deleted. The anonymous reflective responses were stored in a filing cabinet in a locked office. These reflection forms will be destroyed once the thesis process was completed.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter described the case study approach and methodology used to conduct the qualitative research and discussed the approaches used to enhance the study’s trustworthiness and validity. The chapter includes a description of the songwriting process.
Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter lays out the findings of the study. Data were analyzed and sorted based on the ten character traits from the YRDSB. The chapter provides findings of students’ views and interpretations of the value of the character songwriting program. The researcher’s field notes, character-tracking checklist, and students’ songs provide insight into, and specific concrete evidence of, the impact of the character songwriting program on students’ engagement, motivation, and behavioural changes.

The findings are from a research study involving three junior-grade classes. Eighty-four participants were invited to participate and 58 (69%) provided consent. On students’ reflection forms, participants were identified by a participant number assigned using the first letter of their homeroom teacher’s last name followed by a number (e.g., participants in Mrs. Hay’s class were assigned numbers such as H1, H2, H3. “Mrs. Hay” is a pseudonym). Respondents were asked without being given confounding prompts to describe in their own words their perceptions of the benefits and impact of participating in the character songwriting initiative. The data were categorized by looking at indications of attitude and behavioural change with respect to the ten character traits set out by the YRDSB, which form the Character Matters! Policy: (a) respect; (b)
responsibility; (c) honesty; (d) empathy; (e) fairness; (f) initiative; (g) perseverance; (h) integrity; (i) courage; and (j) optimism (YRDSB, 2003).

The first step was the coding process, which involved a careful repeated examination of the responses in order to find common themes. The coding was done by hand and repeated a few times over the course of a few days to ensure my analysis and interpretations were consistent. The responses were then categorized according to the definitions of the ten attributes. Depending on the nature of the responses, and because some students provided more than one answer for each question, some responses were overlapped and sorted into more than one attribute. Sorting was made easy by the fact that students responded with common vocabulary created by the board. I attributed this to the fact that the board’s Character Matters! character education policy and its guiding principals were very well instilled at our school.

According to Kokotsaki and Halle (2007), there were many other possible ways of sorting the data. However, I decided to use the 10 attributes from the board as predetermined categories or a priori codes (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006) because the results could benefit our school community, our school board, and our parent community in gaining a better understanding of the positive impact of a character songwriting program on students’ character development. The ten character traits developed by the YRDSB were used as a common language that our community would understand.
This chapter first presents the reflection responses students provided, then the data from the researcher’s character tracking checklists and field notes. These results provide insight into the value of this character songwriting program and its impact on students’ character development.

**Examination of Students’ Reflection Forms**

**Skills and Characters Necessary for Teamwork**

In reviewing the reflection forms, it was noticeable that students were using a common language when answering the questions. There was common vocabulary, not just from the board’s character education policy, but also language regarding curriculum expectations, with which they had become familiar over the years. When students were asked to reflect on the kinds of learning skills and work habits that were necessary for successful group work, they employed the common language that was used to describe learning skills on their report cards prescribed by our ministry document, *Growing Success, Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools*. Figure 1 in Appendix H summarizes the frequency of reference to the main categories of responses given to the first question on the reflection form.

Students used both the common language for describing learning skills (e.g., collaboration, organization), and the common vocabulary of character (e.g., respect, responsibility, fairness). The other terms used, such as teamwork, cooperation, and patience, were general terms that students came up with on their own, as this was a free response. Still, a large number of responses used these common terms, although students
were not prompted in any way, as I instructed the homeroom teachers. Responsibility was valued comparatively low at only five responses, even though responsibility was both a learning skill identified in *Growing Success* (Ministry of Education, 2010) and a character attribute in the board’s character education policy. Cooperation and teamwork appeared often with 35 and 25 responses respectively, even though they were general terms and not part of the character vocabulary. In addition, respect also appeared frequently, with 29 out of the 58 participants mentioning it. Because this was a free response, students also provided other answers such as support, perseverance, focus, courage, trust, honesty, optimism, good attitude, creativity, and integrity. While some of these are character words, none of these provided more than 5 counts, so they were represented by “others” in Figure 1. From these responses, I could tell that students were carefully reflecting on their songwriting process experience and what was most important to them, since respect was so often mention as an important character attribute when working collaborative and cooperatively as a team.

**Respect**

One possible reason that respect was mentioned so often in students’ responses is that students were very familiar with the meaning of respect from years of character education at our school. Respect was the first attribute students would have learned at the beginning of each school year, since it was the Character of the Month for September. This same group of students had written a respect song in the previous year’s pilot study, although that connection was not examined in this study. While writing the respect song,
students had to explicitly reflect on the meaning of respect and provide examples of how respect could be demonstrated in everyday life. In addition to writing a respect song, character artists such as Glenn Marais and Errol Lee had been invited to our school to talk about character and the meaning of respect year after year as part of our performing arts program. Therefore, throughout the years, students would have learned that according to the YRDSB, respect is defined as respecting ourselves and treating others with courtesy, dignity, and positive regard; and to respect is to honour the rights of others, respecting others’ belongings, the environment, and the world around us (YRDSB, n.d.). Similarly, on their reflection forms, students gave examples of what they thought respect meant to them. One student (G3) wrote, “Respectful—not to say mean things when you get mad.” Another students (G4) wrote, “To be successful [when working in a group], you need be Respectful—don’t put down anyone when they have an idea.” Furthermore, student G14 wrote, “You need to listen to everyone’s ideas and not make fun of them. You also need to cooperate with everyone.” From these responses, it seemed that students interpreted respect as the need to treat others with courtesy and to not put others down by making fun of them. From their past experiences coupled with their familiar knowledge about the meaning of respect, it was clear to see why students thought respect was such an important attribute to have when working together during our songwriting program.
**Fairness**

I noticed that the responses mentioned very few character traits. This could have been due to students’ interpretation of the question, as they were focusing on the learning skills and work habits needed and not specifically on character traits. Still, students were making some connections to character. Nine responses indicated that fairness was an important character for teamwork. Fairness, as defined by our board, is to demonstrate that we were sensitive to the needs of each individual. It is treating others as we wish to be treated ourselves. A Grade 5 student (C2) wrote, “We need to decide if our ideas were interesting. We need to listen to other people’s comments about the song…. In other words, this student expressed his or her idea of fairness by saying that we need to give each other the chance to share ideas and decide, cooperatively as a group, which ideas to keep. This is significant because this student seemed to recognize that not all ideas were of equal worth. His criterion on worth was whether or not the ideas were “interesting.” That suggested the possibility of idea improvement through collaboration, an important characteristic of Knowledge Building (Scardamalia, 2002). He was not just saying that students should keep the ideas that were most popular or most liked. Saying that they needed to be interesting suggested that they needed to be good for the purpose at hand and that the group needed to be able to make something significant of them. Another student (C8) expressed the importance of fairness by writing, “I need to remember to let everyone have a turn.” Another possible reason that fairness came up in the responses
was that it was one of the character traits on which we focused in our songwriting in the year of the study.

**Responsibility**

Aside from respect and fairness, responsibility is another character trait that appeared in the responses, although not in a large portion of them. According to the YRDSB, responsibility is to be accountable for all our actions and to follow through on our commitments. Student G3 gave an example of being responsible by writing, “Responsible—not losing lyrics or music.” Even though it was a brief answer, student G3 was demonstrating that it was important to take responsibility for one’s learning and to take care of one’s paper work.

**Making Connections to Real Life and Learning**

Students were further asked what connections they made to their lives when writing the character songs. A large majority of the respondents, 47 out of 58, made connections with real-life situations. On their reflection forms, when asked what connections they made to their lives when writing their character songs, students gave various answers that indicated that good character was or should be a part of their everyday life.

Student G7: “When writing these songs, we connect to what we do or should do in and out of school.”

Student G2: “I believe that every character trait is similar to our life because you can use them every day.”
Student H19: “The connections I made is how we can show character matters everyday like we can wait in line and tell the truth.”

Student H5: “I made connections about what I did, things that were wrong before.”

Student C15: “I made connections that everyone should show at least one character trait.”

These quotes demonstrated there was some level of awareness and recognition of what a student could or should do to have good character. Student H5 demonstrated that he or she reflected on his or her actions in the past and how he or she could improve in character.

When writing the Honesty song, students came up with examples of how they could be honest with their friends, their parents, themselves, and in their community. We also read books that had to do with the topic of being honest. Students demonstrated connection they made to their lives by including real-life examples in their lyrics, such as not cheating on tests, admitting they have broken something, or giving back extra change to a cashier. In their reflections, one student (G28) stated, “When we wrote the Honesty song, I admit I broke my brother’s toy and I told him.” Another student (H2) wrote, “When writing the Honesty song, it says that we check receipts to make sure they’re right and I also do that to make sure they don’t give us too much money.” These examples show actual behaviour that students connected with the character songwriting. Further,
G8 wrote, “When we were creating/writing the Honesty song, it made me connect to times when it was hard to be honest, like when you have broken something, It’s hard to admit it instead of blaming it on someone else.” Again this student is reflecting on the difficulty of being honest sometimes, though this response does not make clear whether he or she has really changed in behaviour.

When writing the Fairness song, students made connections to things they might need to remember to do in order to demonstrate fairness. For example, student H5 wrote, “The connection I made was having to share a seat with my brother.” Although sharing a seat with someone was not actually written in our lyrics, students H5 made the connection that sharing demonstrates fairness. Another student, G4, made a similar connection to sharing by writing, “I was being fair when I broke half of my cookie to give to my cousin.” Breaking something in half equally was a discussion we had in class. When each person gets an equal share, it demonstrates fairness. Further, student H8 wrote, “It reminded me to always be fair and to treat people how I want to be treated.” Other than being fair, student H8 could also have been making a connection to respect, because to be respectful is to not only treat other people equally but to behave towards them with courtesy, dignity, and positive regard, which could be understood as the way everyone would like to be treated.

This idea of making connections with real-life situations was further observed in our class activities during the whole-class brainstorming sessions, as many of the students
were able to articulate at least a few occasions when they demonstrated honesty or fairness outside of school. The examples they shared illustrated the students’ capacity to make connections between a trait and manifestations of that trait in their own behaviour. One student shared an example of a time when she got too much change from buying a popsicle and how good she felt when she returned the extra change, just as we were writing about that in verse two of our honesty song. A few students talked about how they would share their seat on the bus or a treat with their siblings. They talked about how it bothered them when the treats were not divided evenly or fairly. From this evidence, it was obvious the songwriting process was having some impact on students; while some students were using their real life situations to feed into the lyrics of the songs during the writing process, others were using the lyrics to reflect on their daily life experiences.

