REVEALING OUR COMMONESSENCE:
A COLLABORATIVE SELF-STUDY INVOLVING
CHORAL MUSIC EDUCATORS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Music Education
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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand how five choral music educators’ life experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, and understandings surrounding the formation of their musical selves have come to shape their professional practice. A secondary purpose of this research was to examine institutional context and governing ideologies of the choral music discipline. The study involved five choral music educators—including the researcher—of various ages, genders, and cultural backgrounds from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

This research is grounded in what Beattie (1995) terms the dialectical and collaborative nature of narrative inquiry, but also looks to reflexive inquiry and life history methodologies (Cole & Knowles, 2000), as well as the practice of collective biography (Davies & Gannon, 2006) to shape its methodological framework. As such, autobiographical forms of self-study research are reconceptualized as collaborative self-study. Data collection methods included journal writing, personal in-depth interviews, and participant observation. In particular, regular focus group sessions, which included peer interviewing, played a central role throughout the research process. This forum allowed participants to share their musical life histories and
interrogate each others’ narratives, thereby triggering musical memories and exposing the interconnectivity of musical pasts to current professional practice.

Data is re-presented in rich narratives which trace the path of each participant’s musical life history in interaction with theory and relevant literature. Numerous themes, sub-themes, tensions, and epiphanal episodes (Denzin, 1994) are illuminated. Moreover, connections between participants’ experiences and resultant ways of knowing are exposed, and we are confronted with “the unexpectedness of universality” (Hofstadter, 2007, p. 242). Thus, our commonessence is revealed. Participant chapters are followed by a postlude featuring the researcher’s personal narratives, an examination of researcher voice, and questions regarding the practice of choral music education that have surfaced through reflexive analysis of the data. This research strives to be a model for personal professional development among choral music educators, and provides a template for future purposeful discussion in the choral discipline.
Acknowledgments

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ........................................................................................................... ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ......................................................................................... iv

## PART I

**PROLOGUE**

**BUTTERFLIES IN MY STOMACH, NO VOICE FROM MY THROAT:**

**WHO AM I AS RESEARCHER? WHO WAS I AS RESEARCHER?**

The Journey Begins............................................................................................... 1

**INTRODUCTION: TESTING THE WATERS OF REFLECTION**

Coming to Understand the Potential for Personal History Self-Study.................. 6
Symphonic Form: Structure and Struggle.............................................................. 9
Exposition............................................................................................................. 11
   An Opening Theme......................................................................................... 12
Retrospection and Revelation............................................................................. 14
Identity and the Space Between......................................................................... 16
   Second Theme: Modulating........................................................................... 16
Learning to Listening............................................................................................ 19
Toward Transformation......................................................................................... 21
   A Final Theme: Letting Go and Learning......................................................... 22
Coda as Commencement: A Tale of Transformation........................................... 24

**CHAPTER ONE: EXPLORING NEW TERRAIN**

Shaping a Methodology......................................................................................... 26
   Study Purpose and Research Question............................................................ 27
   At the Crossroads: Collaborative Self-Study....................................................... 29
The Tourist Looks to a Guide: Principles of the Qualitative Research Paradigm...... 30
Narrative Research in Education........................................................................... 33
Narrative Research in Music Education............................................................... 35
Life History, Reflexive Inquiry, Collaborative Inquiry......................................... 37
Collective Biography............................................................................................ 40
Embracing Interaction at the Intersection: Revisioning Self-Study ........................................42
Possibility and Potential: Collaborative Self-Study .............................................................43

CHAPTER TWO: “YOU ARE HERE ”
Construct Clarification, Discussion of Related Literature, Significance ...............................46
Qualitative Research in Choral Music Education ......................................................................48
Professional Development .......................................................................................................50
Reflective Practice in Music Education ....................................................................................51
Personal Practical Knowledge ....................................................................................................53
Music Educator Identity ...........................................................................................................54

CHAPTER THREE: EXPLORING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF THE SELF
“Identity” to “Self”: A Quest for Common Essence .................................................................58
Overlooking My “Self” ..............................................................................................................60
A Crazy Little Thing Called Self ..............................................................................................64
The Self throughout Antiquity: Changing yet Remaining “The Same” ....................................65
Descartes and the Dawning of Empiricism ..............................................................................67
The Phenomenological School of Thought .............................................................................69
Poststructuralism: Power and Resistance, Gendered and Corporeal Selves .........................69
The Contemporary Identity Crisis .............................................................................................71
Sociology, Social Psychology, and the Interacting Self ............................................................73
The Psychological Self .............................................................................................................75
Robert Jay Lifton and the Protean Self .....................................................................................77
The Contribution of Complexity ...............................................................................................78
Neurological Ways of Knowing ...............................................................................................80
The Synaptic Self ......................................................................................................................82
Revealing our Commonessence through Strange Loops and Intimate Connectedness ..........85
Music Education and the Brain ...............................................................................................87
Music Education and the Synaptic Self: A Synaptic Synergy ................................................89
In Summary ............................................................................................................................91

CHAPTER FOUR: READY FOR TAKE OFF
Research Design .......................................................................................................................93
Searching Out “Composers”: Co-Researcher Recruitment .......................................................93
Sketching a Collaborative Composition: Data Collection Methods .......................................98
Journals ..................................................................................................................................100
PART II

OVERVIEW ......................................................................................................................... 132

CHAPTER FIVE: HENRY ........................................................................................................ 136

Who Is Henry? How Do I Relate to Him as Researcher? .................................................. 138
Henry’s Soul-Soil ............................................................................................................... 140
Musical Construction of a Soul: Congregation and Connection .................................. 144
Henry’s Hymnbol .............................................................................................................. 153
Who Lives Inside Henry Engbrecht? ............................................................................... 154
The Shoulder Tappers .................................................................................................... 158
“I’m Afraid” .................................................................................................................... 164
Uncovering the Sensational in the Seemingly Un-Sensational ...................................... 169
A Final Thought on Relationships .................................................................................. 171
## CHAPTER FIVE POSTLUDE

“To Learn and Serve”

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## CHAPTER SIX: SONYA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is Sonya? How Do I Relate to Her as Researcher?</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonya and Her “Family”</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Because they “really cared”</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonya on the Step</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Girl on the Steps</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family as Fare to Cross the Border</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension and the Space Between</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Epiphany</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tale of Princess Chocolate</td>
<td>202</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering the Profession: Shaping up to be a “Fine Music Teacher”</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonya’s Soul-Uniqueness</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Final Thought on Family</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

## CHAPTER SIX POSTLUDE

Figuring out what we’re Really Teaching.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN: ELROY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is Elroy? How Do I Relate to Him as Researcher?</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digging in the Soul-Soil of Elroy</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mrs. Reimer’s Soul-Shard</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpreting our Libretto</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leaving the Musician-ship to Sail the Leader-ship</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echoes of a Libretto Lived in “List C”</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life: The Grand Rehearsal</td>
<td>244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Essential Element</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

## CHAPTER SEVEN POSTLUDE

Learning as a Researcher.

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PROLOGUE

BUTTERFLIES IN MY STOMACH, NO VOICE FROM MY THROAT:
WHO AM I AS RESEARCHER? WHO WAS I AS RESEARCHER?

Travellers who accept that their thesis journey emanates from their own deep values and beliefs experience many benefits.


