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Music and homeschooled youth: A case study

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Abstract
One dimension of music education and community music activity remains virtually unexamined: the homeschooled community. The purpose of this research was to examine the nature, values, and teaching-learning strategies of the North Jersey Homeschool Association (NJHSA) Chorale. This case study, conducted over a period of three months, chronicled numerous musical and social interactions of the NJHSA Chorale. Analyses of the data revealed four themes related to this organization's nature, values, and teaching–learning processes: care, community, cultural pluralism, and spirituality. The conclusions of the study include (but are not limited to) the following: the aims and values of the NJHSA Chorale resonate with central issues in contemporary educational philosophy and with central aims of community music in particular (e.g., music making for life-long learning and for community well-being).

Keywords
care, choir, community, cultural pluralism, homeschooling, spirituality

> The best schools should resemble the best homes. (Noddings, 2005b, p. 260)

Introduction

Research in the field of community music has grown and matured significantly. There are many reasons for this, including (for example): the longstanding work of the International Society for Music Education (ISME) Community Music Activity Commission, which had its genesis in the 1950s and received ISME's official endorsement in 1982 (McCarthy, 2007); the Adult and Community Music Special Research Interest Group (SRIG) of the Music Educators National Conference (MENC), which began in 1999; research symposia of 'Music in Lifelong Learning,' which began in 2005; and the launch of the *International Journal of Community Music* (*IJCM*) in 2004. Arguably, the inauguration of the *IJCM* served to announce and mark officially: (1) the culmination of many years of largely 'hidden' and unpublished research efforts; (2) the importance of community music of all kinds and in all places; and (3) music educators' thirst for broad, deep, and rigorous research in this global field.

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Indeed, contemporary research in community music encompasses a wide range of traditional and innovative situations, musics, teaching–learning styles, aims, financial structures, partnerships, and so forth. In short, community music is analogous to a rich and continuously-evolving tapestry, and community music research is akin to a 'moving mosaic' of (mostly) qualitative, historical, and philosophical research studies of local, regional, national, and international community music sites. To cite only a few examples: Warfield (2010) offers a case study of a women's string orchestra in the Hiland Mountain Correctional Centre; Hayes (2008) provides a comprehensive history of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender (GLBT) community choruses in the Unites States; Hebert (2008) investigates a Tongan youth band in Auckland, New Zealand; Balandina (2010) utilizes the methods of applied ethnomusicology to evaluate the efficacy of music making as a means of conflict transformation in post-Yugoslav Macedonia; and Phelan (2008) combines a postmodern concept of practice theory, and her experience as a ritual theorist, to investigate the role of music in empowering and healing asylum-seekers in Limerick, Ireland.

Notwithstanding the breadth and depth of current research activity, one area of community music activity remains virtually unnoticed: the homeschooled community. A review of past and present research in community music and music education revealed only three studies of music and homeschooled youth in the US (i.e., Nichols, 2005, 2006; Young, 1999). Nichols (2006) conducted a phenomenological study of eight homeschooling families in the greater Phoenix (Arizona) area and documented music education opportunities for these families. Young (1999) surveyed 147 families to uncover the music education opportunities for homeschooled students in Broome County, New York.

In contrast to the dearth of research on music and homeschooled youth, the homeschooling movement itself has been researched deeply from several perspectives: educational philosophy (e.g., Apple, 2000, 2007; Aurini & Davies, 2005), educational history (e.g., Carper & Hunt, 2007; Gaither, 2008, 2009), educational policy (e.g., Lines, 2000), sociology (e.g., Stevens, 2001), and educational psychology (e.g., Arora, 2003; Cai, Reeve, & Robinson, 2002).

Background and purpose

The motivation for this study emerged from a conversation I had with an undergraduate music education major in October 2009. During the conversation, I remarked on the artistry this student demonstrated in a recent recital. I asked her where she studied prior to entering our music education programme. She explained that she was homeschooled and that she learned to sing and play the piano from lessons with her mother and her participation in a homeschooled choir. This immediately piqued my interest. Prior to this conversation, I had little knowledge of 'homeschooling' and no knowledge of the relationship between music education and homeschooled youth. As I delved into this topic, I was delighted to discover, through word of mouth and follow-up investigations of newspaper and internet reviews, that an award-winning homeschooled chorus was located in close proximity to my university: the North Jersey Homeschool Association (NJHSA) Chorale. The purpose of the current study was to investigate the nature, values, and teaching–learning processes of the NJHSA Chorale. This study begins to fill an important gap in the research literature of community music and music education.

Context

Homeschooling

Prior to this project, I assumed that homeschooling involved a small number of students in the United States, and, therefore, homeschooling did not qualify as a significant educational movement. But as I pursued this topic deeply, it became clear that my initial assumption was wrong. The United States National Centre for Education Statistics reported that there were 1.5 million homeschooled students in the United States (2007). While this is small compared to the total population of 'schooled' students (approximately 53 million American children K–12), the homeschooled population is not insignificant. The centre's report is notable for several other facts, including some of the reasons parents gave for choosing homeschooling: 'to provide religious or moral instruction, concern about the school environment, and dissatisfaction with the academic instruction at other schools' (2007).