While a large majority of the respondents made connections to real-life situations in the songs they were writing, a few students also made connections to learning experiences they had in other subject areas such as to their community unit in social studies, their experience representing the school in the choir, or their preparation of a performance for their international school community.

**Performance Stage Fright or Spotlight Stars?**

As concerts were seen as a short-term goal that could motivate students to form communities (Rusinek, 2008), one of the questions in the reflection form asked students how they would feel about preparing and performing their character songs in front of the
rest of the school and their parents at the next concert or school assembly. The responses were mixed and varied. The results are summarized in bar-graph form in Appendix I.

In their responses, some students provided more than one answer, as some indicated they would be nervous but also excited at the same time. In these cases, both responses were tallied and recorded. Slightly fewer than half of the participants indicated they would feel nervous or have stage fright in front of a large audience. In their responses, they expressed that they felt the pressure of needing to do a good job and were worried that they would make a mistake during their performance. Ten students who mentioned they were excited supported their answers by expressing their enthusiasm and seeing this as an opportunity for them to show off a masterpiece on which they had worked hard and which they were proud to celebrate with their parents and peers at the concert or assembly. A smaller portion of students indicated that they would be happy and proud, eight and four responses respectively, and saw this as an opportunity to teach others about character through song. The following were some of the responses that supported these findings:

Student C23: “I would feel good because then I’ll get to show everyone how hard we worked to make this song and how much effort we put into it.”

Student C2: “I would feel shy because the song is kind of embarrassing because we sing kind of pitchy and I think I sing bad.”
Student C8: “I would feel proud because my friends and family could hear the song that I and my group created.”

Student C5: “I would feel nervous because you are in front of everyone and you don’t want to make a mistake.”

Student H15: “I would feel happy because you’ll have to perform and tell people about character traits.”

Student H26: “I would feel happy because other students will learn from the song.”

Student H22: “I would feel a bit scared but also a bit strong and confident about it, because I will be performing in front of a lot of people but at least I would try my best.”

Student H2: “I would feel proud because it shows that we care about honesty and fairness.”

In these responses, there were no direct and clear indications of how students connected their songwriting process with character. However, sharing their feelings of nervousness took courage, and admitting nervousness may be an indication of honesty. As well, saying they were nervous could also mean they cared enough to make sure they would do a good job, since they were performing a song about a particular character attribute. Because students felt they were responsible for teaching others about character, this may be why students thought it was important for them to demonstrate good
character in the working process. In support of this is my observation that students worked cooperatively and carefully to decide which ideas to keep in the lyrics and which ones to reject. Knowing that they would perform this to an audience later, when writing, students demonstrated that they wanted to make sure they had the best lyrics and examples in order to effectively teach others about good character.

**Links of Songwriting to Character Matters!**

*Reflections on Lyrics, Contents, and Experience*

When asked how writing and performing their own song connected to YRDSB initiative *Character Matters!*, the majority of the students expressed that they made the connections to their lives when writing the lyrics. During the writing process, students were asked to think of examples that reflected the character trait for the character song they were writing. Some students expanded on this idea in their reflection form and stated that writing, preparing, and performing their song was connected to *Character Matters!* because it provided them with the opportunity to expand their knowledge and teach others about character. Student H6 wrote, “Writing and performing our own songs help us understand more of what it means.” This was further supported by student G4: “It’s related because it reminds us how we can be fair or honest,” while student G8 wrote, “It is connected to *Character Matters!* because you are teaching good character traits to other people.” Some students explained how their songs taught others about the chosen character trait because the songs provided details about the trait. Student H19 wrote, “Our
songs can tell others what *Character Matters!* is and what we can do to show character matters.”

Other than reflecting on the lyrics, some students reflected on their writing experience and how they had to learn teamwork and demonstrate respectful behaviour to others when working together. Furthermore, other students reflected on their feeling about performance. Student C8 wrote, “It takes courage to be up on a stage and it takes perseverance to stay on track and not give up. Similarly, student G27 wrote, “We learn to have courage to perform in front of people.” Apart from the above reflections on the content of the pieces and the opportunity for sharing and teaching, a small number of students responded without many in-depth links, as they stated that the songs they were making were linked to *Character Matters!* because they were simply about honesty and fairness.

*A Question on “Should”*

One might ask how these responses indicated that students had changed in character. For example, student G28 wrote, “We write about what we should do like, be honest and tell someone the truth and always be fair.” This response may not be an accurate indication of the student’s positively changing character, since he or she was simply responding to what we *should* do to demonstrate good character, not necessary how he or she *actually behaved.* Still, such a response could demonstrate that student G28 was provided the opportunity to reflect deeper upon the learning process, and, while doing so, was making an attempt to understand the value of having good character traits,
such as honesty and fairness, which would encourage him or her to be more truthful and fair in the future.

**Implications of the Songwriting Program**

To evaluate the impact of this songwriting program, students were asked whether or not we should continue to write character songs at our school. A large portion of the respondents, 42 out of 58, approximately 71%, responded that we should continue to write character songs. These students supported their answers with various reasons, such as that songwriting was fun and a great way to get students involved in music, that it was an interesting way to refine their musical skills, and that it was a satisfying experience to write a song and perform it in front of a large audience. Others expressed the importance of learning about character through the creation of a song of their own, which they saw as an easy way to learn and remember certain character attributes. This response is supported by student H6: “Yes, because it really helps us show our understanding of what character really means.” Student C17 wrote, “Yes, because it helps us understand the traits.” Still others indicated it was a good way to express their character message through songs instead of through reading a book about character traits. A few students reflected on their experience of learning to work with others, like students C6, who responded, “I think we should continue because it helps us work together as a team.” While one student, H8, made connections to improving students’ writing skills, the response did not make clear whether he or she was referring to musical or language writing skills: “Yes, I
think we should continue this at our school because it’s teaching kids about how to treat others also we are becoming better song writers so it helps with our writing skills.”

In contrast to this enthusiasm, about 28% of the respondents (16 out of the 58 respondents) indicated that they would not want to continue the songwriting initiative for another year at AAPS. Some did not explain why, but two students expressed that it was because they were too nervous about performing. Some stated that they thought writing about character traits was a challenging experience, while others felt it was taking up too much time and impeding them from learning other things in music, such as playing string instruments. Some felt that there could be other or even better ways than songs through which to teach others about character. A number of students indicated that they felt they were learning about Character Matters! over and over again as they were already learning about it in other classes and at the school’s monthly character assemblies. One student did not respond to this question.

**Examination of the Character Tracking Checklists**

The character tracking checklists (Appendix F) were used as a way to provide more specific examples of students’ change in behaviour over the course of this five-month character-songwriting program. The checklist was used three times throughout the study: at the beginning of the study before the implementation of the songwriting program (stage one), after the first character song was completed (stage two), and after the second character song was completed (stage three). The checklist provided a concrete
method for tracking specific character traits. There were 10 expectations that targeted a wide range of character traits, such as respect, responsibility, honesty, empathy, fairness, and initiative, with specific examples for each.

During stage one, all 10 expectations were used. However, for the second and third stages, two expectations were eliminated. These were “Responsibility, Fairness (Takes ownership for their action)” and “Initiative (completes task without being prompted).” These were eliminated because it was difficult to actually track students to see if each of them were taking ownership of their actions. Unless a conflict arose which was brought to my attention and the student had to admit they were wrong, for example, for breaking something or hurting someone’s feelings, it was rarely possible to track every student’s level of ownership of their actions. In general, there were so few conflicts in the class that it was not necessary to track whether students were taking ownership of their actions. Instead, I decided to simply record these conflicts in my field notes, since they would provide specific concrete evidence for the study. The expectation of initiative was also eliminated, because it was too similar to the expectation on “responsibility (finish assigned work on time e.g., stay on task)” and was thus combined with the “responsibility” trait. This is because students usually had no problem finishing work in class, as there were usually other motivators such as checklists and tickets out the door to keep them on track. Because students were kept busy most of the time, they were generally very good at getting started with their work without being reminded. Again,
only when there was noticeable lack of responsibility in finishing their work or a lack of initiative in getting started with work did I record these situations in my field notes.

The character tracking checklist was an easy tool for me to track the number of students demonstrating certain character traits. In general, there was a gradual increase over the course of the study in students advancing from the ranking of “sometimes” to “sufficient” or from “sufficient” to “always” in each expectation. There was a general trend where the number of students who “never”, “rarely”, or “sometimes” demonstrated the character trait was decreasing and the number of students who “sufficiently” or “always” demonstrated the character was increasing. The percentage changes between each round, stage one, stage two, and stage three, as well as from stage one to stage three, were calculated to help me gain more concrete understanding of the changes. These charts can be found in Appendix J. The percentage increase in each category of the checklist for “always” varied. For example, there was a substantial increase of students, from 32 students at stage one to 55 students at stage three, demonstrating cooperative learning. In other categories, the increases to “always” were also quite strong. For the category of finishing assigned work on time, there was an increase of 37 students in stage one to 53 students in stage three; 38 students in stage one demonstrated respect, empathy, and fairness while there were 53 students in stage three; and 39 students in stage one demonstrated collaboration during group activities while 54 students demonstrated that in stage three. There was one category that had a small increase to “always” from stage one
to stage three; there was a change of 46 to 54 students demonstrating they take care of their belongings, which could be because students were in general very good at taking care of things to start with.

In addition, there were other noticeable trends. There was either a decrease in “sufficient” over the course of the study, as those participants moved on to the “always” section or an increase in “sufficient” over the course of the study, as participants moved into this category from “sometimes” or “rarely”. The same trend was also seen in the “sometimes” and “rarely” sections, while the ranking “never” did not need to be used. There was generally an overall increase of students demonstrating the character trait expectation and an overall decrease in the number of students demonstrating the character expectations sometimes or sufficiently.

**Examination of the Researchers’ Field Notes**

**Songwriting and Behaviour Changes**

Performing in a concert can be a way to motivate students in their learning, because concert performance provides students with an achievable, visible, short-term goal (Rusinek, 2008). This was evident in my study in students’ reflective responses as well as in how students worked together in class. Almost half of the participants stated that they were nervous about performing, while the other half indicated that they were excited, happy, or proud to show off their skills at the next concert. As well, they were very energized by having the opportunity to teach others about character and the chance to celebrate their learning and hard work with their parents through performance. This
extrinsic motivation was evident in class when I observed particular students, who usually hated singing, beginning to make an effort to participate more actively in music by singing along to our Honesty song in class. Even during the writing process, the idea of knowing that they were going to write their own song and perform it was motivating. This was again evident in class when students who were not generally active participants began to take the initiative to share their ideas with the rest of the class voluntarily. Some students felt that performance was risky, since they were usually not confident with themselves and the answers they gave, fearing their peers would laugh at them. However, even when an idea was not the best, students were mostly very accepting and encouraging. During the five-month songwriting program, there was only one occasion when I witnessed a student being put down by another where the hurt feelings caused some tears. I did not witness any other put-downs other than on that occasion.