The Journey Begins

The Thursday Group was a band of experienced professionals in education who, for fifteen years, gathered on Thursdays at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) in Toronto with the purpose of discussing issues surrounding the teaching-learning process. Their common goal of demystifying the doctoral process resulted in the publication of The Doctoral Thesis Journey (1994). This book came to me as a Christmas gift from my roommate, also a doctoral student, as I began work on my own doctoral thesis; it was a most welcome and comforting read filled with many ideas that resonated strongly with me. As many others in the field, the Thursday Group likens the process of completing a dissertation to a journey in which the researcher is viewed as a traveller or tourist on a winding road toward transformation (1994, p. viii). Through discussions continually rooted in their own direct experience, the writings of these professionals, and in some cases doctoral candidates, reveal the inextricable connection between the researcher and the research, uncovering just how much they are “a part of the phenomenon they seek to understand” and asserting that, “they must include themselves in the account of the inquiry” (Kelly, 1955, as cited in The Thursday Group, 1994, p. 161). It becomes clear from their writing that the dissertation journey itself should be viewed as an experience for both the writer/researcher and reader. With such principles in mind, this dissertation aims to be just that; a
documenting of the experience of writing a doctoral thesis, as well as an experience of sorts for
the reader. In detailing a journey which winds its way through the landscape of the musical lives
of five choral music educators, the connections and collaboration that fueled our journeys of self-
discovery are exposed and a rich tapestry of related experiences, both scholarly and personal in
nature, are revealed. A tale of my transformation as researcher and choral music educator
throughout the research process, at first a fata morgana on the horizon, comes uniquely into
focus. And so, with such inspiration as a point of departure, allow me to introduce myself. Or
perhaps, more accurately, allow me to introduce a tourist-self I was earlier on in the
conceptualization of this research, at the beginning of my travels.

The musings which follow were written during the development of my doctoral thesis
proposal. They reveal a student struggling in the midst of a confrontation with her former
assumptions regarding the choral music discipline and the emergence of new understandings
surrounding knowledge construction in light of taking new university courses and sampling a
variety of philosophical flavours. This introduction specifically details how I first came to
undertake this study; a tourist at the onset of a journey of transformation. This journey in its
entirety exposes a musical self and choral music educator “under construction,” and introduces a
researcher negotiating the ever meandering path that is self-study research.

In order to make music joyfully and authentically with others, to truly teach others, we
must first seek to understand and then to celebrate the voice that sings in the musical life
stories that we bring to our classrooms. (Richardson, 2006, p. 17)

I think I had lost my voice. Ironically, coming to Toronto and going back to school to complete a
Masters of Music in Music Education after so many years of being an authority in the choral
field in my home province of Manitoba silenced me. Suddenly, I was faced with alien
experiences: an exchange of music for reading, an abandonment of singing for philosophizing, a turn from practice toward theory. All these shifts were foreign to me. No questions came to me about my experiences other than the quick introduction voiced in the first class of a course where I would hastily decide what identity I would wear, and how I would like to, or need to, have the others in the class perceive me. And so I sat in silence, assuming this was the way graduate work in music education went about, assuming this was what efficient learning looked like.

And then, at the onset of my doctoral coursework, came two classes of conversation, two classes of discussion, accompanied by some specific requests: “Bring in things that mean something to you,” “Write about your feelings and the impact of the arts in your life,” “Talk with others about your experiences and theirs’,” “Engage in a self-study,” “Ask yourself, ‘Who am I as a researcher?’”

You’d think I’d be elated that my opinion was genuinely being asked, that my experiences were genuinely being acknowledged. I was confused. You’d think I’d be excited to tell my stories, to release my song unto new ears. I was tentative and suspicious. You see, I am a choral music educator and quite frankly, I wasn’t sure we do this sort of thing. Unless I’m mistaken, there’s a system we follow. There are well established music methods and strategies we have come to embrace dearly (Sataloff & Smith, 2005). There are unspoken rules embedded in our pleasantly packaged pedagogies, acknowledged performance practices, and traditional approaches; our “tried and true.” Are we not, for the most part, content in our current understandings of research and the comfortable clarity found within the quantitative paradigm? Certainly coming to graduate school I was hoping to return with many tools in my arsenal of tricks to make choirs sound better. In viewing the scope of choral research it becomes readily apparent that we like to see comparative numbers, results graphed, theories set forth for debate, better ways of rehearsing, compositional styles explained; the presentation of neat and tidy knowledge for
quick application so we may groom our products for elite performance, for competition. This knowledge aids in our presentation of a beautiful package, close as possible to perfection and ripe for critique and the award of standing. And thus, the conductor/educator is armed with a mastery of skill which must be consistently evident so that the one correct interpretation, that is, the conductor’s interpretation, retains the authority: “Ambiguity and equivocation can be seen as problems of inadequate communicative gestures and role prescriptions” (Faulkner as cited in Lamb, 1996, p. 128).

It appears then, that there is no choice but to present oneself as a master of one skill, a leader to be followed since, as Lamb (1996) asserts, “the demand for authority and perfect performance have become intrinsic to the discipline of music, making ambiguity and inadequacy a symptom of poor musicianship” (p. 128). Thus ambiguity, the messiness and muddiness which accompany multiple ways of knowing, have been generally avoided in the music discipline until fairly recently (Turcott, 2003).

Such a trend is reflected in choral music education and music education research in general (Turcott, 2003). Methodological approaches to design and analysis which favour positivist principles have been employed most often, and as such the question of meaning is rarely addressed save for battle cries of advocacy. Seldom do we ask, “Why do we want to know?” Never do we ask, “How do we want to know?” (Gamelin, 2002). The current research conditions in higher education have not yet allowed us full passage to such waters (Jorgensen, 2003; Poklington & Tupper, 2002). As conductors and musicians first, and educators second (Bouij, 1998; Dolloff, 1999; Roberts, 1991) we feel we simply don’t have the time to formally reflect (Butke, 2003). We have a package to present. And second of all, if we began to tinker with our system, if we began to fully embrace the qualitative research paradigm we would end up with a very different package and then where would we be?
We would be exactly where I have begun to realize I, as a researcher in choral music education, would like to go. We would be smack dab in the middle of a messy, muddy place, teeming with a complexity of knowledge to sort through, of experiences to evaluate, and to understand. We’d be at the place of epiphany, the tipping point, poised to make new meaning as we make sense of the old, poised to tell a narrative, a life story with the power to enchant, comfort, disturb, excite, interrogate, reframe, revise, and regenerate. Clarke (1988) asks, “Do teachers of teachers have the courage to think aloud as they themselves wrestle with troubling dilemmas ... and the human mistakes that even experienced teacher educators make from time to time?” (as cited in Loughran, 2004, p.154). Well, I hope we have the courage to go there.

I hope I have the courage to go there.

Paulo Freire suggests education and teacher education is “not simply about acquiring ‘skills’ but also about maintaining a critical, reflective, politically engaged consciousness (Dimitriadis & Kambeleris, 2006, p. 122). Thus, a return to Freire’s concept of “praxis” must prevail. And so I have decided to drum up my courage, summon my powers of reflection, and lead by example. I will step off the podium, set aside my “skills,” and wade into muddy waters by asking myself “Who am I as researcher?” which, although I feel the butterflies in my stomach gathering already, admittedly involves asking the more daunting questions “Who am I as conductor and educator?” and “What identity is mine and how has it come to be formed?”