According to Stevens (2001), the general perception of homeschoolers is one of 'misperception.' For example, Stevens says, homeschooled children are often viewed as 'unsocialized.' Stevens (2001) corrects this: 'homeschoolers have built a lively and talkative world of their own, one that supplies parents and children alike with wide possibilities for friendships, political experience, and, sometimes, lucrative careers' (p. 4). A major reason for this is because homeschooling is a social movement (Apple, 2007; Sampson, 2005; Stevens, 2001). At the core of this social movement is 'a sense that the standardized education offered by mainstream schooling, and taught by teachers prepared in our teacher education institutions, interferes with their [homeschooling parents'] children's potential' (Apple, 2007, p. 114). Importantly, this social movement is led, for the most part, by women (Andre-Bechely, 2005; Apple, 2007; Stevens, 2001). Apple (2007) writes: 'Women are to have not a passive but a very active engagement in their family life and the world that impinges on it' (p. 119). This is not to say that homeschooling functions to 'domesticate' women. On the contrary, says Apple (2007):

> Homeschooling is outward looking . . . In many instances, homeschooling is a collective project. It requires organizational skills to coordinate connections and cooperative activities (support groups, field trips, play groups, time off from the responsibilities that mothers have, etc.) and to keep the movement itself vibrant at local and regional levels. Here too, women do the largest amount of the work. This has led to other opportunities for women as advocates and entrepreneurs . . . A considerable number of the national advocates for evangelically-based homeschooling are activist women as well. (p. 122)

The North Jersey Home School Association (NJHSA) Chorale

The NJHSA Chorale is part of a larger organization called the North Jersey Home Schoolers Association, Inc. This is a loosely-formed, Christian support group[1] that exists for the purpose of providing aid and encouragement to home school families in the northern counties of New Jersey and, in fact, to some families in New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania.[2] As explained in the association's mission statement (2010):

> The purpose of NJHSA is to provide support through disseminating information, furnishing means of contact with other homeschooling families, and sponsoring various activities and events to enhance the home school experience. We believe it is best for the family to be together whenever possible and therefore many of the events and activities sponsored by NJHSA encourage the attendance and

participation of the entire family. Exceptions to this would include age-appropriate field trips, parents' support meetings and the like.

The students who belong to the NJHSA Chorale use the term 'homeschooling' very loosely. Many of the students (depending on their ages and abilities), for example, take online or on-campus college courses, and/or belong to learning communities or Co-Ops. The idea that homeschooling means being taught by a family member and/or parents of friends is not necessarily the case. 'Homeschooling' is a somewhat variable and fluid concept.

The NJHSA Chorale did not begin as a chorus. In 1989, a group of parents decided that they wanted to create a special, celebratory event for their children through a group-learning activity that included music. Indeed, and because NJHSA students did not belong to a traditional school community, they did not have opportunities to participate in projects (e.g., high school musicals) and traditional celebrations that commemorate students' achievements. Accordingly, the project the parents chose was an end-of-the-year small, musical theatre production. These productions began and continued from 1989 until 1994.

In 1994, Beth Prins[3] founded and became director of the NJHSA Chorale. By way of background, Prins, trained as a concert pianist, received an undergraduate degree in music education, and did her student teaching in a large public school outside of Buffalo, New York. She began working in a private school in Hackensack, New Jersey, when a maternity leave position became available.[4] She stayed in the Hackensack school for seven years, working as the music teacher and choral director. She left the school to start her family.

Prins put forth an idea for the NJHSA parents' consideration. Prins explained that, while yearly productions were enjoyable and while it was lovely that the students were able to have this experience, 'the students needed something progressive,' because without any kind of systematic music education, they would not have the opportunity to pursue music in any depth, and certainly not in higher education should they choose to do so (whether it be as a music major, minor, or joining a university choir, orchestra, or band). With the parents' agreement, Prins formed a general chorus in 1994, and the Chorale was formed.

The NJHSA Chorale is an audition-based choir. At the time of this study, there were 31 students, aged 14–18; 17 female students and 14 male students. The ethnicities of the students were Caucasian, Asian, and Middle-Eastern, all from varying socio-economic backgrounds. All members of the NJHSA Chorale were also members of the larger NJHSA Concert Choir (a non-auditioned group). Some of the male singers were also members of the NJHSA Men's Ensemble. All Chorale students took classes in music reading and aural skills. Some students took piano classes. Other students formed small 'boutique' groups, for example a small group of male students initiated and formed a group that was supervised and worked on repertoire as diverse as Billy Joel songs and popular music to classical and jazz numbers. Some students took private voice lessons while others were self-taught instrumentalists (on guitar, clarinet, violin, piano, and percussion). One female student sang in the Chorale, sang in her church choir, took private voice lessons, took private violin lessons, and took private harp lessons. In other words, the students in the Chorale had varied musical interests, musical experiences, and levels of musical understanding and appreciation.