More surprising for me was the initiative students demonstrated. When students did not finish their work in class, they took it home and completed it for the next class so that they would not fall behind. Initially, I was a little hesitant because these were not the most responsible students and I was afraid of them losing their papers. However, these students brought back their work the very next class. Not only did they remember to complete it, they also made some connections to their daily lives and provided a variety of examples of what honesty meant to them, their families, and their friends. They subsequently made use of these ideas in their song lyrics. This was rather unusual, since
students generally forget to complete homework for music, let alone complete work for songwriting. This phenomenon was also seen by Burnard, Dillon, Rusinek, and Saether (2008), and Smithrim and Upitis (2005), who noticed that students become more diligent in completing their homework after being enrolled in the engaging arts activities in the arts program.

**Engagement of the Normally Unengaged**

A few researchers have claimed that, in their studies, the arts provided a reason for students to engage with school (Burton, Horowitz, & Abeles, 1999; Catterall, Chapelau, & Iwanaga, 1999; Heath & Roach, 1999), especially for the non-academics or what Burton et al. (1999) term “classroom failures.” This claim resonated with me even more when I noticed that students who were generally low achievers academically, including the few who were struggling to use proper techniques when performing on their recorders during normal music lessons, were enjoying themselves more during the songwriting sessions as they enthusiastically shared their ideas, being hopeful that their ideas would be considered for their song.

There were a number of Student Support Centre (SSC) students in my classes who often needed extra support and encouragement. They were generally more shy than other students in class and did not participate as actively as the others. During the songwriting process, especially when we were writing the fairness song, students were given the opportunity to choose at least one or two friends to be in their group. These SSC students, I noticed, were a lot more engaged than they usually were and seemed to
collaborate well with their friends during the songwriting activities. There may be a few reasons for this. Firstly, students may have felt more comfortable participating more actively because at least one or two friends were in their group. Secondly, the number of choices they were given in the songwriting activities and differentiated instructions in class allowed students to use their strengths to demonstrate their creativity in various ways, to choose to do something at which they excelled. For example, as mentioned, students who were good at the recorder would choose to take on the role of a “musician” (instrumentalist) when planning on their RAFTS planning sheets, while others experimented and explored borduns on the Orff instrument, or simple tapped out a simple ostinato on a hand drum. As a result of the choices provided, students felt more confident and willing to participate.

An increase in participation was also seen in other students. For example, there was a student who rarely spoke at school, even when asked a question. However, during our brainstorming session for the honesty song, this student felt the courage to speak. He spoke so softly that I could not hear him the first time and had to ask him to repeat himself. Still, this student who normally did not speak at all made another effort to make sure I got his idea correctly on the chart paper to share with the rest of the class.

Furthermore, there were a few boys in my class who were previously often embarrassed to sing in front of the class. However, I could see they were enjoying composing the melody for the fairness song because they were willing to sing it to me for
feedback before they decided if they wanted to share their melody with the rest of the class. These were the same boys who normally only mouthed the songs in class because they were always too shy to sing. Also, I could see they were enjoying the project due to the loud laughter I often heard coming from their group during the lyric-writing sessions.

There was another student in one of the classes who was working on developing positive social skills. His group would often approach me during the songwriting activities to complain about his lack of interest or helpfulness in completing the assigned tasks. He had also been seen to lie on the carpet or the floor or to roll on the carpet during lessons because of his general lack of interest. However, during the practice sessions for our Honesty song, this student stood up straight and tall, sang his heart out, had the lyrics memorized, did all the actions along with the lyrics, and even corrected me when I made a mistake with my actions when I sang along with the class. This was a very obvious change from his normal behaviour. As I paid closer attention to his behaviour during non-songwriting time, I noticed he returned to his old habits. Again, this student needed a lot of prompts to even sit up straight and take his recorder out of the case, or to turn to the correct page in his recorder book. From these observations, I wondered if it was because he was not fluent in reading standard music notations that caused this lack of interest in playing his recorder, or if it was really because the songwriting program was so much more engaging for him.
In addition, during the brainstorming session there was a noticeable difference in one of our ADHD students, who usually could not sit still. During the songwriting sessions, he was less antsy and was able to focus and contribute some ideas with the rest of the class. This student reflected deeply on the character traits in our class discussion and pointed out how all 10 character traits were interrelated in some ways. Even during our musical game sessions, a time when he usually had difficulty sitting still and playing cooperatively, he sat patiently and waited for the other children to settle down so we could start our game. This was an example I observed of an improvement of student behaviour outside of our songwriting time.

Furthermore, I noticed that students were more attentive and more active during the songwriting days. When my student teacher began her practicum term during the middle of this songwriting initiative, we began to team teach, which meant the songwriting had to be deemphasized a little to provide her with the time to try out other music activities with my students. I noticed, during her lessons, that some of the usually unenthusiastic boys were back to their old selves. Still, this evidence alone was insufficient for me to decide whether this change in engagement and behaviour was due to students being more engaged with the songwriting activities in comparison with other music activities, or whether they were simply affected by the difference in classroom management strategies between my student teacher and myself.
Despite this difficulty, noticeable changes were still evident, whether in our low academic achievers, our shy SSC students, our antsy ADHD students, our socially challenged member, or our unmotivated boys who were “too cool” to sing. Students, in general, were enthusiastic and wanted to be part of the song creation. They worked cooperatively and collaboratively, choosing their lyrics carefully and responsibly, taking risks and having the courage to share their work with their peers and teacher. These changes in behaviour were particularly significant since they showed contrast with other activities, and so were closely connected with the features of this songwriting intervention.

A Look at the Songwriting Process

As described in Chapter 3, students used a RAFTS (Role, Audience, Format, Topic, Strong Verbs) planning sheet to help them plan during the songwriting process. The RAFTS planning sheet played a major role in helping students develop their lyrics, melody, accompaniment, and format of their presentation. For example, some groups decided they wanted to present their final product to teenagers or their peers (audience), so they decided to create a rap and present it on a simulated radio program because they thought a rap was more engaging. They decided to use the strong verbs “teach” and “encourage” to bring their fairness message across, and in turn, these decisions helped them decide what instruments and roles they would have in their group.

Cooperation and collaboration were definitely demonstrated in each group while writing their songs. I heard discussions on what names they wanted to use in the songs,
what stories and scenarios they would like to tell through their songs, as well as the format in which they would like to present their song. The discussions for creating the melody or rap and accompaniments were a little more complicated. Because there was so much choice given, many students just wanted to do what they were good at, although their choice of instrument might not have been appropriate for the purpose or format of their song. Therefore, it took a little longer for them to come to consensus as to who should play what, who should be the one singing or rapping, or when the Orff instruments or recorder should come in. Respect was demonstrated as students listened to each other and encouraged each member of the group to share their ideas. Responsibility was also demonstrated as students took care in handling and returning instruments appropriately, sharing instruments when needed among groups, and keeping their RAFTS planning sheets and lyrics in a safe spot.

I was very proud to see that students were making use of their musical knowledge when creating on the Orff instruments and on their recorders. Many of them created simple borduns that acted as ostinati for their songs. Although there was lots of noise in the room during the experimental stage, it was noticeable that students were happy and engaged during these songwriting classes. I rarely had to remind students to stay on task. In fact, there were many occasions when students would ask, “Are we playing instruments today?” when I pick them up from their classroom for music class. In addition, students would often ask for extra time to work on their songs, while one group
of students came in during lunch recess to practise. As well, near the end of the classes, I often had to remind students how much time they had left and to repeatedly encourage them to start cleaning up because they would not clean up right away. From these observations, I can say that students very much enjoyed the songwriting process because of the opportunity for choice created by the RAFTS planning sheet, the fun experimental stage provided by the Creative Process, and the opportunity to explore and create authentic work using their musical capabilities on the variety of instruments available.

**A Long-lasting Effect?**

In contrast with the results stated above, there were three students whose character caused me to reflect a little deeper on the impact of this songwriting program. First, there was a grade five boy who had behavioural issues. He was a student who some teachers would say had “verbal diarrhea,” because he often spoke out rudely without waiting for his turn, although he has not been professionally diagnosed with any particular condition. He was very creative in making up excuses to disagree with punishments from his teachers, and would fabricate stories to his parents to get himself out of trouble. He was often silly and disruptive, wanting to become the centre of attention in class lessons. During the songwriting sessions, there were occasions when he was very well behaved and engaged and was willing to be an active learner. He would take a leadership role and make sure each person in his group had a role, although often dictating this role for them. On other occasions outside of songwriting, he would be disruptive, not cooperating with others, sharing instruments, or getting any work done,
and handling instruments inappropriately. There were a few occasions when I had to warn him numerous times and even use extrinsic motivation by threatening to take away his instruments or lower his mark based on his poor work habits in order to get him back on track or to handle his instrument more appropriately.

At the end of the songwriting, I felt this student had not changed. In fact, I felt his behaviour had become even worse and I wondered whether this student had gone so far off track that it would require more extreme measures in order to get him to behave. A few times, I had to speak with his parents on the telephone or meet with them regarding his behaviour, though this would only improve the behaviour for about two weeks before this student returned to his former ways. In addition, it was a challenge to speak with his parents as they were overly protective and often made up excuses to cover up his dishonesty. On one occasion, the boy’s father told me he was having similar issues at home, where his nanny was not respected because she was female. I saw this behaviour repeated at school, where he was disrespectful to all of his female teachers, but not the Phys. Ed. teacher, who was male. His homeroom teacher had tried everything from checklists to behaviour contracts with no success. This student’s behaviour was obviously an extreme case, but it also made me wonder about the extent of the effectiveness of the songwriting program in positively improving every students’ behaviour. Although this songwriting program provided students with choice and voice, it was obviously not
effectiveness enough to change this particular student’s behaviour within such a short time frame.