(Doctoral Dissertation Proposal, 2009)
INTRODUCTION
TESTING THE WATERS OF REFLECTION

Coming to Understand the Potential of Personal History Self-Study

Although the meandering journey of the doctoral process may put one in the position of feeling they are battling rapids, or even travelling upstream, often calmer waters lie ahead. In this chapter, I recall a researcher “testing the waters” of identity-oriented self study and life history approaches to inquiry. This is a researcher excited about possibilities, but still feeling her way around new methodological territory. I come to understand the potential for these methodologies and reveal my epistemological and ontological positioning, thus laying the initial groundwork for my theoretical foundation. Weaving pivotal narratives of my personal musical life story into descriptions of identity-oriented self-study research, I “remember myself,” as Freema Elbaz-Luwisch (2005) encourages narratives researchers to do. Thus, after treading the waters for a time, I ground my work in my own personal experiences as the Thursday Group (1994) suggested, and attempt to develop a critical perspective on personal storytelling. These stories bring to the surface pivotal life experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, and understandings germane to the formation of my musical self; narratives that have come to shape my professional practice. They reveal many of my formative assumptions as a researcher. As such, my initial and continually developing perspectives on research are exposed, the detailing of which is at the heart of qualitative research (Eisner, 1998; Phillips, 2008).

* * * * * * * *

After teaching at all levels of the public school system, conducting community choirs of varying ages, working as an arts administrator, and teaching a course at the university level in Winnipeg,
Manitoba, I entered graduate school in Ontario with the simple goal of expanding my knowledge in preparation for a more permanent teaching position at the post secondary level. In a dizzying—and at times I admit, desperate—search for “the right methodology” for my as yet completely undefined research topic, I found myself enthralled with whatever I was reading at the time. Ethnography looked good, as choral music education is a culture begging further exploration, phenomenology looked extremely good, as questions rooted in a focus on meaning and our “passionate involvement with whatever is being experienced” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 57) resonated with me. Naturally, as a classically trained singer, vocal coach, and conductor, I’m all about resonance.

I recognized in myself a passion directed toward my students, a desire to put them first and foremost in my continued teaching at the post-secondary level. This desire is something I naturally expected to follow me into my research. To explore the qualities and core themes, to consider possible meanings and arrive at “an understanding of the essences” of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 63) was something that deeply interested me. Additionally, as an observer of detail and a naturally critical and divergent thinker, I was also eager to apply some of the recently introduced theoretical lenses to my inquiries: feminism, critical theory, and poststructuralism. I wasn’t sure how far I wanted to go with these applications, but knew I wanted to dig a little deeper and uncover what lay beyond the traditions I had, since my childhood, been immersed in. I was concerned, however, that other conductors and music educators might not want to hear these voices. A paradox presented itself—a bit of a dilemma to be exact.

Then, the unexpected happened. A request came in one of my “qualitative research in education” classes for, oh no, a journal entry. Admittedly, I’d never written one before. But as I took the time to explore my stories, as I unearthed those moments that lay forgotten—long buried under the densely packed soil of the career of a choral music educator—almost
immediately the foundation for my assumptions regarding knowledge and how it should be (and could be) conceived of and represented began to shift. I realized that in order to understand my practice and my relationship with my students, I would first have to look at myself. My “self.”

Reflecting on Clarke and Erickson’s (2004) definition of teaching as “the professional practice of engaging learners in the construction of knowledge directly related to a particular area of study” (p. 53), I questioned if I had realized before this point that the construction of knowledge differs greatly from the regurgitation of knowledge. This gave me cause for pause. And so, I pondered the skills driven teaching of my past, what and how I had been taught, and more importantly, how I had taught others. I pondered how the influence of music in my life, as well as the sense I had of my choral music educator identity had affected such teaching. I pondered the methodology of narrative inquiry and along with Polkinghorne (1995) entertained the idea that “work with stories holds significant promise for qualitative researchers” (p. 7).

As my stories accumulated, my pondering turned to probing. I probed my personal stories and past experiences for more profound meaning. I probed in hopes of personal growth and deeper learning. I began to understand Clandinin and Connelly’s (1994) assertion that the awareness of how my personal and institutional stories have influenced and shaped my lived stories carry the ability to both transform my former assumptions, and clarify my perspectives surrounding research in my particular discipline. I probed my musical memories in order to appreciate how stories of my life history in relation to music, and my past teaching practice revealed through self-study, might transform my practice and that of others as Schön (1987) suggested:

We can encourage one another to tell stories about experiences that hold elements of surprise, positive or negative. Stories are products of reflection, but we do not usually hold onto them long enough to make them into objects of reflection in their own right.
When we get into the habit of recording our stories, we can look at them again, attending to the meanings we have built into them and attending, as well, to our strategies for narrative description. When we can pay attention to the assumptions and ways of framing experience … [we] can see ourselves as builders of repertoires rather than accumulators of procedures and methods. (p. 26)

In my stories I began to see themes surrounding the construction of my identity, the neat and tidy labeling of my “self” as musician. I unearthed many moments. I dug deep. I tested the waters of self-study in the hopes of having the courage to dive deep. I allowed the waves of reflection to erode, little by little, the soil that was my former understanding of research, thus allowing deeper understandings of my experienced knowledge to surface. Ripples of reflection in the form of personal stories muddied my waters. Slowly, and at some times no more than what seemed a crawl, I saw a way to loosen the foundations further, to invite dialogue, self-discovery and examination of assumptions into my discipline on a broader scale. I would have to begin with my self and hope that others would follow. And yet I clung to my identity as a musician and searched for a form to guide my immersion, to comfort my descent from the choral conductor podium. And so I chose to compose myself as researcher. And off the podium I went. And so it goes:

**Arial font:** the researcher, exploring the possibilities of self-study

**BerhardModBt font:** temporal shift, creative non-fiction personal narratives (Lee, 2004)

**Symphonic Form: Structure and Struggle**

Sometimes I really get into symphonies. I'll listen to a symphony, or even a single movement over and over again for days, maybe even a whole month. I prefer to listen through headphones, shutting out the other sounds of the world, choosing instead to
focus on the variety of musical sounds available to the ear; the soaring melodies, the subtle changes in tempo, the many colours of the layered harmonies.

The soul of the symphony speaks to me; its robust romantic shape bursting at the seams of its traditional form, threatening to overflow and surge forth, leaving behind its structural confinements. The symphony sings to me that it feels boxed in by its form, labeled and identified by its conventions. Perhaps it longs to explore new, unexpected and distant keys, to reflect on the repeated patterns and motifs of its recent history in the hope of emerging illuminated, newly aware of its textural possibilities.

My life history in the arts and subsequent teaching practice are my symphony\textsuperscript{1}. I often play my symphony’s prominent themes over and over again in my head for days, maybe even an entire month. I wonder at its harmonies. I contemplate music’s role and significance in my life, and how its movements and structure have shaped my education and subsequent profession. In honest moments of reflection, I become aware of the limits its structure has placed upon me. I admit that often I feel boxed in, labeled and identified by its conventions. Thus, confined by the expectations of a discourse that privileges perfection in performance and emphasizes the visible product, I, along with a few others in the choral music discipline, have begun to question our interactions, our \textit{harmony} with students, and have begun to critically examine the expectations placed on us in our role as choral music educators (Bernard, 2004; Countryman, 2007; O’Toole, 1994; Schmidt, 2007).

\textsuperscript{1} “Moore asks his readers to consider as a metaphor for life, the common musical structure as found in hundreds of classical sonatas, symphonies and concertos…” (Moore, 1996 as cited in Willingham, 2001, p. 81).
Self-study and life history research seek to inform such questioning, such examining, through the use of various methods of data collection which may include personal journal entries, a sharing of personal artifacts, and focus groups discussions, as well as informal conversations and emails with colleagues (Samaras, Hicks, & Garvey Berger, 2004). This form of inquiry reflects, through the vehicle of personal narrative, on past practices as it contemplates the contrasting styles and opposing keys of my personal symphony. For me, it is but a “first movement” as a novice self-study researcher, its themes anticipate the introduction of future variations and new thematic development through musical collaboration with other “composers” throughout my doctoral dissertation journey. Its ontological and epistemological orientation reflects my desire as a researcher to find meaning in my own composition and encourage others to follow.