In terms of programming and repertoire, the Chorale focuses on year-long projects surveying either American or international music. This study occurred when the Chorale was studying international music, singing traditional, folk, and religious songs from six continents. This included music from France, the Philippines, Spain, Nigeria, Scotland, Native American Canadian regions, China, Israel, Brazil, Korea, and Kenya, and the Chorale learned music in

the original languages of French, Tagalog, Spanish, Mi'kmaq, Chinese, Portuguese, Hebrew, Korean, and Swahili.

Notably, each student in the Chorale must sign a statement of faith,[5] or what Prins calls 'a contract.' This statement of faith speaks not only to the students' commitment to a belief in a Christian god, but more importantly to the Chorale as a place for students who combine an ability for advanced musical study and a 'heart for ministry.' Part of it states: 'it is our intent to disciple students using "hands-on" ministry experiences which will both prepare them should they continue their music education and equip them to serve in their local churches and impact their communities.'

While some readers might view this as problematic and/or discriminatory, there are reasons that the Chorale members sign this statement of faith. As Prins explained, the statement of faith is generally based upon Christian values, and aligns closely with Protestantism, because many of the churches that the Chorale members travel to and perform in are, in fact, Protestant. Administrators of these Protestant church venues want to be assured that the singers have each signed such a statement of faith; in fact, they often want to examine the statement before allowing the Chorale to perform in their spaces. Both the administrators and Prins need to be assured that the students will be respectful and sensitive to the nature of these spaces. This is not to say that students do not or cannot hold their own individual values or beliefs. However, as long as a singer feels comfortable being and performing in these church settings, and is willing to sign the statement of faith, any student, regardless of religious values or beliefs, can join.[6]

Method

Stake (1995) defines case study research as inquiry that 'catches the complexity of a single case' (p. xi). Given this study focused on a largely-unknown phenomenon, I chose case study methodology to investigate the NJHSA Chorale because this methodology probes the nature, values, and strategies of 'a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context, when boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clear, and when it is desirable to use multiple sources of evidence' (Schwandt, 2007, p. 28). Additionally, as Mariano (2001) notes, case study not only uncovers data from a variety of sources, it also analyzes data in a variety of ways, as 'factual, interpretive, and evaluative/judgmental levels of analysis' (p. 360).

An important issue in qualitative research concerns the role of subjectivity. As Peshkin (1988) notes: 'It is no more useful for researchers to acknowledge simply that subjectivity is an invariable component of their research than it is for them to assert that their ideal is to achieve objectivity' (p. 17). In other words, qualitative research is inherently 'Deweyian' to the extent that it dissolves the dualistic, either/or assumption that researchers must choose an objective or a subjective stance.[7] Put another way, acknowledging that we are inescapably cognitive-affective beings means that research is a form of 'lived practice' that always involves varying degrees of subjectivity and objectivity. Bresler (2009) draws from Peshkin and expands the above:

> Noting and perceiving, searching for themes and motifs, sensing the various voices, and their contributions to the whole, all are prerequisite to, and in turn intensified by a connection. That process can expand one's emotional as well as cognitive repertoire. The lingering involved in prolonged engagement and immersion in both fieldwork and data analysis allows us . . . to 'move closer' in order

> to establish intellectual and emotional connection and gain a renewed perception and interpretation of the other. In this dialogistical space for the creation of meanings (a space which becomes tri-directional in the process of communication) ideas and issues are appreciated, absorbed and internalized. (p. 8)

Peshkin (1988) argues that researchers must 'systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of their research' (p. 17). By doing so, says Peshkin, we will become more keenly aware of those personal characteristics that shape, block, or transform our research processes. With these thoughts in mind, it is necessary that I acknowledge several details of my prior knowledge about and personal disposition toward my subject, 'where self and subject become joined' (p. 17).

In regard to the aforementioned argument, it is important for me to disclose that, being Jewish, I had no prior sense of what it meant to be educated in a Christian environment, or how it was possible to educate another towards/in/for 'spirituality' (a concept discussed later). Also, as a flautist, my knowledge and experience of instrumental music education outweighed my knowledge of choral music education. What I did possess, however, was an open predisposition to learn about and understand the nature and values of this group.

Data collection and analysis

My data collection methods included on-site observations of rehearsals 'in-situ,' post-site analyses of video recordings, and interviews that I conducted with 30 of the 31 Chorale singers (one student's parents declined to give permission for him to be interviewed), as well as six mothers of the student singers. The interviews of the students were carried out in small groups and on a one-to-one basis, and I met with the parents on a one-to-one basis. Additionally, I interviewed the Chorale director, Beth Prins.

The Chorale met for three hours, from 9:00am–12:00pm (but sometimes longer, as needed) every Thursday throughout the school year. My observations took place between late April and late June, 2010. I chose this time to investigate the Chorale because April marked the end of a recent competition period and a shift to new repertoire for a summer tour.[8] I observed each rehearsal (totaling 72 hours) in the Chorale's rehearsal spaces.