The second example was of a grade four boy. In all of his classes, not just music, this student would often act much younger than his age or act silly to gain negative attention. He would often receive negative attention from his teachers due to his disruptiveness, while his peers simply ignored his immaturity. For example, during the songwriting program, he would act silly and suggest inappropriate lyrics. His group members would often complain to me about his behaviour, and how the group was struggling due to his immaturity.

The third example was of a grade five girl. She had social issues and had had difficulty making friends or working with others prior to the study. I had seen this behaviour throughout the four years I had taught her music, though I was not familiar with her background or whether she had been diagnosed with a lack of social skills from our Child Youth Worker, because the difficulties she demonstrated during group work were neither extreme nor serious. In fact, I noticed an improvement in her behaviour during the writing of the honesty song. She was working well with the members of her group and the other members seemed to be quite happy working with her. Unfortunately, this did not last. As the program progressed and we moved on to writing our fairness song, I was again receiving familiar complaints from members of her group about how
she was not being inclusive or respectful of others’ ideas. There was an occasion when
the group was unprepared for their presentation because of this student’s behaviour.

These examples provide some evidence that the songwriting may not be as
effective with students with severe or long-term behavioural issues as it was with the
majority of students. In the first two examples, the boys were both challenging to their
parents at home, as there was either a lack of father figure or a lack of mother figure in
their lives. In the third example, the grade four female student had lacked social skills for
a long time. Therefore, although it was impossible to know the background of every
student, knowing the background of these exceptional cases might have been helpful to
me as a researcher to further understand the effect of this songwriting program.

**Chapter Summary**

Data from students’ reflections revealed connections they made between the
songwriting program and their lives. Without being prompted, students were able to make
connections to real life. They saw that in order to work effectively as a team, certain
character traits were needed, such as respect, fairness, and responsibility. During the
songwriting process, students were able to make further connections between the content
with which they were presented and the content they were providing. Students were
making connections to the examples in others’ lyrics for the honesty and fairness songs,
relating them to similar personal experiences. Writing their own songs gave students
ownership. They took responsibility for making sure they were producing good lyrics and
work of good quality throughout the program. Most students had a positive experience with the songwriting program and saw it as a valuable program that should be continued.

Data from the researcher’s character tracking checklist and field notes provided similar evidence as data from students’ reflections. In general, there was an increase by the end of the study in the number of students who were always showing character traits such as respect, responsibility, honesty, fairness, empathy, and initiative. As well, the field notes provided concrete evidence and specific examples to illustrate students’ positive involvement and engagement in the songwriting program. The field notes also provided contrasting examples of students who were not as affected by the songwriting program, perhaps due to more long-lasting background issues.

The next chapter, chapter five, explains how the findings address the research questions and discusses the significance of the findings. The chapter also provides reflections on the scope and limitations of the study and implications for further research.
Chapter 5

Discussion

This thesis began an exploration of how songwriting might have a positive impact on children’s character development. As discussed in Chapter One, character education has become a widespread initiative taken by all public schools in Ontario, Canada (Ministry of Education, 2006). The literature review, Chapter Two, examined the impact of common approaches to character education that make use of extrinsic motivation to get immediate results. Such methods were exposed as creating a culture of compliance where students lack the opportunity to think critically and to reflect on the importance of having good character. The review also examined research studies on the positive impact of music education on school engagement in disengaged youths, the building of personal skills and social skills, and the development of good character traits such as respect for one another, taking responsibility for one’s learning, and taking initiative to be an active learner (Burnard, 2008, Burnard et al., 2008; Kokotsaki & Hallam 2007; Rusinek, 2008; Wong, 2005).

As indicated in Chapter Four, when students were writing the character songs, they were making connections to the meaning of the character traits, what they learned about these traits, and experiences in their lives that embodied these traits. Students were serious about what they were writing, taking ownership of their work and responsibility for doing well. Students also took the opportunity to teach others about good character.
This final chapter analyzes further the findings from the three sources: (a) students’ reflection forms, (b) researcher’s character tracking checklist, and (c) researcher’s field notes, and shows how the findings address the two research questions from Chapter One. The chapter also examines the songwriting process and the song lyrics, arrangements, and melody. The discussion sheds further light on the development of character through songwriting. Reflections on the study include the study’s limitations, its implication for the education system, and future research. Concluding thoughts on the thesis end this chapter.

Research Questions

Question One: What Connections do Students Make between the Character Songwriting Program and Their Lives?

Connection between Daily Life and a Common Vocabulary of Good Character

On students’ reflection forms, it was clear that students were making connections between some aspect of the character songwriting program and their daily lives outside of school. This was evident in their responses, making use of the common language to which they had been exposed, whether the common vocabulary used to describe the group learning skills or the character vocabulary engrained in them from years of character education through school-wide initiatives. Even without prompts on their reflection forms, students were employing this common language naturally and confidently.
**Connection to Respect**

In their reflection forms, half of the participants (29 out of 58) indicated the importance of respect when working in a group. A similar result occurred in my pilot study the previous year, where students articulated the importance of demonstrating respect by cooperating, waiting for their turn to speak during the brainstorming activities, and listening attentively. They also demonstrated their appreciation for others by providing their peers with encouragement and positive constructive feedback rather than destructive put-downs, which are all attributes of respect. A grade four student identified as M15, articulated this idea by writing, “I think in a team it means to be respectful, active listening, putting your own ideas, giving positive comments to their ideas, and to pay attention to everyone in your group.” Of the 58 respondents in the pilot study, 42 of the students (72%) indicated that respect was the most important characteristic required to work successfully as a team in creating our character songs.

As mentioned, this finding could be explained by the fact that respect is the first character trait of every school year, since it is the character trait assigned to September. This could be the lesson students are most likely to apply to the rest of the school year, since they learn its meaning first thing in September, so they have 10 months to practice it in school afterwards. As well, many of the teachers at our school, including me, practice the Tribes approach (Tribes Learning Community, n.d.), in which mutual respect is an important classroom feature. Because I have been the music teacher at the school for the past four years, students may also have noticed that respect is the most important
thing for me, personally and professionally as an educator. Student G14 wrote, “You need to listen to everyone’s ideas and not make fun of them. You also need to cooperate with everyone.” Students seemed to interpret respect as needing to treat others with courtesy and not put others down by making fun of them. Their past experiences, coupled with their familiar knowledge of the meaning of respect, make it clear why students thought respect was such an important attribute to have when working together during our songwriting program.

Connection to Life Outside of School

Were students using this common vocabulary of learning skills and writing about the importance of respect on their reflection form simply because they had been trained to do so from years of repetitive learning at school? Did they genuinely mean what they wrote on their paper or did they just do so to please the teacher? I believe that students were genuine with their answers. It was obvious to me that students were very well trained in making use of the common vocabulary used in board or curriculum documents; however, students also provided answers demonstrating that they were making connections to real life situations. When writing their character songs, students provided examples of when they demonstrated honesty or fairness in situations outside of school. Some of these ideas eventually became part of our lyrics. In addition, other students wrote about how the songwriting process made them reflect on their behaviour; they shared, in their reflection forms, details about the times when they had been bad or when they felt they were being treated unfairly.
Similarly, during our class discussions, students shared their experiences and describing occasions when they had demonstrated respect, responsibility, honesty, or fairness outside of the classroom. These examples illustrate students’ capacity to make connections between a trait and the manifestations of that trait in their own behaviour. These are all genuine responses, as they were sharing about their unique individual experiences.

When students were asked how they would feel about performing their character song in front of the whole school at the next concert or assembly, which was a real-life situation for them, other than nervousness or excitement, some students felt that it was a good opportunity for them to teach others about character and to show others how much they cared about these character traits. Their responses show that they were taking this seriously and that they truly wanted to make the effort to educate others about the importance of having good character, demonstrating what it would look like to be a person of good character. Students also reflected on the writing process, how it took effort to show respect and other good traits, in order to work with others, especially people with whom they did not normally enjoy working.

In the end, I think students’ reflection forms provided concrete evidence that students were not just writing what they thought the adults wanted to hear. When I asked the homeroom teachers how students reacted when they were instructed to not put their names on the reflections, I was told the students were happy and very willing to work on
their reflections. The students were happy to be asked their opinion on the songwriting program, especially when they were asked if there was anything else they would like to see changed in order to improve the program.

Knowing that their answers were anonymous and that I was not going to have access to them until after their report card marks had been submitted provided the opportunity for students to express themselves more freely and honestly. In their answers, students used common learning skills and character terms, not because they were trying to please, but because they were familiar with this vocabulary as a way to express themselves, having acquired this vocabulary from many years of being at the school. It was clear they believed that respect was an important aspect of working together, because it was an experience in which they were participating in a concrete way during the songwriting activities. In other words, students needed to learn to respect each other in order to get work done in their groups. Thus, students were experiencing the meaning of respect, instead of being told what it meant in class, through books, or on the morning announcements. In addition, the fact that students were sharing their real-life experiences when writing the lyrics, or reflecting on the lyrics, demonstrates that the students were considering what it would be like to have those good characteristics as a person.
Question Two: How Do I, as a Teacher, Interpret, Evaluate, and Justify This Songwriting Program from the Results of the Study?

Making their Songs “Good enough”

In my experience as a teacher, I believe that having a short-term goal such as a concert can help students learn to work together as a group and to overcome nervousness about performing for an audience. One of the questions in the reflection form asked students how they would feel about preparing and performing their character songs in front of the rest of the school and their parents at the next concert or school assembly. Slightly fewer than half of the participants indicated that they would be nervous or have stage fright if asked to perform the character songs in front of a large audience. One possible interpretation of this is that students were shy and were not comfortable performing in a large group. Another interpretation is that they did not think they sang well enough to perform. For example, student C2 thought their voices sounded too “pitchy,” so they would not want to embarrass themselves in front of a large audience. A deeper interpretation, indicated by some of the responses, is that students felt overwhelmed with the responsibility to perform well and do a good job because they were teaching others about good character. Apart from those who were nervous, the rest of the respondents indicated they would feel excited, happy, proud, or good about performing. Students explained they were happy, excited, and proud to have the opportunity to share their hard work with the rest of the school, especially their parents. Others were proud they would have the opportunity to teach others about character.
These responses give no direct or clear indication of how students connected their songwriting process to character. However, openly sharing their feelings of nervousness may also be seen as an indication of honesty and did take courage. As well, feeling nervous could also mean they cared enough to make sure they did a good job, since they were performing a song about a particular character attribute they valued, which made it just that much more important for them to demonstrate good character in the working process. This was reinforced in class when I observed the way students worked cooperatively to decide which ideas to keep in the lyrics and which ones to reject. Knowing that they would perform to an audience later, students worked hard to make sure they had the best lyrics and examples in order to effectively teach others about character. To further support this point, in my pilot study the previous year, students collectively made a decision that demonstrated they cared very much about the quality of their performance. As the winter holiday concert date neared, the Grade Fours actually voted to not perform their piece at that time, but to perform it instead at the Spring Concert, so they would have more time to prepare for it. They explained that they were not ready to perform their Responsibility song and did not wish to share the importance of responsibility to the rest of the school with a half-ready performance.