Exposition

The exposition of a symphony introduces primary thematic material. It must be catchy to ensure the audience will listen on. It must hold weight, it must urge us to care. It must allow the listener to feel that they may make themes revealed in the symphony their own. Samaras et al. (2004) suggested that the first use for personal history self-study is the exploration of “self-knowing and forming—and reforming—a professional identity” (p. 905). My journal entries wherein I explored the influence of the arts in my life and subsequent teaching practice “exposed” repeating patterns, motifs surrounding the construction of my identity. For me, an opening theme was revealed. In this case, it is presented in a minor key and revels in its uneasiness, its harmonic dissonances, since
the labeling and assigning of an identity related to one's musical talent is not always a positive thing.

An Opening Theme

Sweat covers my hands and I know every eye is upon me as I wipe them up and down the black velvet skirt that lines my quaking thighs. I wonder what my mother is thinking. I’m pretty sure this doesn’t fall under what she terms “lady like” gestures. I quickly check my posture. Shoulders back, head held high, eyebrows up. “Never forget the eyebrows, they really make the difference,” Mrs. Maxey always says. The introduction begins and I struggle to calm my racing heart, to deepen my shallow breath. If I could just swallow once, just once more before I have to begin, I’d be in better shape. I bite the tip of my tongue hard and the tiniest gush of saliva flows into the arid basin of my mouth.

’Why is this so much harder than last time?’ I wonder. Last time I didn’t care so much. Last time it was really fun. I was excited when I got the dignified nod to begin from that portly lady that Mom had brought me to for my first rehearsals with a piano. The excitement I felt is still so vivid a memory. The first big breath, shoulders heaving, and then through a wide, open mouth, “I like going to a party, oh what a happy day, with lots of lovely things to eat and jolly games to play!” Crackers the song was called. And it was a party.

But this is no party. The excitement cannot be reclaimed. Now it is Autumn. Autumn has no balloons, no cupcake treats to tempt and tease the seven year old palette. The major chords have sunk to minor, for Autumn is a time of withering, of dying, of fading away.
short, Autumn really sucks. The worst part is I’m worried that I will too. If I began to count
the number of people in this room sitting with their eyes fixed upon me I just might puke.
Mrs. Maxey is here, and of course Mom is sitting with grandma’s best friend Gladys. My best
friends Rae-Ann and Yogi are also here, and, quite unfairly, so is Jon Gustafson, with his
blond hair, freckles, and “girls are yucky” attitude. In fact, the entire grade three class is
here. We walked the twenty minutes down Scott Street single file with Mrs. Maxey to the
church together so everyone could watch me this time. “It’s for support,” Mrs. Maxey had
told me. Drat “support.”

Something dreadful happened last time after Crackers. I didn’t know it at first, but a
full realization of the consequences was upon me now.

I had won.

I had won first place. I had gotten a certificate and everything. Everyone else’s
stickers had been silver and bronze, but mine had been gold.

I had won first place.

“Did you hear? Catherine won festival. She’s a real singer.” The news had spread
around my grade two classroom within minutes of my return after Mom had dropped me
off back at my elementary school. Our classroom singing sessions featuring such hits as We
All Live in a Yellow Submarine, and I Can Sing a Rainbow took on different meaning for me.
Everyone in class listened for my first breath, glanced secretly sideways to watch for the
singer’s heaving shoulders, to follow the lead of the girl who got the gold sticker. Yes, I had
won first prize in singing at my home town Music Festival.

I was a singer.
I guess.

But now, one year later, with the entire third grade class before me, squished, sticky and sweaty into the pews at Knox United Church on 3rd Street, now, in the face of Autumn it dawned on me; what happens if I don’t win first prize this time?

I haven’t won first prize in a solo singing competition since. Although for sixteen more years, I was made to try.

**Retrospection and Revelation**

Such stories are not unique to me. They have been known to surface among so-called “classically trained musicians” in conversations where we have let our pride slide and our guard down. We somehow accidentally find that we share the same shame, that at some point we found ourselves unable to conquer the performance, unable to perfect the product. Perhaps the pressure was too great, the challenge too overwhelming, the fear of failure too real. And yet for years we did not stop trying. If we did, who were we? If we did, what identity was ours? Such a dilemma is, perhaps to some, a revelation. The fact that these early labels have a significant impact on our future musical endeavors, relationships, and self-confidence, warrants further reflection, and on a much grander scale.

I have humbly relayed my story to countless performers and students of my own when the tears come before a performance, or after a performance, or have stopped a performance. It is a story, an admission of failure that attempts to comfort when the pressures of the win placed upon us by parents, instructors, peers, and perhaps most of
all ourselves, seem at that moment too strong to conquer. These are the times when music pains, when the pressure outweighs the pleasure, and the joy that was once the motivation for our music-making becomes lost in the quest for perfection so frequently demanded by our discipline.

This beginning self-study, this seemingly simple search for the self, set off all kinds of bells, full chords, constantly ringing, sending out rainbow resonance, subtle yet bold colours of overtones pulsing and pressing, demanding that I listen further, that I seek a silent place from which to reflect. These understandings surrounding the development of my identity through life stories (Danielewicz, 2001) were a revelation. Initially, however, I weary; I didn’t want to sing too soon, to freely and carelessly let the tones ring, for as Behar (1996) reminds, “to write vulnerably is to open a Pandora’s box. Who can say what will come flying out?” (p. 19).

Although self-study research must always negotiate the borders between self-indulgence, significant experience, and confessional (Knowles & Cole, 1996), operating within the classical music discipline often arouses strong feelings of self-doubt. Admittedly, many music educators acknowledge such feelings. With caution, I would offer that they are most often viewed as something to “get over” rather than confront; the show must go on. In this sense, self-study methodology’s retrospective examinations may feel like admissions, the escape of dirty little secrets, whispered confessions. I feel that this makes the telling of such stories all the more important and the use of such a research methodology all the more appealing to me as a researcher.
Identity and the Space Between

“Modeling and testing effective reflection” is a second use for personal history self-study (Samaras et al., 2004, p. 905). In sharing personal artifacts of mine with colleagues I experienced flashes of various images; my experiences frozen in time. I reflected on the things I have come to value. I challenged myself, once more, to test the waters. I remembered the good times with my choirs, accomplishments added to my resume which I took great pride in, compliments on my work which increased my confidence, and the development of many relationships with young music makers and fellow music educators. Running my fingers over a few treasured pieces of music, feeling the glossiness of the raised printed notation, the smoothness of the paper page, seeing the scribbling of my old markings, the musical decisions made and executed when one strives for the best, I was reminded of one year where my choir was so full of talent, buoyant in its bubbling personality, rock solid in its commitment. I further challenged myself to look beyond its glossiness, points of praise, pictures of smiles, and sounds of meticulously shaped phrases and tuned and retuned chords, in search of what Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) term the space between; the tension between my experience and practice, and those who share the practice setting. It is here I may critically investigate how my sense of identity has influenced others in shared music making.

Second Theme: Modulating......