In even weeks, the Chorale met and rehearsed at Grace Church in Ridgewood, New Jersey; in odd weeks, the Chorale met and rehearsed at Grace Bible Church in Haledon, New Jersey. Both churches donated their space for the Chorale's meetings and rehearsals. Additionally, I observed the Chorale in a performance at Heritage Festival's National Invitational Choral Festival in New York City at St. Bartholomew's Church (11 April 2010) and at a free concert at the Bronx Household of Faith (2 May 2010). During the period of my observations, the Chorale was preparing for its first international tour, which involved 19 concerts in France over a 10-day period.

I positioned the video camera in an unobtrusive location, and left it alone to record the actions and interactions of the full Chorale. The position of the camera afforded excellent visibility and audibility. Because I was able to revisit the rehearsals via videotapes, I analyzed the rehearsals from both detailed and holistic perspectives. Although data from my immediate observations were documented at the same time the camera was recording, it was important to observe videos repeatedly. An event observed 'in situ' and in progress is rich, but fleeting; even though the camera's images were somewhat compromised by the scope of the lens, videos were extremely helpful in capturing 'thick data' (e.g., Geertz, 1973) beyond the range of my immediate

perceptions. Taken together, my immediate observations of sensory data, the videographical data, and my interview data combined to complete the data triangulation. In the semi-structured interviews, I asked both closed- and open-ended questions to enrich and clarify my assessments of why and how the teaching–learning processes and contexts affected the experiences of the Chorale members.

I transcribed my field notes within 24 hours of each observation. However, I delayed coding the field notes in order to step back for a broad perspective on potential and emergent patterns in the observations. In other words, I wanted my interpretations to 'lift data to a level of abstraction apart from the original' source of observation (Morse, 2001, p. 570). Once the coding process was complete, I reviewed all videotapes of all rehearsals and re-coded aspects of the rehearsal processes and events.

My analyses of the data revealed four themes related to the nature, values, and teaching–learning processes of the NJHSA Chorale: caring, community, cultural pluralism, and spirituality. I wish to emphasize, however, that these themes are conceptual abstractions which, in reality, overlap and interweave continuously with the 'lived' human actions and musical interactions that define the unique characteristics of the NJHSA Chorale.

Presentation of themes

Care

The literature of educational philosophy evidences an increasing focus on the 'ethics of care' (e.g., Gilligan, 1982; Martin, 1992; Noddings, 2002, 2005a). Noddings (2005a) argues that an ethic of care:

> calls on people to be carers and to develop the virtues and capacities to care, it does not regard caring solely as an individual attribute. It recognizes the part played by the cared-for. It is an ethic of relation. (p. 21)

An ethical 'caring response' permeated the relationships and interactions I witnessed in my observations of the Chorale. The students cared for and about each other, their director, the music they were learning and performing, and the world around them.

My first observation of the Chorale took place at the Heritage Festival. I listened carefully to the singers and observed them as they participated in a choral workshop.[9] I was impressed with their musical abilities, and their cohesive performance. Although I was affected, my initial reflections did not go beyond the impression that the NJHSA Chorale was yet another outstanding 'high school' chorus. It wasn't until I began observing rehearsals that I was struck by something unique. Upon entering the rehearsal space, each student hugged every other student s/he encountered. At first, I simply assumed that some were inclined to be friendlier than others. I discovered quickly, however, that this occurred every time and with every Chorale member. Every student received and embraced each and every member of the group. Prins explained:

> That's how these kids greet each other. They come, they hug each other. And it's safe for them to do that here. It's wonderful that they feel they *can* do this. They are really genuine, and they reach out to each other affectionately . . . To the extent that we've created this community together, I've achieved a major aim . . . in this we've accomplished something wonderful together. Here, they are free from ridicule. We nurture this community of caring.

The students also reflected on their greetings. Some called it a 'ritual,' some said, 'that's just something we do.' Peter,[10] a 17-year-old, said, 'We belong, not only to our close friends in the group, but to each other. Even if we do not spend time with each other outside the group, when we come together we know that we care.' Michael, a 16-year-old, elaborated: 'We care about each other . . . we want each other to feel good. We love each other. It's that simple.'

The theme of caring did not exhibit itself through greetings alone. Daniel, another 16-year-old, remarked: 'Because we are a Christian homeschooling group, we have a central value of helping people. So one of our main goals is to reach out to people – to people who feel alone, to people who are down.'

At every rehearsal, each of which was packed with non-stop musical activities, Prins and some of the students' mothers hosted 'snack breaks.' Prins and the mothers gave the students brief rests to 'decompress' from intense 'collegiate level' rehearsing, and to achieve another goal. Prins stated:

> we give them a snack break . . . this is so important because they visit a little, and someone will be in charge of bringing some 'passage,' and it doesn't have to be from the Bible, it can be from anything: a book, something they heard that is inspirational . . . something to challenge the students' minds and hearts . . . I do not go into their homes, I do not see them every day, this is a way to take 'the pulse' of the students, to *hear* those that are really hurting, which kids are in tough situations . . . when I uncover these issues, I am less likely to take things for granted, to say to them, 'What's the matter with you? Why can't you focus? Why can't you pull yourself together?' . . . For some, this is a lifeline.