**The Value and Positive Effects of Descriptive Feedback**

There were other indications that students were serious about the songwriting program and the message they were delivering in their songs. Throughout the writing process, students were given opportunities to receive feedback from me and their peers.
These feedback sessions were checkpoints where students would perform their preliminary work and receive suggestions of how to improve their work. No marks were given to students and the feedback was usually focused on improving musical elements in their performance such as balance, texture, and dynamics. Other expectations focused on students’ creativity and the content of their piece. During these feedback sessions, both the students providing feedback and the students receiving feedback took their role seriously. The students providing feedback learned, over the course of the year, to always provide one positive feedback and couple it with a suggestion for improvement. During these feedback sessions, the students receiving feedback usually took the initiative to jot down the comments, even though it was not necessary, because they would be getting the feedback checklist and written comments from their evaluators later. With my guidance, students then reviewed and reflected on their feedback and wrote out three things they needed to improve upon for their final presentation.

During these feedback reflection sessions, students worked seriously and rigorously on improving the three things they had written down. There was rarely a focus on what marks they would be getting, but rather a focus on the quality of their performance, for example, whether or not the audience could hear their lyrics clearly if they were playing the instruments too loudly. The reason students were not as focused on their marks could be that they were never given a grade on the rubrics because they were encouraged to focus on the comments and the look-fors. The feedback students were
getting was descriptive feedback without numerical values. Overall, I observed that students genuinely enjoyed the songwriting process, because, although they were bound by certain expectations and checklists when creating their songs, they were provided with many choices to be creative and to perform in ways in which they were most comfortable. Students who were good speakers decided to take on the role of a TV host to introduce their performance while students who were comfortable with singing or playing their recorder chose to be the instrumentalists of the group. Because students were given choices, they were able to do that at which they excelled and which they enjoyed, and they consequently became more engaged in the project.

_A Look at the Songwriting Process and the Songs_

As mentioned in Chapter Four, there was evidence that students were more engaged in the project than they were in music class when not involved in songwriting. During the songwriting work periods, I rarely had to remind students to stay on task. They showed a joy in playing the instruments, especially the Orff instruments. They were often in a great rush to grab the instruments they wanted and to get started without wanting to finish listening to all of my instructions. At the end of the classes, some groups had to be reminded several times to clean up because they were so engaged that they wanted to finish exploring their ideas or continue practising. Compared to our regular non-songwriting classes, there was a noticeable difference in students’ behaviour. Students enjoyed the independence to explore, especially on the Orff and other percussion instruments; they had the freedom to compose a piece over which they felt
ownership, and had the opportunity to share their musical capabilities and musicianship in a safe, respectful, encouraging learning environment.

Cooperation and respect were demonstrated throughout the songwriting process. In their groups, each student would take on a role such as being timekeeper, recorder, or materials person. Students took their roles seriously to ensure they were contributing to their group. There were one or two occasions when students reported to me that someone in their group was not helping out or contributing, but after a simple reprimand and reminder, students would work cooperatively again.

During the lyric-writing sessions, students worked cooperatively to share their ideas and experiences about fairness. Again, there were few occasions when students became silly and came up with silly names or scenarios to include in their lyrics. However, it was all seen as having fun, not an aspect that was deterring groups from completing their work. Some students took on a leadership role to encourage other group members to contribute. I noticed that students listened, valued, and respected the thoughts and opinions of others in the groups. Care was put towards making sure their lines had a consistent number of syllables, had stresses on strong beats, used rhyming words, and that the content made sense.

When creating the music, students who were more confident in their musical skills assumed more leadership than others in their group. They demonstrated respect, good listening skills, and encouraged all to choose roles in which they could excel.
Again, students were engaged because most groups preferred to work in the quiet environment of the soundproof practice rooms and needed little teacher supervision. They took risks to try out different things, shared ideas and techniques, and encouraged each other when exploring on the instruments. All students in each group took responsibility and helped with setting up and cleaning up. Students demonstrated mutual respect, creating an inclusive environment so everyone’s talent would fit into the presentation of their songs.

As for the performances, it was clear that students were committed to creating high quality performances. We decided to video record the Honesty Song and show it as a clip at the Spring Fling Concert as a way to celebrate our learning and share with the rest of the school community what our learning looked like and sounded like in the music classroom. When looking at the video clips, students were not satisfied with the filming and requested to be filmed again and again until they felt their performance was up to standard. To improve their performance, they made sure everyone was smiling, doing the same actions correctly, and knowing their words so they didn’t have to sing from the paper. Some students took the initiative to memorize their lyrics ahead of time at home. Others were correcting each other on their actions. Similarly, when preparing for their Fairness song presentations, students often asked for extra time; one group of students decided to come in at lunch recess to practise. The level of engagement in class was high as students committed to providing a high quality performance. Overall, these
observations demonstrated that students were more engaged since students would not
generally take initiative to memorize lyrics, give up their lunch times to practise their
recorders, or take care to help each other improve on their performance skills. As well,
character was also developed as students learned to cooperate, collaborate, and interact
with members of the groups in a respectful way.

Students’ Opinions on the Songwriting Program

As indicated in Chapter Four, to evaluate the impact of this songwriting program,
students were asked whether or not we should continue to write character songs at our
school. A large portion, 42 out of 58 respondents responded that we should continue to
write character songs. These students supported their answers with various reasons:
songwriting was fun and a great way to get students involved in music, it was an
interesting way to refine their musical skills, and experience of writing a song and
performing it in front of a large audience was satisfying. I think this enjoyment of music
creation is important to note, because students indicated they genuinely enjoyed the
songwriting process, independently of its role in character education. Still, others students
expressed the importance of learning about character through songwriting, which they
saw as a more effective way to learn and remember the meanings of the different
character attributes than previously employed methods.

I believe students felt the songwriting was effective because they were given
voice in this activity. Throughout the songwriting process, students wrote their own lyrics
rather than being told what honesty or fairness meant. They also had more freedom to
explore on the Orff instrument compared to the limited opportunities they had during regular Orff lessons. Students enjoyed the opportunity to work with others and come up with creative ways to present their songs and make actions that fit the meaning of their lyrics. This, for students, was a more effective way of learning and remembering the meaning of the different character traits compared to the repeated character messages on the morning announcements, the monthly character assembly, or some of the character books in the library. Other students indicated songs were a better way to express their character message than by reading a book about characters. A few students reflected on their experience of learning to work cooperatively and collaborative as a team, even with those with whom they did not normally enjoy working.

On the other hand, 16 out of the 58 respondents indicated that they would not want to continue the songwriting initiative another year. Some did not explain why and two students stated that it was because they were too nervous about performing. Some thought writing about character traits was a challenging experience, while others felt it was taking up too much time and impeding them from learning other things in music, such as playing string instruments. Some felt that there could be other or even better ways to teach others about character instead of through songs. A number of students indicated they felt they were learning about Character Matters! repeatedly and unnecessarily, as they were already learning about it in other classes and at the school’s monthly character assemblies.
My Interpretation and Evaluation of the Program

I found that the benefits of the songwriting program amply justified introducing it into my teaching. For example, the character-tracking checklists provided evidence that students improved in behaviour over the course of the songwriting program, where almost all students moved from the “rarely” and “sometimes” ranking to “sufficient” and “always.” Students became more responsible, being prepared for class by always remembering their books and other needed materials. Furthermore, students who were not normally active learners, such as the Student Support Centre (SSC) students described in Chapter Four, became more active and confident in these sessions. Other students took the initiative to take home incomplete work; whereas, they would previously forget to take home their recorder or practice regularly. As well, the boys who were usually embarrassed to sing, started singing. I attribute this to the fact that students became more engaged.

From my field note observations, it was evident that students very much enjoyed what they were doing. They respectfully discussed in their groups what roles they were taking, carefully filling out their planning sheets. There was laughter around the room as students worked collaboratively and cooperatively exploring the different instruments and musical elements. The opportunity for choice provided students with a safe learning environment in which they were able to shine in the ways that they felt most comfortable. Writing their own character songs afforded students the opportunity to apply their
musical and character knowledge in a creative and authentic way, making connections to real-life experiences and expressing that through song. Students were not told what to write and there were no right or wrong answers; rather, they were simply writing about their beliefs and interpretations of what having good character was all about. This is a move away from common approaches to character education, in which students are usually told what to do, what to write, and the value of character, without the opportunity for critical thinking and reflection. The character songwriting program does the opposite; students are given the opportunity to apply their knowledge of character traits both in school and to the world outside of school.

Although students did not express enjoyment explicitly, it was evident that they enjoyed the songwriting activities and were serious about what they were doing. Students were honest about their feelings about performing in front of a large audience and showed they cared enough to want to do a good job on their song, whether by carefully selecting content for their lyrics, or by providing helpful descriptive feedback for others to improve on their work, without really focusing on marks. Their responses genuinely expressed that they saw value in the program, whether it was a good way to improve on their musical skills, an opportunity to perform in front of others and develop courage and confidence, learning to work with people they did not like, learning about the character attributes in a more authentic and creative way, or having the opportunity and responsibility to teach others about the importance of having good character.
Still, the findings from this research suggest that the songwriting program could be improved. The fact that 16 out of the 58 participants stated that they would not want to continue the songwriting program for another year indicates that they did not enjoy it enough to do it again. This response is reasonable because, at Grade Five, students are just learning how to play a stringed instrument by the end of second term, so they may have felt more excited about instrumental music than songwriting. It was also very honest of student to say they felt they were learning about Character Matters! over and over again. I think this concern could easily be addressed. Due to difficulty with timetabling in the year of the study, some classes were shortened for music, providing only 40 minutes instead of our usual 50- to 60-minute class. In the shorter 40-minute classes, students might have felt that we were spending more time on songwriting than on other musical activities, since that was the only activity we could fit into the shortened period. In the longer music periods of 50 or 60 minutes we were able to explore a greater variety of activities in addition to the songwriting activities. This is definitely a good reflection for me, as the music teacher, to adjust my activities accordingly and make sure I have a balance of activities, so students do not get bored or feel overwhelmed and turned off from the lack of variety.