It is a beautiful piece of music, Teiksma. It carries a most delicate beginning, characterized by the repetition of octaves representing funeral bells in the distance. A, slow, haunting minor melody evokes the voices of dead soldiers. This stark texture gives way to the cries
of mournful mothers in unaccompanied, three part harmony. But then, with sudden fury the dead soldiers confront the living; in unison, all men proclaim their disgust at the survivors who have forgotten them! A subito piano grabs the listeners’ attention if only momentarily, then building and building, the lush, expansive, and rich harmonies lead to the climax, a triple forte, booming on a chord that sends the sopranos to the top of their range, the low basses to their bottom. *Teiksma* is a truly moving Latvian song about the struggles of a people engulfed in war, desperate in the fight to retain their cultural identity and individualism. I am fully aware of its power to move the human soul. I know it can drive an audience to the verge of tears.

I’m counting on it.

The Music Festival Trophy Class began fifteen minutes ago. We are third to sing. The choir stands on stage with confidence, bright looks on their faces, matching outfits from the Gap, their burgundy cotton tops and crisp, black bottoms far more up to date and cool than the cummerbunds and bowties that choke the choral singers from across town whose performance preceded them.

My choir is an army standing on the risers, eyes fixed on me. They will neither communicate with each other, nor enjoy a gaze around the large church in appreciation of its intricate architecture. They are absolutely focused and are thoroughly convinced that their musical delivery today is something to be proud of. Perfection in performance has all along been the ultimate goal of our time together, it is understood that the reward of belonging to an elite ensemble outweighs the pure joy of singing. They are accepting of their role and the expectations that have been placed upon them. It is what they signed on for. They are under the impression that this is what choral singing should be about. Those
who are stuffed sticky and sweaty into the pews of the church on 8th Street await the culmination of the years’ hard work, eager to see the results of the extra rehearsals, the extended hours of practice.

My hands mold the melodies with confidence and fluidity. My face displays the emotions of the mothers, the soldiers, the people fighting for the retention of their identity.

I need not fight for mine; it is secure. I know who I am. I am the conductor. Through a molding of louds and softs, dramatic and delicate gestures, I manipulate the audiences’ emotions. I am in complete control.

Gone is the trembling singer of stages past. There are no sweaty palms, no racing heart. My tongue is free from the hard bite, no part of my body quakes. There is no need to adjust the singers’ posture. I have pressed upon that issue all year and now they carry themselves well; shoulders back, heads held high, eyebrows up. Every musical detail has been attended to. All articulations, nuances of language, facial expressions, shaping of vowels, and balancing of parts have been polished to precision, by me. It is a perfect performance. I feel proud that I fit so confidently here. I am convinced that I have conquered my former insecurities.

The crowd applauds heartily and I bow on behalf of the choir and accept credit for the performance. I look up to the adjudicator sitting at the desk that has been placed on the balcony. A smile creeps over her face and she nods to herself as she finishes writing her comments.

I know we’ve won.

I am filled with a sense of pride and accomplishment.
Learning to Listen

Again I feel it is time for a confession. As an experienced conductor having invested much in the building of an impressive CV and reputation, having conducted and guest conducted choirs of all ages in Western Canada, and having served as a guest adjudicator and speaker to educators and conductors alike, I have recently begun to ask myself what it all really means. Many, if not all of my colleagues have shared in the goal of elite music making, the seeking of a shining, respectful reputation. What this reputation consists of and whose back it has been built upon are now questions that press upon me. In the above story I have allowed myself to take a critical and provocative view of my past actions, and to become vulnerable and admit to those sometimes ugly sensibilities which surface in a competitive arena. In doing so I have placed myself in a position to wonder at the demands I have placed upon so many singers throughout my career. I wonder at the meaning they have made of our time together and their ideas surrounding the values I have suggested of being most worthy. A conductor standing alone on the podium means nothing. A conductor must have a choir in front of them. So whose choir is it? There is a tension between what I demand of others and the results I seek for myself. I wonder if singers have in some way become a tool for my success. Have my insecurities diminished through the perfecting of other bodies in light of an inability to perfect myself in the vocal discipline?

Identity-oriented self-study research includes retrospective examinations of personal life history (Louie, Drevdahl, Purdy & Stackman, 2003) where emphasis is placed on developing awareness of one’s current self and one’s development as an instructor. To reflect upon the power of a discourse that places an identity upon an
individual and determines how that individual should judge their accomplishments, however, is not a comforting thought to me or to others in my profession. Conductors are not necessarily taught to be humble. Although I have met a good handful who are, and I gladly wish to emulate them, I have found many whose outward appearance and actions reject humility. Conceivably, the balance between the nurturing teacher and the demanding head musician is not always easily struck. In relationships though, as in choral music, balance is achieved by listening. Admittedly, I now listen and reflect with a certain degree of shame, not on my failure as a solo musician, but as a conductor, a teacher who has at times perhaps, allowed egocentric pursuits to shape their professional practice. I allow my pride to slide and let my guard down in the hopes that others will follow and evaluate their teaching practices. Without a spirit of reflexivity guiding my own musical teaching, I recognize that the processes of socialization I have experienced and continue to model will become the main influence upon my own students’ learning and future professional practice (Woodford, 2002).

This honest engagement with a formerly proud memory was an epiphanic moment (Denzin, 1994) of reflection for me in that it opened my eyes to the possibility that while my life experiences in the arts and with my students displayed the trappings of success, perhaps these successes were not so easily reconciled. Such revelations regarding my identity as a choral music educator strengthened my conviction that I was on to something. That self-study research could provide a means not only of exploring our identities through life stories, but also offer a means of deconstructing the governing ideologies of the discipline beginning from the self and our own interaction with the field of choral music education was a revelation.
Bullough and Pinnegar (2004) contend that an essential quality of all self-study “points toward a specific ontology, which includes a commitment to a quest for understanding and to a way of being with and for children, colleagues, and our students” (p. 340). Thus, the self is never merely psychological and individual but “is formed and maintained in relationship to others” (p. 340). Therefore, self-study research may allow educators to reveal points where our relationships with colleagues and students have shaped our practice and caused us to examine what we value in our profession. The purpose for self-study is this sense is not all at an individual level. Loughran (2004) suggests that beyond one’s desire to be better informed about how they think and act (to purposefully reframe their practice), “is an expectation that their learning through self-study might also help to positively challenge and change teaching and teacher education practices more generally” (p. 155). Thus, research on teaching practice by teachers “holds invaluable promise for developing new understandings and for producing new knowledge about teaching and learning” (p.155). This is especially true if we as teachers look to our students, and our relationships with our students, for stories to inform our learning.

**Toward Transformation**

Typically, in the recapitulation of a movement in a symphony, thematic material returns in its home or tonic key. The experience comes full circle and we are comforted by the return of the familiar melodic leaps and rhythmic patterns. It is here that I resist the comforts of the familiar. It is here that I desire to break free of such a conventional form. It is here that I recognize the need for continual development of these earlier themes as
well as the continual introduction of new themes. Thus, at this point, the symphonic composition truly becomes my own.

I was reminded of the time I was asked by a colleague in an informal conversation if there was any turning point in my teaching career, any moment where my foundation was shaken, where I had cause for great contemplation. There is no need to search my memory for such a moment; it is constantly floating just below the surface. Sometimes we have an experience that changes us, that shapes our practice in a most profound way. I return to the motif of the performance with an understanding that it can create a greater perception of what it is that we truly value in our practice and how it influences those in our midst.