Erika, a 15-year-old, said: 'Mrs. Prins not only brings out the best in us as a choir, she also brings out our goodness as people.' Because the Chorale – including the director, parents, and students – framed and valued themselves as a Christian group, they felt very strongly about using music to heal and help each other and those around them. As a community, they deliberately sang for a wide cross-section of people and groups and in pursuit of several shared aims – personal, spiritual, and ethical. Prins stated:

> My role is to help set the students' musical foundation, giving them a love and an idea of how music can be used, but not only this. When we travel, I bring them into nursing homes, retirement homes, special needs schools . . . homeless shelters . . . to populations where they can use their music – not necessarily for the sake of performance, but to see how they can put music to work in everyday life and give others another voice for themselves.

Equally important to caring about each other and the world around them, members of the Chorale also cared deeply about the music they learned and performed. Sara, a 15-year-old, said: 'Socially, and musically, we need to rely on each other. We not only have to care about each other socially, we need to take care of each other musically.' Christine, a 16-year-old, elaborated:

> This group is different from any music group I've ever been in. I mean when you go to a music college . . . it's so competitive and everyone hates everyone else because each person wants to be at the top . . . it's really nice to be in a group where everyone wants to build each other up . . . We want to use our voices to sound good as a group. We tell each other that we're all good, and we can do it, and when we put ourselves together, we can really do it.

Community

Closely connected to the theme of caring is the theme of community. Noddings (2002, 2005) and hooks (2000) argue that these two ethics are inseparable. However, the members of the Chorale, including Prins, spoke about it and embodied the theme of community as if it were an additional value of their work together. To them, 'community' is somewhat distinct from caring. Community, to this group, is when people come together with a common goal for a common 'good.' Community is a place to acquire friends. For the Chorale, you can care about someone or something, but this does not necessarily imply or necessitate the existence of a community such as theirs. For this Chorale, caring is embedded in community, but community is not necessarily embedded in caring. As Jason, a 14-year-old, said:

> I know it sounds cheesy, but it's a big family . . . I mean, sure, there are some people who get on my nerves, especially after having to travel places with them for like a week, but we are a family. And I love that.

Sara amplified: 'Because we're homeschooled, we don't necessarily have an easy time making friends . . . this group is a way to make friends. The Chorale is a good place with good people. It's a home away from home.' Jonathan, a 17-year-old, clarified further:

> Teamwork. Being together for an entire day each week, and being together on trips and tours, I think there's a real lesson . . . we learn how much we need each other. And there were people that I hardly talked to for the first three quarters of this year, but then we go on tour and I realize not only how cool they are, but how important they are.

For these students, interpersonal support was extremely important. Their concept and enactment of 'community' seemed to be a 'collective' priority. Individual members of the Chorale were first and foremost interested in the Chorale as a welcoming, sympathetic, and caring community. As such, the Chorale's context enabled them to reflect on their individual and collective sense of self-worth. And this sense of self-worth helped them to contribute more of themselves to the group community as a whole. As Janice, a 16-year-old, said: 'It doesn't really matter how good the individual members of the group are. Some of us are not really fine individual singers. But as a group, we are wonderful.' Jonathan offered his view on music making as enacting and embodying the essence of community as lived and felt: 'There's a real sense of community in the group, even musically. When we breathe, we need to do so as a community.'

Prins also encouraged a sense of musical community by engaging Chorale members as accompanists on various instruments. She felt that varied experiences allowed students to individualize themselves while bonding as a social group and more versatile ensemble. Again, however, a central value of their choral community was to prepare for lifelong musical participation and caring in students' future communities. Prins explained:

> I invite student accompanists. For some of them, this is a stretch, but I want to give them that experience . . . I feel confident that they can walk into a nursing home and play and sing with people . . . Even though it might be more polished if I accompanied them . . . the kids in the choir become more responsible, they take it very seriously. The students also introduce new pieces to the Chorale as we begin learning them. I assign a student a specific piece and s/he needs to prepare an introduction for the group.

This multidimensional approach would not be possible without the assistance and support of dedicated parents. At any given rehearsal, parents engaged in many supporting roles: collecting permission slips for trips, arranging fundraisers, organizing music, and taking small groups of students aside to coach musical and movement details. Indeed, some parents participated in musical problem solving. At one rehearsal in April, Prins distributed a new piece that the Chorale would showcase in France. To that point in the year, the chorus had yet to learn a French song. Hence, one mother who had been a French teacher offered to teach the Chorale French pronunciation and meaning of the text to 'Oh! Jesus, mon Sauveur,' by Darele Zschech. As Ashley, a 16-year-old female, remarked: 'The parents are the glue that holds us together.'