One major concern regarding the justification for, and value of, the program, however, was its long-term effect. As mentioned in Chapter Four, there were three particular students whose behaviour did not seem to improve. Two of these students came
from homes where they were permitted to challenge an authority figure such as their mother, father, or nanny. The third example was of a grade-four female student who had been lacking in social skills for a long time. Because of these cases, I believe character may not be something that can be explicitly taught, which is a topic I further explore later in this chapter, but is something that is experienced and developed over time. The fact that these students’ behaviour did not improve as noticeably as that of their peers could be because, as Davis (2003) suggests, character is a settled disposition, something that must exist over more than a small part of one’s life to exist at all, which means character can be developed only over a long period of time. While some students might show development in a five-month songwriting program, others might need significantly more time. As mentioned in Chapter Two, this was supported by Smithrim and Upitis (2005), in their research comparison of students from a Learning Through the Arts (LTTA) school and regular schools, where higher performance was found in LTTA students only after three years later, at the end of the study.

Overall, there were definitely many benefits and positive impacts of the songwriting program. Any weaknesses or areas for improvement were minor and reflected no detriment to any students. It was evident that students enjoyed the program, were engaged and took it seriously, caring enough to put effort in their work and seeing value in the program. Giving students choice and voice provided a sense of ownership and motivated them to take responsibility for their work. Character was also developed as
students reflected on their real-life experiences and made connections to the meaning of the lyrics. Still, character development is a long and slow process that would require a more longitudinal study to explore fully.

**Study Reflections**

**Limitations**

There are a few limitations to this study. As mentioned, the impact of arts education may be a long and slow process (Smithrim & Upitis, 2005), therefore, a more longitudinal research than the five-month term timeline that was employed here may be needed in the future. This was supported by Moore & Halle (2001), who stated that musicianship and character building take time to develop.

In addition, even though students were completing these reflection forms in their homeroom classes, knowing that these would be given to me may still have created bias in their responses. As mentioned earlier, although it seemed students were genuine and honest with their answers because they were demonstrating their statements in their class behaviour, in my teaching experience, children often have a tendency to attempt to please and give responses based on what they think their teachers would like to hear or see, which may have been a factor in the use of common vocabulary when describing the character traits or learning skills. As well, some students may be influenced by their peers, or by the posters and word wall around their classroom. Also, because students were completing these reflection forms in class, they may not have had enough time or the ability to articulate their perceptions as fully as they might have done had they been
able to complete the task at home with more time for thoughtful reflection (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, it is evident that one student chose not to share his or her reflection by returning an incomplete reflection form.

As recommended by McMillan and Schumacher (2006), researchers should engage in member checking in order to ensure that interpretations of the responses are aligned with the intended meanings of the participants, but this strategy was not possible for me since the reflection forms were anonymous.

According to Moore and Halle (2001), while intuitive sense of what constitutes character was widespread and many people feel they can recognize a person of good character, it is still difficult to measure this construct in a concrete way. Therefore, although reflexivity could be applied when coding the data to establish credibility, there still remained an element of human subjectivity present when I sorted the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006).

Furthermore, deciding to use only the board’s ten character traits with which to sort my data may have limited me from seeing other interesting things in the data, even though this was the more appropriate method to use for the benefits of our community and board. Additionally, because this was a research study within a specific elementary school, the sample size of about 58 students may seem small compared with the sample needed to generalize to a larger population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006), and, therefore, the findings may not apply beyond my own school community. Furthermore, I
was able to obtain consent from 58 of the 84 invited participants only, probably due to the parents’ lack of understanding of the English language on the consent form and letter of information, since the majority of the community were Chinese immigrants, though I do not suspect that the findings of this study would have changed in a major way had a I also had date from the 26 non-participants.

Finally, what positive changes were observed may have reflected maturation and the influence of other factors not examined in this study. Because of this possibility, as much as possible, I sought evidence that directly linked changes to activities associated with the songwriting program.

**Educational Implications of the Character Songwriting Program**

As seen in Chapter Two, common approaches to character education today may have created a culture of compliance where students have become very good at doing what they are told, but not really critically thinking about why they should do so. This phenomenon was somewhat evident in the research. On their reflections forms, students often responded by providing examples of what they *should* do in order to demonstrate good character. Such responses show that students know what they *should* do, and what it means to be good. However, these responses do not provide enough evidence of whether or not these students put deeper thought into their responses. These students may have simply written such responses about what they should do because they have been taught elements of character education throughout their years at school. Only responses such as student H5’s comment, “I made connections about what I did, things that were wrong
before,” indicate a deeper reflecting on what he or she did wrong in the past, and, perhaps, on what he or she could do to improve.

In addition, motivation plays a big role in students’ interest in completing tasks. When students are rewarded for doing a good deed, they become less likely to perform the good deed again if the reward no longer exists (Kohn, 1995). With this method of extrinsic motivation, we are baiting students to do what they should do, not necessarily providing them with the opportunity to think critically about why they should be good. Fortunately, I think this songwriting program is a good start towards moving away from our traditional drilling and repetition of character education.

By providing students with the opportunity to voice themselves and write their own songs, this program gives them the opportunity to think critically, to make connections to real-life experiences, and to take ownership and responsibility for their work. The outcome is that students better understand what character attributes mean and the true sense of having good character. Supported by Davis (2011), stories can have an impact on character education. When we share our stories, we are sharing our experience, and when we listen to stories of others, we are reflecting on their experiences and making connections to what we can learn about from their experiences. Similarly, when students write their own songs, they are bringing in their own experiences into the learning. Rather than listening to the public address system’s daily character thoughts, students are reflecting on and interpreting those character attributes and creatively expressing their
ideas through music. They are motivated because they are learning about character in an authentic way, by making connections to real life experiences and through songwriting, which gives them the opportunity to explore various instruments, learn about the structure of a song, and to express their love of music, as well as having the option of doing what they are good at in a safe learning environment and working towards higher standards and better quality of their work, based on descriptive feedback, not a numeric evaluation.

My approach to character songwriting is an example of how the arts make the learning experience special by addressing a fundamental human need. According to Dissanayake (1992), art is central to the emergence, adaptation, and survival of the human species. She argues that aesthetic ability is innate in every human being, and that art is a need as fundamental to our species as food, warmth, or shelter. Dissanayake (1992) says the arts enable us to bracket off the things and activities that were important to our survival, separate them from the mundane, and make them special. We took the objects and practices involved in marriage, birth, death, food production, war, and peacemaking and enhanced them to make them more attractive and pleasurable, more intriguing, and more memorable. We invented dance, poetry, charms, spells, masks, dress, and a multitude of other artifacts to make these associated activities, whether hauling nets or pounding grain, more sensual and enjoyable, to promote cooperation, harmony and unity among group members, and also to enable us to cope with life’s less
expected or explicable events. Dissanayake’s (1992) argument is evident in my observations of the children during the songwriting process. Songwriting can be seen as a form of the arts where students can feel what they write and enjoy learning. In this project, it promoted cooperation, harmony, and unity among the group members. Expressing their ideas through song was almost innate or intrinsic to students, like Dissanayake’s (1992) description:

*the arts* have always been with us. And so have ideas of beauty, sublimity, and transcendence, along with the verities of the human condition: love, death, memory, suffering, power, fear, loss, desire, hope, and so forth. These have been the subject matter of and occasion for the arts throughout human history. (p. 41)

As well, Dissanayake states that art is a derivative of play. When we play, we are practicing skills that eventually enable us to, for example, find food, defend ourselves, and mate, among other adult necessities. Also, in play, we learn how to get along with others. “Individuals who play, and thereby learn practical and social skills, survive better than individuals who are not inclined to play or who are deprived of play and therefore lack practice with these essential things” (p. 44). Writing songs and interacting with others allowed students to play and develop useful social skills, experiencing what it means to have good character, an essential element of being a good person.

Furthermore, when students were writing their songs, they expressed their understanding of the character attributes specially, beautifully, and clearly for others. Dissanayake (1992) further suggests that “making special,” for example, making
character education special through songwriting, or making aspects of their experiences special, emphasizes the idea that the arts, biologically endowed predispositions, have been physically, sensuously, and emotionally satisfying and pleasurable to humans.

Dissanayake (1992) further argues that

special can indicate that not only are our senses arrested by a thing’s perceptual strikingness (specialness), and our intellects intrigued and stimulated by its uncommonness (specialness), but that we make something special because doing so gives us a way of expressing its positive emotional valence for us, and the ways in which we accomplish this specialness not only reflect but give unusual or special gratification and pleasure.” (p. 54)

Supporting Dissanayake’s assertions (1992), in the songwriting program, students were writing about character through songs and making it special and meaningful. Making connections to Dissanayake, the art of songwriting may change the life of anyone who experiences it. Students gained a special gratification by participating in the songwriting program, because it was through this program that they could relate to other human beings on a spiritual level, people who experience the same things as they did in regards to what respect, honesty, or fairness meant to them. They learned that what was meaningful to them was meaningful to others they worked with, and so they felt united with a common spirit of humanity. A common spirit and similar goals throughout the songwriting program allowed students to be happy. The power of songwriting gave students a gratifying satisfaction in their work.
Thus, the educational implications of this program are simple: we need to create a world of thinkers, not a world of robots. We, as educators, need to induce good values in our children through interpreted experience, not direct instruction. We need to provide motivation that teaches our children to persevere in setting and reaching worthy goals, not motivation to win presents, rewards, or recognitions. We need to provide our students with choice, and opportunities to take responsibility and ownership for their learning. More importantly, we need to provide opportunities for our students to use their innate skills and make the experience of learning special and beautiful. As Dissanayake states, “Art is a normal and necessary behavior of human beings and like other common and universal occupations such as talking, working, exercising, playing, socializing, learning, loving, and caring, should be recognized, encouraged and developed in everyone. Via art, experience is heightened, elevated, made more memorable and significant” (p. 50).

**Implications for Further Research**

My research left unanswered questions that require deeper probing into student behaviour and motivation. For example, it was evident from a few of the responses that a number of students were not interested in continuing this songwriting initiative as they were not able to see the educational value of developing character through their experience with collaborative team work, problem solving, and celebration of success through performance. In addition, in spite of the fact that the majority of the participants were motivated, engaged, and enthusiastic, there were still a few students who did not improve in behaviour and had a difficult time meeting me half way. According to
Burnard (2008), innovative music programs can be used to re-engage the unmotivated as students learn to develop a mutually respectful relationship with their teachers. I am curious to know whether there were other factors in Burnard’s case study that affected these students’ behaviour towards music in general. Perhaps, interviews with the disengaged could be considered as a more effective strategy of inquiry in the future.