A Final Theme: Letting Go and Learning

The singers stood meekly on the risers, all eyes were fixed on me. Not a single eye wandered, for if they did the sobbing friends and relatives squished, sticky and sweaty into the church pews would be visible. Seeing this would make it almost impossible to keep it together. This was not a performance for a prize, for respect, or recognition. It was not a culmination of a years’ hard work expressed in an hour and a half on the risers in the school gym. It was a performance for Regan. But Regan was the one singer who was not there.

My hands were not as fluid as usual as they shaped the melodies. There was a quaking of my thighs that was out of the ordinary, neither the result of nerves nor of anticipation or excitement, just a quaking; an attempt to hold myself together and give guidance to the teary eyes before me. Lips trembled, voices croaked, the “audience” sighed
behind my back. Hands clasped hands and heads fell to shoulders looking for a comforting squeeze, for strength in friendship and song.

It mattered not whether there was blend or balance. A missed note, a flat tone, a misshapen vowel held no significance. All these were trivial imperfections cast aside in a profoundly shared musical experience. This transcendental experience was derivative of the connection with the people rather than of the art itself. It sought to provide comfort, to acknowledge the contribution of a young girl to our musical whole, now missing an integral part.

One smile short.

The singers shuffled off stage and filed into a small, pink-carpeted back room. There was one more song to go after the sermon was delivered. One more song. We had to do it again. The sobs of the audience would be deeper the next time, the faces stained with red blotches, the chests heaving in a futile attempt to calm the breath. One more song. I had never wanted to perform less in my life.


I wasn’t sure I’d heard it correctly, but Karen was looking around the room in anticipation of a response.

“Ya, we should.”

“Ya, let’s.”

They needed no cue from me, no tempo to begin from, no control over pitch and production; they simply began singing. They began singing the most difficult piece we had ever attempted, years beyond our level, but one that we had worked on for two seasons
and performed finally at Musicfest Canada, on our trip to Ottawa. It had been a significant musical accomplishment for us. However, that was not the focus in the little waiting room at the back of the baptist church on Maybud Street. They all began to sing and I just stood there, amazed at the smiles on the faces stained with red blotches, the clasped hands now snapping to the jazz beat of the arrangement. It struck me, more overwhelmingly this time, that it mattered not whether there was blend or balance. A missed note, a flat tone, a misshapen vowel held no significance. All these were trivial imperfections cast aside in a profoundly shared musical experience. I began to snap along and look at each face as they looked to each other communicating their support through the music. Not a pair of eyes were fixed on me, no attention was paid to posture; there was no prize for this performance. The true purpose of music making, of choral singing, was revealed to me.

I was learning; my students, the singers, were teaching me.

**Coda as Commencement: A Tale of Transformation**

This final narrative represents for me the “utopian moment” in self-study, the point where “the self is invited to be more than, or better than, itself” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004, p. 340). Such moments are the point where self-study research can offer a tale of transformation (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001). Such a tale inspires a renovation of the routine and presents the possibility of new beginnings. My symphony, now understood by me as a continual composition, represents such a transformation. It represents the starting point for a more in-depth questioning of the underlying assumptions surrounding choral music education discourse, and a closer examination of the self and its relation to both professional practice, and those influenced by such a practice. It shows the
possibilities for the “pushing of the boundaries of teaching”; the third use of self-study suggested by Samaras et al. (2004, p. 905).

Thus, when the discipline beckons me listen, I realize it is neither the tempo nor temperament of the music I must attune to, neither the timbre nor the tone from the mouth of the student singer, but the true voice of the student musician who is trying to express that their experiences deserve to be the focal point of our musical endeavors, and that they have much to teach us in our shared experience in music making when it is recognized as a valid part of our education and our lives. I understand that self-study represents a viable methodology which has the potential to create such understandings for other choral music educators. I am so glad I stepped off the podium.²

² Portions of this Introduction were previously published in Canadian Music Educator, Robbins, C. E. (2007). Used by permission.
CHAPTER ONE

EMBRACING THE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE: EXPLORING NEW TERRAIN

Shaping a Methodology

Methodology, based on the assumptions of a specific ontology and epistemology, is the part of the paradigm that guides the research. The methodology can be viewed as providing a map to guide one to the final destination of the research journey. More to the point, sound strategies of inquiry built upon a methodology plot a course detailing how a researcher will arrive at the research destination. In her entry of The Thursday Group’s *The Doctoral Thesis Journey* (1994) Ardra Cole advised travellers: “let your thesis question determine your methodological choices” (p. 49). To expand on her point she explained that if we give ourselves as researchers the opportunity to view other established researchers as “supports,” and allow their methodological ideas to exist in a more dynamic and “dialectical relationship with the research question,” we may be guided by multiple influences and writings (p. 48). In this spirit, I will introduce my research question and clarify my study purpose before venturing on to establish this research as building on the tradition of identity-oriented self-study in dialogue with related methodologies.

This *qualitative study* is grounded in what Beattie (1995) terms the dialectical and collaborative nature of *narrative inquiry*, but also looks to *reflexive inquiry* and *life history* methodologies (Cole & Knowles, 2000), as well as the practice of *collective biography* (Davies & Gannon, 2006) to shape its landscape. After the introduction of the research question, I detail the contribution of the above approaches and the strategies of inquiry they contribute to this study, thus providing a clearer picture of the conceptual framework of this research. Through this
process, I propose a revisiting and subsequent revising of autobiographical forms of self-study research reconceptualized as *collaborative self-study*.

**Study Purpose and Research Question**

After testing the waters of reflection, and doing a bit of trekking through the muddiness of a complex musical life, I arrived at the purpose of this qualitative research. This purpose was inspired by the initial expedition through the terrain of critical points in the development of my musical self and the transformative understandings such a process brought to the surface. The **purpose of this research** is to better understand how five choral music educators’ life experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, and understandings surrounding the formation of their musical selves have come to shape their professional practice.

For the purposes of this study, **choral music educators** are identified as those choral conductors and school teachers who have, at some point in their careers, taught in the public or private school system at the primary, middle school, secondary, or post-secondary level. The examination of their careers, however, may broaden to include involvement with youth community choirs, extra-curricular situations within the school system, and conductor/educator positions at the post-secondary level of education. Because of the nature of the choral discipline and curricular traditions throughout Canada, music education programs in secondary schools often show themselves as performance programs, and community choirs of all age groups flourish. These rehearsal-type atmospheres are recognized in this study as being educative.

A **secondary purpose of this research** is to discern the role of institutional context and governing ideologies of the choral music discipline in supporting or constraining these educators’ professional teaching knowledge, thereby encouraging examination of “those
thoughts and practices that are usually taken for granted” (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 4). The hope is that by engaging in collaborative self-study and through critical reflection, choral music educators may also be able to more fully understand and evaluate the power relations inherent in the choral music discipline: “until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves” (Rich as cited in Beattie, 2007, p. 13). It must necessarily follow that in determining how one’s musical self has impacted one’s professional practice, that it be asked “how has one’s professional practice impacted one’s musical self?”

Thus, this research resides at the intersection of critical reflection and self-study, of life story and life history, of narrative inquiry and reflexive inquiry. This study attempts to bridge the personal with the public. It invites examination of the self and its formation. It explores “identity” as each individual understands such a concept and its relation to their everyday life. It is a call to choral music educators to “really shake things up,” as Davies and Gannon (2006, p. 5) suggested collective biography can, and move beyond reflection and contribute, as is the purpose of all research, to the construction of new knowledge at both the personal and the community level. Loughran and Northfield (1998) elaborate:

Reflection is a personal process of thinking, refining, reframing and developing actions. Self-study takes these processes and makes them public, thus leading to another series of processes that need to reside outside the individual. Self-study can be considered as an extension of reflection on practice, with aspirations that go beyond reflection and even professional development and move to wider communication and consideration of ideas, i.e. the generation and communication of new knowledge and understanding (p. 15).