Cultural pluralism

The third theme is directly related to caring and community. To the same degree the Chorale understood the values of caring and community, they 'practised' these values in the ways they embraced each other, and their music. Through their repertoire, they came to recognize, understand, and subsequently honour others. Bowman (2007) states the point eloquently: 'How diverse and pluralistic music education is, or can be, is a direct function of the diversity and pluralism of our membership, our musical practices, and their attendant curricula' (p. 119).

Before continuing, the theme of cultural pluralism requires some elaboration. According to Deveaux (2000), cultural pluralism involves respect and recognition of artifacts from culturally-diverse groups and a moral commitment to honor diversity in its myriad customs, traditions, collective memories, and so forth (p. 7). As many grassroots movements demonstrate, cultural pluralism is embedded in all forms of art-making and meaning-making, including (for example) folk music, civil rights music, religious music, or 'national musics,' whether these are racially, politically, socio-economically, or ideologically motivated.

Previously noted, I began this study during the year the Chorale explored international music. Varied concepts and practices of cultural pluralism emerged from the Chorale's work on music from six continents, many of which were songs of 'worship': worship of god, worship of the environment, worship of love, worship and care for 'the Other,' and respect for distinct cultural traditions. Prins said:

> Usually, I go through many, many titles . . . Generally, I'm looking for something that's very authentic . . . so a listener will be able to close his/her eyes and, without seeing the title, grasp where the music is from. Then, I try to acquire some indigenous instruments . . . to make the music as authentic as possible. The Chinese piece has an erhu and bamboo flute. Not that our students are going to master these instruments, but I want these authentic sounds . . . I find that student audiences are intrigued by pieces that honor and embody a given culture's music. I also look for something unusual, something that will appeal to the singers, and expand their musical and empathetic horizons . . . They are high-schoolers, and they need to experience as many various worlds of music as possible. Diversity! Most of them listen to only one kind of music, so this is important for them.

Prins continuously sought opportunities for musical-cultural pluralism:

> We [students and parents] invite people whose native cultures match the music we are working on . . . I love when they talk about their own personal journeys, what brought them to the United States, sometimes how they met their spouses or whatever. And sometimes they'll talk about the political

> aspects of their cultures. We don't explore ethnicity the way many do – we don't, say, eat food from a country. No. The students research about and wear traditional clothing from the various countries, and they get that together themselves.
>
> The Chinese song we are doing is sung by an underground church which is persecuted in China. China accepted some state churches that the government has control over. However, there are other churches that don't fall under government control . . . the government will imprison anyone found to be worshipping in such a church. So, to see video taken of these people meeting in adverse conditions, and to see them singing such songs – this song that we are singing – is very meaningful. We met a Chinese lady from China who has relatives who are still in China. She explained this kind of life to the students. We are primarily a musical group . . . but we explore as much as we can.

In fact, and because the group is somewhat diverse, members of the Chorale assist each other. Justin, a Chinese-American student, spoke to the Chorale to help his friends grasp the way it feels to be a Chinese-American, to have relatives in China, and how it feels to be singing a Chinese song. And he helped the group pronounce Chinese words with the proper inflection. Jason, a 17-year-old, elaborated:

> Some of the languages are easier than others . . . I find the Asian songs difficult. But the way Mrs. Prins does it, I now have a lot of respect for the different cultures. Because it's not like we are told, 'Today we're going to sing this Asian song.' She really tries her best to get us into these songs. Like this one African song, she made sure that all the motions we did were actually like the motions African people use when they sing. And because of this, I feel like she has a lot of respect for the other cultures. And she brings people in to meet us who are from those cultures.

Amy, a 15-year-old, continued:

> Yes, this is a big thing. She brings people in, not just to get the pronunciation down, or to translate the song for us. I mean they do this, too. But to also help us understand and feel what we are singing about and what these songs mean in those cultures.

Jonathan said:

> Learning this music is like being in a social studies class. We learn about different world cultures, and when you listen to their music you learn about who these people were. I mean, why do they sing songs in a specific way? And when you experience someone else's music, you learn a little bit about who they are as people and that's really neat.

Not all the students agreed completely. Kevin did not think he gained insight into world cultures from learning the scores alone:

> Learning a song from another nation does not necessarily give you insight into that culture's world. You have to do some digging, and uncover the meaning of that specific song, the language of that song, the tradition of that song. And this takes work. I sometimes can do this work. But other times, I don't have the time. So, no, just because I sing a French song, does not mean I know what it means to be French.

Erika disagreed: 'When you sing someone's songs, you learn what those people were feeling. This gives you a really good education into who these people were at the time when they wrote

or sang the songs.' Sara continued, interrupting Erika: 'We've performed in at least 12 different languages since I joined the Chorale and this is so much fun. You really get a cool experience when you see life from the side of other people through singing their songs.'