If I were to do this research again, I would consider changing three things: First, I would implement my research for a longer period of time, perhaps for one or two years rather than just a five-month school term. As mentioned in the limitations section, the impact of arts education may require more time for researchers to see a noticeable difference, especially when focusing on character, which takes time to develop. Therefore, we might be able to see a more clear impact of the songwriting program if the research were extended to a longer term.

Second, the community that was chosen needs to be considered. The community I chose has a very high population of lower-middle-class Chinese-Canadians. In my personal experience as a first generation Chinese-Canadian, our Chinese culture teaches children to be respectful to their elders and teachers. Therefore, at our school, there were relatively few behavioural issues to start with. As well, the Chinese respect and support music. As a result, many of my students were already taking private piano or violin lessons outside of school, so their enjoyment, knowledge, and skills in music were comparatively high to begin with. Coupled with substantial student background in music
is our school’s strong arts program, in which all students in Grade One through Grade Eight have an allotted time for music each week on their timetable, taught by a music specialist or a teacher with a strong music background. These advantages made the songwriting process go more smoothly than would have been the case had there been less emphasis on music at home and in school. As a result of the specific characteristics of this community and the short-term five-month songwriting program, the findings from this research may not apply beyond my school community. If I were to do this again, I might consider another community, so I could compare the two and look for any differences in the results due to students’ cultural and ethnic upbringing.

Third, although this songwriting program is an active shift from the traditional way of character education that moulds students, I would like to acknowledge that I am still plugging into the school-board character-education system. This is because my program still had students write songs about the character of the month with the goal of performing it at events related to the Character Matters! program. If I were to move further towards autonomy, while still maintaining my focus on developing good character, I would have engaged children in writing songs about what they deal with in life, with relationships, etc. and then invite them to decided whether and how they want to share their songs with others.
Concluding Thoughts

Many researchers have examined the effect of music education on students (Maloney & Cairns, 1997; Moore & Halle, 2001; Wong, 2005), but have not made direct links between musical experience and positive character development. Furthermore, my literature search did not reveal any studies that looked specifically at the impact of songwriting on character development. Still, from the literature review, it was evident that music education could improve the development of social skills (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007; Wilson et al. 2008). When working in groups, students have to learn to work with one another, demonstrate respect, take responsibility for their role in the group, and have to cooperate in order to make decisions in a democratic manner (Kokotsaki & Hallam, 2007). This was also apparent in my observations, where students worked respectfully and cooperatively with one another while making a collective decision on which ideas to keep and which ones to reject while writing song lyrics, paying attention to stressed syllables, strong and weak beats, and the use of high or low pitches and melodic contour in their melodies. When rehearsing for the class presentations, each student had to take responsibility for the role they took in the group, collaboratively share their ideas on how to appropriately and effectively articulate their honesty and fairness songs by using actions and dynamics, take initiative to get work started, encourage others, and persevere to do their very best.
Opportunities to take action, solve problems, and make decisions, individually and collaboratively, paved the way for development of good character. Throughout the songwriting process, students demonstrated many character attributes such as respect, responsibility, honesty, initiative, fairness, and perseverance. Students were given the opportunity to be responsible and accountable for their learning when writing their own songs. Every step of the way, students had to think critically and work respectfully as a class or with their groups to make decisions that would affect the end result, the song and performance of their masterpieces. Because students were writing their own songs, they might have felt the onus to do a good job. In the pilot study the previous year, the Grade 4 students made the decision to delay performance of their responsibility song from the Winter concert to the Spring concert, as they did not feel ready and would not want to share a character song and teach others using a song that was not of high quality. This was, in my opinion, a demonstration of character, because students were taking a role in being honest about how they felt and were being responsible for their work. Relating to the responses students provided this year, student G25 stated, when asked about how he or she felt about performing his or her song in front of the rest of the school and his or her parents at the next concert, “I feel a bit nervous… but I will practice at home so I won’t make a mistake.” By writing this, this student was demonstrating character, because he or she was taking ownership and responsibility for the outcome of the performance by
taking the initiative to practice at home and finding the courage to perform it in front of a large audience.

In a discussion I had with a professor during one of my Master of Education courses at Queen’s, she asked me whether character attributes are dispositions, and if so, whether they can be taught. I remember I was flabbergasted by her question because I was not able to clearly articulate how I thought good character could be taught, even though I believed it could be. I was glad for her question because, from this research study, I learned that good character cannot be explicitly taught, at least not from our daily character thoughts or at our monthly character assembly. If students are to be guided in character development, they should not be told what to do, but need opportunity and encouragement to think critically and reflect on their experience. In this way, they will truly feel and understand what it means to be a person of good character. At the same time, we do not want to focus on providing rewards to encourage students to be good, because students should not be behaving just for a reward or recognition, but should act in good character because they desire to be persons of good character. It may not always be possible to teach someone to be respectful, but it is possible to let someone experience what respect is. This can be done without drilling, repetition, or reward.

Students showed that they were quite capable of making connections between their actions and character traits. As one Grade 4 student wrote, “We needed to be respectful so we can listen to other people’s ideas, cooperate, and appreciate other
people’s ideas.” Another Grade 4 student wrote, “My partner and I didn’t work as well because we were not focused, we talked about other things.” These comments illustrate meaningful reflections produced by students on the reflection form. Students were able to describe specific real-life situations in which they experienced honesty and fairness. These quotes represented a deeper connection, because these responses and my observations supported how students were experiencing what being respectful, cooperative, and responsible for their learning truly meant during the songwriting process. In addition, it was evident there were motivational and engagement changes. A further example is of one of the boys who often had trouble focusing. Over the course of the study, I noticed that he was beginning to make wiser choices whenever he was given the opportunity to choose where and with whom he wanted to sit in class. As well, he became more respectful, often greeting me in the hallway, and was more engaged during lessons, always making an effort to share his ideas. Although I was not sure if this was a direct influence of the songwriting initiative or evidence of his development in maturity, this student became one of the first to volunteer to help out around the classroom, especially during our songwriting activities.

This case study has provided me, as a teacher, with insight into how this songwriting program had a positive effect on student learning and character development. The study has given me detailed evidence to justify my songwriting program and guide its improvement; it has provided me first hand understanding on how students
demonstrate and apply their learning and understanding to character. I am glad to have had the opportunity to conduct this research because it has led me to reflect on my teaching, try out new lessons, and learn about what works and does not work. As a curriculum leader in my school board, I can share my experience, my findings, and the connections of my work to research on the benefits of music education.
References


*Support for Learning, 19*(2), 52–56.


Appendix A. First Song: Honesty is the Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse 1</th>
<th>Chorus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Alex is truthful and honest  
He broke Bob’s favourite yo-yo  
He did not break his promise  
And made it up with coco  
He is always fair in games  
He follows rules won’t be a fool  
He wins some games and gets some fame  
So all his friends think he is cool | Do not cheat, do not cheat  
That is fair and honesty  
Do not cheat, do not cheat  
‘Cause that’s our policy |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chorus</th>
<th>Bridge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Do not cheat, do not cheat  
That is fair and honesty  
Do not cheat, do not cheat  
‘Cause that’s our policy | Nobody likes liars  
All they do is deceive  
Nobody likes liars  
Be fair and tell the truth |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse 2</th>
<th>Verse 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Ali is truthful, never cheats  
She studies for tests and won’t forget  
She works hard so she can succeed  
She tries her best and won’t regret  
Christina gives back extra change  
If it has changed she’ll rearrange  
She checks receipts makes sure they’re right  
She will be honest day and night | Abraham Lincoln was truthful  
So people called him Honesty Abe  
He was an honest lawyer  
And never lie to win a case  
He was not a liar  
So he never got fire  
In fact, he became president  
And was a White House resident |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chorus X2</th>
<th>Chorus X2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Honesty is the Policy

Verse

Voice

\begin{align*}
\text{Voice} & \\
1 & \text{Verse} \\
2 & \text{E}^b & B^b/D & A^b/C & E^b & \text{Al ex is truth ful and hon est} \\
3 & & & & & \text{He broke Bob's fav ourite yo yo He} \\
4 & & & & & \\
5 & & & & & \\
6 & & & & & \\
7 & & & & & \\
8 & & & & & \\
9 & E^b & A^b & B^b/D & A^b/C & E^b & \text{did not break his pro mise and made it up with co co} \\
10 & & & & & & \\
11 & & & & & \\
12 & & & & & \\
13 & & & & & \\
14 & & & & & \\
15 & & & & & \\
16 & & & & & \\
17 & & & & & \\
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25 & & & & & \\
26 & & & & & \\
27 & & & & & \\
28 & & & & & \\
29 & & & & & \\
30 & & & & & \\
\end{align*}

He is al ways fair in games He fol lows rules won't be a fool He

wins some games and gets some fame So all his friends think he is cool.

Chorus

\begin{align*}
\text{Chorus} & \\
23 & \text{Fm} & E^b & B^b & E^b & \text{Do not cheat Do not cheat That is fair and hon est y} \\
24 & & & & & \\
25 & & & & & \\
26 & & & & & \\
27 & & & & & \\
28 & & & & & \\
29 & & & & & \\
30 & & & & & \\
\end{align*}

Do not cheat Do not cheat 'cause that's our po li cy

Bridge

\begin{align*}
\text{Bridge} & \\
31 & D^b & E^b & F & D^b & E^b & F & D^b & E^b & \text{No bo dy likes li ars All they do is de ceive No bo dy likes} \\
32 & & & & & & & & & \\
33 & & & & & & & & & \\
34 & & & & & & & & & \\
35 & & & & & & & & & \\
36 & & & & & & & & & \\
37 & & & & & & & & & \\
38 & & & & & & & & & \\
39 & & & & & & & & & \\
40 & & & & & & & & & \\
\end{align*}

li ars Be fair and tell the truth.