The overarching question of this study is: How has the “musical self” of five choral music educators’ influenced their professional practice?
My **sub questions** include (but are not limited to) the following:

1. What is the “musical self” of five choral music educators?
2. How have life experiences shaped the musical self of five choral music educators?
3. How has prior knowledge shaped the musical self of five choral music educators?
4. How were the attitudes, values, and beliefs formed that inhere in the musical self of five choral music educators?

*At the Crossroads:*

**Collaborative Self-Study**

Self-study recognizes an epistemology and ontology rooted in relationships and a commitment to a quest for understanding and recognizing multiple ways of knowing with a specific attention to context (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004). With these principles in mind, I revisited my initial self-study at the onset of this dissertation journey and asked myself the following questions: What would a self-study for choral music educators look like on a larger scale? Can I begin to envision such a self-study design as a methodological choice? Where do I begin? What established methodologies most contribute to the shaping of a method that would suit my *self* as a researcher? How might self-study be adapted, broadened, and extended to make a significant impact on the field of choral music education research?

Subsequently, I began to look to complementary methodologies which, when viewed from a cooperative standpoint, might contribute to a reconceptualization of self-study in a manner which can “push the boundaries of our teaching” (Samaras, et al., 2004, p. 905). I sought a path (meander as it may) through various methodologies, searching for characteristics both unique and specific to each which, when employed cooperatively, would allow choral
music educators, individually and as a community, to begin to reflect on their practice in new ways and encourage others to follow suit. In the remainder of this chapter I hack away at the overgrowth, revealing in detail the characteristics of these contributing methodologies, and outlining the contours of the various lenses and approaches which play a role in this research. From the overarching principles of the qualitative paradigm, through contributions of narrative inquiry, collaborative inquiry, reflexive inquiry, life history, and collective biography, I arrive at a clear conception of collaborative self-study, a shore from which one may depart on an idiographic journey of exploration of the musical self.

The Tourist Looks to a Guide:

Principles of the Qualitative Research Paradigm

As a result of my acceptance of postmodern sensibilities and thus a rejection of “positivist methods and assumptions” (Denzin, 2005), this research embraces the qualitative paradigm and broadly attempts to draw on the six features of qualitative inquiry as described by Elliot Eisner (1998). The feature which is first and foremost is the researcher’s understanding of self as instrument. This concept is central to this research study as the introduction has revealed. Other principles such as the study being field focused, the use of expressive language, and the presence of voice in text are inherent in the narrative medium of storied lives. Attention to particulars and coherence, insight, and instrumental utility as criteria for judging the success of a qualitative study (Eisner, 1998) are features emulated through a critically reflective process in my own in-depth self-study alongside and in dialogue with my co-researchers.

Additionally, Marilyn Lichtman’s (2006) “ten critical elements of qualitative research in education,” many of which are relative to Eisner’s, serve to further define one’s understanding of
knowledge and how it is represented. Like Eisner, Lichtman highlights the role of researcher, and stresses the importance of well chosen, expressive words in the pursuit of a thick description (Geertz, 1973). Furthermore she looks to qualitative researchers to bring understanding, interpretation, and meaning to such description. Her identification of the following additional critical elements further clarifies the research goals inherent in the design of this study:

- **Description, Understanding, and Interpretation:** The in-depth description and understanding of human experience, which is the main purpose of qualitative research, must be acknowledged as filtered through the eyes of the researcher. Lichtman (2006) reminds, “Good qualitative work clearly distinguishes between what the respondent said and the research analyst’s interpretation of it” (p. 9). Thus, the metaphorical interpretations and the interpretations of meaning are “the author’s most important contribution” rather than their description of the participant (p.9).

- **Dynamic:** The fluidity and ever-changing nuances of qualitative research assert that there is never one particular way of doing things. Qualitative interviewing, for example, is “flexible, iterative, and continuous” (p. 9). The “multiple realities,” or different possible ways of interpreting things, means that qualitative research, frustrating as it may be to some, cannot be “a single thing” (p. 10). As such, open-mindedness to the exploration of alternative ways of doing research is a core characteristic of the paradigm.

- **Inductive thinking and Holistic Properties:** Rather than the general to the specific, i.e. a deductive approach, qualitative research seeks to move from the concrete to the abstract, the specific to the general, beginning with the data to “gain an understanding of phenomena and interactions” (p. 11). Lichtman contends that the breaking down and
labeling of specific variables is not the focus in qualitative research. Rather than testing a hypothesis, qualitative researchers “aim for description, understanding, and interpretation and not examinations of cause and effect” (p. 11).

- **Variety of Data in Natural Settings:** Not changing anything about what participants are doing in an attempt to avoid artificial situations, can allow the qualitative researcher to view things as they exist. Dropping in on a rehearsal or watching a concert, interviewing in the home, office, or a familiar setting are desirable, as are the examination of artifacts such as photographs, letters, recordings, etc.

- **In-depth Study:** Lichtman reiterates that the isolation of variables in a reductionistic manner is not a goal of qualitative research. Revealing layer after layer in an effort to get past the surface and look at something more completely while involving only a few individuals is a distinguishing feature of this research.

- **Not Linear:** Traditional research follows a certain order. Qualitative research on the other hand, as Lichtman explains “can be viewed as having multiple beginning points” (p.15). The process can weave back and forth between data gathering/collection and data analysis. This means that after listening to or transcribing data, the researcher may go and observe participants once more, or schedule interviews after initial, tentative coding. Thus a cyclical reasoning process becomes central to the study.
Collaborative self-study research claims a narrative foundation. Susan Chase (2005) explains that methodologies within the narrative inquiry field are at various stages of development and there are “plenty of opportunities for exploring new ideas, methods, and questions” (p. 651). She presents narrative inquiry as a “particular type—a subtype—of qualitative inquiry” (p. 651). My research resides in this “subtype” which focuses on the biographical elements narrated by those who have lived them, although one may find myriad approaches, analytic lenses, and a mix of tradition and innovative methods within the field (p. 651).

Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) suggest that the most defining feature of narrative inquiry is that it “is the study of experience as it is lived” (p. 69); an opportunity for researchers to create meaning out of the events of participants’ lives. David Cleaver (2009) describes it as researchers and participants “living in each other’s storied accounts (where) data is generated through an intersection and interweaving of researcher and participant experience” (p. 36). The organizing of distinct events into a “meaningful whole,” where one connects and sees the “consequences of actions and events over time” (Chase, 2005, p. 656), however, takes on special meaning when the narrative is acknowledged as a communicative vehicle for the narrator’s point of view as much as a representation or presentation of the story teller’s voice. And so, it becomes of great importance that “narrative researchers view themselves as narrators” (Chase, 2005, p. 657). This particular characteristic features prominently throughout this dissertation. My voice is ever present in the text as story teller of a musical life lived and as a researcher experiencing a complex process. My hope is to display what Chase (2005) calls the “complex interaction—the intersubjectivity—between researchers’ and narrators’ voices” (p. 666) as I examine my own
voice throughout the research and interact with my participants through the continual construction of my researcher self.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) apply a Deweyan notion of interaction to their thinking on narrative. Of particular relevance is their concept of focusing on “four directions”: first, the inward, toward internal conditions such as “feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” (p. 50); second, the outward (environment); and third and fourth, backward and forward which refer to temporality or past, present, and future (p.50). They suggest that to research an experience is to ask questions which point each way. My research purpose and subsequent research questions emulate such a venture and I embrace these four directions as my compass for the research journey. The influence of this “compass” is particularly obvious in the focus group session outlines described in the design section of this document.