Spirituality

Spirituality is a major concern for scholars in education (e.g., Carr, 2003; Noddings, 2005a, 2005b) and music education (e.g., Richmond, 1999; Tillman, 2007; Yob, 1995). This informed my research stance intellectually, practically, and emotionally. That is, because I am not Christian, and because I've never attended a Christian church service, I was uncertain about what to expect when I arrived at St. Bartholomew's Church to hear the Chorale. The Chorale approached the stage to sing *The Creation*, by Willy Richter.[11] While sitting in the pew my attention was drawn to the beauty of the stained glass windows, the mosaics, and the marble columns adorning this huge Gothic structure. And as I became settled in this 'alien situation,' I felt more at home despite the fact that this space was not 'mine' but 'other,' and that the choir was religiously 'foreign.' I was drawn to this environment. For me, it was the combined effect of the music's beauty, the students' exquisite performance, and the architectural brilliance of the church. Another factor was the care and attention Prins gave her students as she conducted them, and as she alertly and emotionally watched master choral directors of the Heritage Festival work with her students. In short, what happened to me personally in these moments was something akin to Buber's (1970) 'I–Thou' relationship, which is not simply a sense of religious affiliation. It occurs when there is a shared 'now' between two 'living' entities, whether person-to-person, person-to-nature, person-to-god, person-to-music-made by and for others, and so forth. In such encounters, says Buber, each finds 'the other,' not as an object or a thing; in 'I–thou' encounters, interactions are transformed in communion where each enters the subjectivity of the other.

The Chorale learned informally and formally that music has many values and is created for a variety of purposes, as explained also in the Christian Bible. As the Chorale's statement of faith explains, music is utilized:

> to celebrate important events (Ezra 2:65, Nehemiah 12:27), for worship (Psalm 33:3), for devotion (Psalm 27), for comfort (Job 35:10), for encouragement (Ephesians 5:19), in times of judgement (Isaiah 16:10, Lamentations 5:14, Ezekiel 26:13, Revelations 18:22), in times of joy (Exodus 15:21), in times of sorrow (II Chronicles 35:25).

Prins explained:

> You'll see that some students will lead a devotional session. They will choose a bible passage. They will pray together. I want them to be free to do that. I want all the students in this group to be sensitive in the churches and that they are comfortable meeting together and sharing needs. All this is part of what bonds them together, because they meet only once per week . . . they can share each others' burdens, and they know that those thoughts and feelings do not leave this space. They can share if their families are having problems. They have someone to talk to, to pray with. In this sense, it really is a community.

Sara added:

> I think we all hope that our faith can be seen in our actions. We can't only say we believe something,

> we need to show, through our actions, that we care about each other, and we care about the world.

Jonathan continued: 'I really learn, from being in this group, to appreciate everyone and everyone's gifts. I get a lot of encouragement, not just musical encouragement, but encouragement in my work with God for others. This group gives me that.' Steven said:

> Having a statement of faith that everyone signs means we share similar values. We all have similar beliefs. This helps you know each other better and more automatically. I mean, everyone has different views on things, and that's cool, but everyone has basically the same core values.

Prins viewed the statement of faith as a tool to encourage goodness and care of the self and care of others:

> If they do something that is not appropriate (for example swearing or promiscuous behaviour), or if they are struggling with something, this statement of faith gives me an avenue to say something like, 'what you're doing doesn't really line up. Can we talk about it?'. We want this to be an oasis, not nirvana; we want it to be as healthy an environment as possible, a place where everyone is free to express themselves, but there are limitations to 'expression.'

As Noddings (2005a) suggests, 'spirit and body are joined, and the quest for grace is an attempt to integrate the self' (p. 82).

Additionally, and while the music the Chorale explored concerned Christian devotion and worship, Peter reflected on the broader spiritual dimension of the arts:

> The arts in general, and for me, music, has an embedded 'soul.' When you express yourself through music, you are sharing yourself, your soul, with another. This is spiritual. This is what makes what we do different from other group activities like a soccer team, or a chess club. And when you sing about something you believe in, no matter what that belief is, it makes what you do that much more personal and that much more moving both for yourself and others.

Conclusion

Case study research focuses on the specific – the unique case; case studies cannot draw general conclusions or contribute general perspectives on such issues as the aims and values of music education. That said, I suggest that the values identified in the case of the NJHSA Chorale are consistent with key themes in the current literature of educational philosophy. That is, and unbeknownst to the NJHSA Chorale students and their director, the emergent themes of this study echo central topics of concern in the writings of several eminent scholars, including Apple (2000; 2001), Freire (1970), Gilligan (1982), hooks (2000), Martin (1992), and Noddings (2002; 2005a).

Of course, one might argue that critical pedagogues (e.g., Freire, 1970), who emphasize the educational priorities of humanity and respect, would deem the theistic assumptions and moralistic attitudes of the Chorale 'oppressive.' If so, then such an interpretation of this group's nature and values would be simplistic. For, as John Dewey writes in *The School and Society* (1902), 'What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all its children' (p. 3). The parents involved in the NJHSA Chorale chose to have their children educated this way. Is this an act of 'oppression'? Apple (2007) does not accept this interpretation:

> Protecting and educating one's children, caring for the intimate and increasingly fragile bonds of community and family life, worries about personal safety, and all of this in an exploitative and often disrespectful society – these themes are not only the province of the Right and should not be only the province of women. (p. 121)

Indeed, and moreover, caring, community, cultural pluralism, and spirituality (as explored here) are ways of 'being in relation with others.' Despite the fact that some critics may view much of the Chorale's education as 'purely religious,' the students of the Chorale care for others and are cared for. To echo Noddings (2005a), such caring 'defines genuine education' (p. xiii).