Nov. 2008
Appendix B. Teacher Field Notes

Things I would include in my observation and reflection notes:

- Observations on students’ level and nature of involvement during the songwriting activities
- Without personal interpretation, things I noticed
- Things I make connections with (e.g. This situation reminded me of the time when I was teaching…)
- I wonder… (e.g. I wonder why X was having a hard time working in his/her group today; I wonder what Y was thinking when we were brainstorming ideas for our song today.)
- Ideas that were contributed by students during the songwriting
- Connections students made with their lives when sharing ideas about their interpretation of a character trait during the songwriting activities
- Observations on how thoughtful students were when creating musical elements for the song (e.g. Were the instruments they were using appropriate in carrying out the ideas and message from the song?)
- Ideas I get generated from conversations with other people
Appendix C. Letter of Information

Justina So
Music Teacher, AA Public School
Justina.So@yrdsb.edu.on.ca
Tel: 905-479-4795

(date)
Research Study: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN MUSIC MAKING
Understanding How Character Can Be Developed Through Songwriting
LETTER OF INFORMATION

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As the music teacher of school, I will be conducting a research study on CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN MUSIC MAKING: Understanding How Character Can Be Developed Through Songwriting at AAPS this year as part of my graduate school program at Queen’s University. Last year, students wrote Character Matters songs in music class as a part of our Character Matters/Bullying Prevention Initiative at AAPS. This year, I will be continuing this songwriting program in your child’s class. This project is intended to support our school culture that values positive relationships, fosters a sense of belonging, and builds positive character.

To help me evaluate and improve the program, I will be conducting research in three junior classes. This study is part of my work as a part-time graduate student at Queen’s University. The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the impact music education has on student engagement and character development. This research was granted clearance by the Queen’s University General Research Ethics Board for compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans, and Queen’s policies. In addition it was cleared by our principal, Mrs. LeBlanc and vice-principal, Mrs. Miller, and the York Region District School Board. I would like permission from you and your child to use data about your child’s involvement.
At the end of this songwriting project, your child will submit a written reflection to their homeroom teacher. Written reflections are a normal part of our learning and all students will complete this reflection form; the written reflection for this project will take 15-20 minutes to complete and your child will be given time to complete this with his/her homeroom teacher in class. Your child will not be asked to write his/her name on the reflection form, but will be identified by a unique identification number. Please note that your child’s homeroom teacher will be the only one to handle this Letter of Information, Consent Form (attached), and your child’s reflection form. Each consent form will be assigned an identification number and will be held by the homeroom teacher in a sealed envelope. Your child’s homeroom teacher will have a copy of the names corresponding to who has provided consent and their unique identification number. I will not be given these Consent Forms until the end of the term in June, after report card marks have been submitted. At that time, your child’s homeroom teacher will provide me with all of the reflection forms, separated into two piles: one with parental consent, and the other without. I will read all reflection forms, as they will provide me valuable insights on how I could improve my music program. However, I will only use for research, the reflection forms of the students whose parents have provided consent. Remember, students’ responses will help me understand what connections students make between this songwriting program and their lives. If you would like a copy of the summary of findings of this research, you may indicate so on your Consent Form.

In addition, I will be completing a checklist and field notes based on my observation and interpretations of students’ involvement during the songwriting. Confidentiality will be maintained to the extent possible. Field notes taken about students whose parents have not provided consent will be removed once I receive Consent Forms from your child’s homeroom teachers at the end of the year. Data collected from this research will be saved in a password-protected file on my computer using FileVault. FileVault will encrypt the information in my files by scrambling the data so that unauthorized users, applications, or utilizes cannot access the data. Data will be kept for five years and then deleted. Please note that students will receive this character songwriting program regardless of whether their parent consents to have their reflection paper and students-specific observational data considered as data.

This research may result in public talks about the program and publications of various types, including my master’s thesis, journal articles, professional publications, newsletters, and books. I will not use your child’s name or anything else that might identify him/her in my work. The only other people who will have access to my research data will be my thesis supervisor, Dr. William Egnatoff, and the thesis committee member, Dr. Rena Upitis. They will be required to abide by the same ethical restrictions.
that apply to me as the researcher.

There are no known risks to your child for assisting in the project. Your child’s participation is entirely voluntary. Remember in any reporting about the research, confidentiality of your child’s identity will be maintained to the extent possible. Students are free to decide whether or not they would like to submit their anonymous response. Furthermore, you and your child may request at any time that I do not refer to any field notes or the checklist that are explicitly connected to your child. If you decide to withdraw from the research at any point of the study, please contact your child’s homeroom teacher and I will not be given his/her reflection form. There will be no consequence of withdrawing from the research and the quality of your child’s music education at AAPS will remain the same.

Before the end of the school year, any questions about the study participation may be directed to the homeroom teacher. After the end of the school year, any questions about study participation may be directed to me, Ms. J. So at 905-479-4795 or justina.so@yrdsb.edu.on.ca or to my supervisor Dr. William J. Egnatoff at egnatoff@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.

If you are willing to have your child participate in this research, please sign and return the attached consent form to your child’s homeroom teacher.

Sincerely,

Justina So
Appendix D. Consent Form

Justina So
Music Teacher, AA Public School
Justina.So@yrdsb.edu.on.ca
Tel: 905-479-4795

November 2010
Research Study: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN MUSIC MAKING
Understanding How Character Can Be Developed Through Songwriting

CONSENT FORM: Parent/Guardian Participant

I have read and retained a copy of the Letter of Information concerning the Research Study: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT IN MUSIC MAKING: Understanding How Character Can Be Developed Through Songwriting and all questions have been sufficiently answered. I am aware of the purpose and procedures of this study, and I have been informed about all the sorts of data that will be gathered involving my child, including my child’s completion of a 15-20 minute reflection form at the end of the songwriting initiative. In signing this form, I recognize that I am giving the researcher permission to use data about my child’s participation in this research.

I have been notified that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my child at any point during the study and I may request the removal of all or part of data gathered from the researchers’ field notes and checklist about my child without any consequences to myself or my child. I have also been told the steps that will be taken to ensure confidentiality to the extent possible of all information.

Before the end of the school year, any questions about the study participation may be directed to the homeroom teacher. After the end of the school year, any questions about study participation may be directed to Ms. J. Cheung (So) at 905-479-4795 or justina.so@yrdsb.edu.on.ca or to her supervisor Dr. William J. Egnatoff at egnatoff@queensu.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to the Chair of the General Research Ethics Board at 613-533-6081 or chair.GREB@queensu.ca.
Please sign one copy of this Consent Form and return it to your child’s homeroom teacher. Retain the second copy for your records.

Student’s Name: ____________________________________________

Name of Parent or Guardian: __________________________________

Signature of Parent or Guardian: ________________________________

Date: ________________________________________________________

Please write your e-mail or mailing address at the bottom of this sheet if you wish to receive a copy of the results of this study.
Appendix E. Second Song: Our Fairness Song

Our Fairness Song

Bob passed the ball while playing basketball but did not pass to his friend Paul.
Our Fairness Song

Bob says sorry I didn't pass the ball. But he feels better after he told Paul so.

they went to the mall to buy a new ball now they walk down the hall with Paul's new basketball.
Appendix F. Checklist for Tracking Character Changes: For use by Teacher

| Student Names | (Responsibility) Prepared for class | (Respect) Willing to be active learner | (Responsibility) Demonstrate co-operative learning (in group and in class) | (Responsibility) Finish assigned work on time (e.g. stay on task) | (Respect, Empathy, Fairness) Value diversity of classroom (sensitive to others’ feelings) during discussions and group work | (Responsibility) Takes care of belongings/others’ property and classroom resources, recycling bin vs. garbage, clean up after self | (Responsibility, Fairness) Takes ownership for their action (Honesty) Play fair (provide everyone with an opportunity to share during group work) (Initiative) Complete assigned task without being prompted |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
|               |                                   |                                      |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |
|               |                                   |                                      |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |
|               |                                   |                                      |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |
|               |                                   |                                      |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |
|               |                                   |                                      |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |
|               |                                   |                                      |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |
|               |                                   |                                      |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |
|               |                                   |                                      |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |                                                 |

(Note: table reformatted for thesis publication)

0: never  1: rarely  2: sometimes  3. sufficient or most of the time  4. Always or consistently

Data will be taken from November (or as soon as clearance is obtained from EREB and the school board) to March (5-months, half of a school year).
Appendix G. Student Reflection Form

AAPS Character Really Matters! Songwriting Program

Student Reflection Form

PLEASE DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ON THIS SHEET.

1. What learning skills and work habits are needed in order to successfully work in a team when creating our own character songs together as a class? (Remember to think about the work you did for both the Honesty Song and your Fairness Song).

2. How do you feel about preparing and performing your Honesty or Fairness Song in front of the rest of the school, your parents, or your friends at the next concert or assembly? Explain your answer.

I would feel…. because…

3. When writing our character songs, what connections did you make to your life?
4. How is writing and performing our own songs connected to *Character Matters*?

5. Do you think we should continue this *Character Really Matters! Songwriting* Program at AAPS? Why or why not?

6. Is there anything else you would like to change about our music class (e.g. compose other types of songs, perform more on recorders/other instruments, play musical games, etc?)
Appendix H. Student Perception of Learning Skills and Work Habits Associated with Character Song Writing

Figure 1: Students’ perceptions of learning skills and work habits needed to work successfully on a team when creating their own character songs.
Appendix I. Student Perceptions of Character Song Performance

Figure 2: How students felt about performing their Character Song in front of the rest of the school, their parents, or their friends at the next concert or assembly.
Appendix J. Character Checklist Data

Table 2: Number of Students Demonstrating Character Traits on the Character Tracking Checklist and the Percentage Changes between Rounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Responsibility (Prepared for Class)</th>
<th>Respect (Wait for their turn to speak)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ranking</td>
<td>Before program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rarely</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sometimes</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>always</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Responsibility (Willing to be active learner)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Before Program</th>
<th>After completion of first song</th>
<th>After completion of second song</th>
<th>% change (before program to completion of first song)</th>
<th>% change (from completion of first song to completion of second song)</th>
<th>% Change (before program to completion of second song)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
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<td>44</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>59</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Respect (demonstrate cooperative learning)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Before Program</th>
<th>After completion of first song</th>
<th>After completion of second song</th>
<th>% change (before program to completion of first song)</th>
<th>% change (from completion of first song to completion of second song)</th>
<th>% Change (before program to completion of second song)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rarely</td>
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### Responsibility (Finish assigned work on time)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ranking</th>
<th>Before Program</th>
<th>After completion of first song</th>
<th>After completion of second song</th>
<th>% change (before program to completion of first song)</th>
<th>% change (from completion of first song to completion of second song)</th>
<th>% Change (before program to completion of second song)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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### Respect, Empathy, Fairness

<table>
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<td>53</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>39</td>
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### Respect (Takes care of belongings…)

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<th>After completion of second song</th>
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<th>% change (from completion of first song to completion of second song)</th>
<th>% Change (before program to completion of second song)</th>
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### Honesty and Fairness (collaboration during group activities)

<table>
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<th>After completion of second song</th>
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