In addition, I would argue that the NJHSA Chorale further fosters and embodies the thinking of Dewey. For in Dewey's pragmatic view, art should be a fundamental part of everyday social life, not only for the maintenance and sustenance of authentic living, but as a way of coming to understand the self and 'the Other.' According to Dewey (1934), active participation in art-making that is connected to life, and enjoyed in/with a community, is a cornerstone of collective living and fellowship:

> The remaking of the material of experience in the act of expression is not an isolated event confined to the artist and to a person here and there who happens to enjoy the work. In the degree in which art exercises its office, it is also a remaking of the experience of the community in the direction of greater order and unity. (p. 81)

Dewey's words return us to the values of the NJHSA Chorale and the greater charge of community music. Two of the main aims of community music are: (1) life-long learning in/through music; and (2) music making in/for the well-being of the community. Recall that Prins worked to create a positive environment of expectations, challenges, and support systems that would contribute to the students' achievements of these aims. As Prins said: 'I want the students to know that even if they do not pursue music as a career, they can have music and use music for themselves and others. And they can do so for their whole lives.'

On the last day of my observations, I bid the Chorale farewell. They were departing for France the next day. In addition to their scheduled concerts for special-needs schools, private boarding schools, juvenile detention centres, homeless shelters, and two charity concerts (to raise money for the victims of the recent earthquake in Haiti), the Chorale was also scheduled to sing at the Luxembourg Gardens and the Cathedral at Notre Dame. In the eyes of this group, their voices and their music were devoted to civic 'good,' and their musical voices embodied their personal and collective sense of mutual care, community, cultural pluralism, and spirituality. As Jonathan said: 'We sing together; we sing for others. I love the complete wholeness of the experience.'

Notes

1. As stipulated in the website: 'Membership in NJHSA is open to all families who fulfill the requirements for membership, regardless of religious beliefs' (https://www.homeschool-life.com/sysfiles/member/index_public.cfm?memberid=709). However, the support group 'espouses' creationism.
2. Because the NJHSA has members from four states (New Jersey, New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania), travel to Chorale rehearsals and functions is specific for each Chorale member. Some students travel a relatively short distance to attend rehearsals, while others travel a few hours to attend.
3. Beth Prins is identified in this research with her permission.
4. Prins did not think she would continue on as a music teacher in the Hackensack, New Jersey school, as she was pursuing piano competitions at the time. The music programme she worked for needed

much attention, and Prins felt a sense of responsibility to assist these students in getting the best music education possible. With that in mind, and leaving piano competitions behind her, she knew she was in need of further education. Because of this, she did her graduate work at the Westminster Choir College.

5. The 'Statement of Faith' was written by Prins. For students who were uncomfortable signing this statement of faith, Prins welcomed them into the Concert Choir, or recommended them to other performing group opportunities.
6. This confirms Stevens (2001) research. Stevens writes:

   > Some families participate in expressly 'Christian' homeschool groups. These often include the word *Christian* in their names and provide newcomers with a *statement of faith* that stipulates core religious tenets of conservative Protestant Christianity. Some of these organizations make formal agreement with such statements a requisite of membership or of office-holding. Others participate in explicitly nonsectarian homeschool support groups. These purvey *nondiscrimination* or *inclusion* statements that formally welcome members regardless of religious preference or homeschooling philosophy. (p. 18, italics in original)

7. John Dewey was against many forms of dualism (see, e.g., Dewey, 1917).
8. The repertoire for the tour included: *Mi'Kmaq Honour Song* by Lydia Adams; *A Red, Red Rose* by James Mulholland; *Flanders Fields* by Paul A. Aitken; *Betelehemu* arranged by Wendell Whalum; *Wana Baraka* arranged by Shawn Kirchner; *L'Dor Vador* by Meir Finkelstein; *Hey Harmonika/Mayim Mayim* arranged by Joshua Jacobson; *Psalm 150* Chinese Folk Melody; Paruparong Bukid by George Hernandez; *Amparo* arranged by Amanda Swift; *Oh! Jesus, mon Sauveur* by Darlene Zschech; *Esto les digo* by Kinley Lange.
9. The Chorale engaged in a workshop with Anton Armstrong and Z. Randall Stroope.
10. All students' names are pseudonyms to maintain students' anonymity.
11. The remainder of the programme was as follows: *In Ressurectione* by Jakob Handl, *O Magnum Mysterium* by Morten Lauridsen, and *I'm Gonna Sing 'til the Spirit Moves in my Heart* by Moses Hogan.

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