Additionally, there are a number of specific characteristics pertaining to narrative that Chase (2005) described. For example, a pivotal characteristic of narrative, Chase contends, is that in doing narrative one is “accomplishing something” (p. 657). Chase animates that narrators “explain, entertain, inform, defend, complain, and confirm or challenge the status quo. Whatever the particular action, when someone tells a story, he or she shapes, constructs, and performs the self, experience, and reality” (p. 657). She adds that the researchers must treat the narrative in a creative manner, emphasizing the narrator’s voice(s) (p. 657).

Beattie (2007) reminds that inquiry provides a “central organizing framework for professional learning and for the continuous construction of a professional knowledge in teaching throughout an individual’s career” (p. vii). Her conceptualization of collaborative narrative inquiry (Beattie 1995, 2001) is an invitation to create new knowledge “through the linking of these experiences: past, present and future, complete with insights and understandings,
into a narrative unity which intertwines researcher and participant that we come to reframe, re-imagine, and rehearse our new understandings” (Beattie, 2001, p. 80). Such a proclamation draws attention to the relationship between the researcher and the “researched,” colouring it with respect, thereby creating a space for professional learning and a reinventing of our future through examination of our practice (Beattie, 2001, p. vii).

**Narrative Research in Music Education**

Like narrative, music threads through lives in diverse ways and “thrives in lived experience” (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009, p. 223). Graham Welch (2009) points out, however, that the musical world has been “relatively slow” in adopting the wide range of qualitative research methodologies that have become mainstream in educational scholarship (p. 57). The collection of writings in *Narrative Inquiry in Music Education* (2009) edited by Margaret Barrett and Sandra Stauffer, show that scholars in music education have begun to explore the possibilities narrative inquiry has to offer our discipline. Barrett and Stauffer point out that in the work of “early career researchers” such as myself, “considerable innovation is often evidenced in both the methodological approaches adopted and adapted and the substantive issues with which these researchers engage” (p. 3). Their opinion is that narrative work offers a “means to re-conceptualise the ways in which we think about music engagement, music education, and inquiry in music education” (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009, p. 1). To this end, they suggest narrative inquirers in music education make a space to “trouble certainty” (p. 2) with a goal of prompting the music education community to consider our multiple ways of knowing. The empathic enlightenment gleaned in the attempt to come to an understanding of the musical worlds others experience, and the persistent seeking of “places and moments of intersection and reflection” (p. 2) serves not
only to connect with others through our stories, but must also push the boundaries of our current perspectives:

What makes an account a narrative inquiry rather than a story—is one’s willingness not only to look for connection and consonance, but also to recognize that different perspectives, voices, and experiences exist and can inform (p. 2, emphasis in original).

And so, we must also look to what Barrett and Stauffer (2009) term the “moments of disquiet, and the instances of unsettling” (p. 2) as places of illumination in narrative inquiry. Bowman (2009) characterizes such instances as “dissonances” and contends that these moments need to become a “more prominent feature of narrative work” (p. 216). The task of the narrative researcher then, is to create narrative works which leave the reader “a better person,” “a more perceptive educator,” and a “more critically aware music education practitioner” (p. 217).

In spite of the revelations of dissonance, Barrett and Stauffer (2009) still express narrative work as “resonant work” (p. 20) and imbue it with specific qualities: it is respectful, it is responsible, it is rigorous, and it is resilient (p. 20). Respect is shown through “deep listening” without ever trivializing experiences, or turning away when the listening gets tough. Respect also grows out of “multiple realities (and) multiple ways of knowing” (p. 22) the importance of which has already acknowledged several times in this thesis document. Responsibility calls for a balance to be struck between the researcher’s agenda and their own pursuit of transformation, good-natured as it may be, and the research participants’ meanings so that participants never become the means to a researcher’s end. Rigor is revealed in the “artistry, craftsmanship, and care in writing,” what Barrett and Stauffer term “the makers and markers of rigor” (p. 25), and is “simultaneously transparent and evocative, connotative and metaphorical” (p. 25). Finally,
narrative work is resilient in that it speaks to multiple audiences, such as educators at all grade levels, students, and scholars alike, and “is open to multiple interpretations” (p. 26).

Phillips (1985) defines resonance in relation to the voice as “the constructive interference of sound waves within the vocal tract” (p. 261). This, perhaps, is a more specific and telling definition than that of the “sympathetic vibrations” offered by Barrett and Stauffer (2009, p. 3). Moreover, it is that very interference of waves that transforms a rather indistinguishable sound at the laryngeal level into a resonant tone. What is necessary for this transformation is an optimum space for the sound waves to travel and bounce back creating the possibility for frequent and continual constructive interference. The methodology and design of this dissertation strive to create such a space and to bring out the defining characteristics of the resonant voice; depth and richness (Phillips, 1985, p. 261).

**Life History, Reflexive Inquiry, Collaborative Inquiry**

To research is to reveal the autobiographical—the self or elements of the self. (Cole & Knowles, *Lives in Context*, 2001, p. 45)

Drawing on principles of reflexive inquiry, collaborative inquiry, and the developing life history research tradition is incredibly central to this work. Reflexive inquiry specifically, is described by Cole and Knowles (2000) as “reflective inquiry situated within the context of personal histories in order to make connections between personal lives and professional careers, and to understand personal (including early) influences on professional practice” (p. 2). Such inquiry strongly lends itself to the process of transformation, highlighting the “relationship between what we do and who we are becoming” (McCarthy, 2007, p. 3). While Bowman (2009) and Barrett
and Stauffer (2009) liken narrative inquiry to resonance, Cole and Knowles (1994) liken the act of being reflexive to mirrors and transparent prisms: light bending back on itself, causing movement in opposite directions to the ones originally travelled (p. 9). As such, reflexive practice allows exciting new ways of analyzing elements of one’s musical life and creates wonderful possibilities for personal growth.

Collaborative inquiry, as a qualification of reflexive inquiry, also lends itself to professional growth, but specifically acknowledges that “we are created through ongoing communication with others” (Baum, 1971, p. 41 as cited in Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 136). As the methods of collaborative and reflexive inquiry do not differ greatly from independent inquiry, the centrality of the research relationship becomes what defines such an endeavour (Beattie, 1995; Cole & Knowles, 2000). The process rather than the product becomes the focus, and the research plan must be developed with a heightened sensitivity to interpersonal relationships as well as both procedural and ethical issues (Cole & Knowles, 2000). Although this research strives for a certain amount of collaboration and a focus on relationship building in addition to mutual respect and sharing, I fully acknowledge that as the primary researcher, this is indeed my dissertation and therefore the data is filtered and interpreted through my perspectives. Collaborative elements serve to guide the ways in which I treat the research participants and strive to provide them with a sense of agency throughout the process as a result of constant interaction.

Life history methodology resides in the same spectrum of the narrative continuum as collaborative inquiry. Susan Chase discusses the numerous flexible meanings given to the term *life history* in the context of narrative inquiry. As a general term, Chase refers to life history as a social text presenting a person’s biography. Life story, in contrast, describes the “autobiographical story in the person’s own words” (p. 652). Life story has also come to
represent epiphanic events or specific aspects of people’s lives, and in many instances is termed a *personal narrative* as opposed to *life story*. This research weaves both conceptualizations into its tapestry. Self-study in this research is enacted primarily through the vehicle of personal narratives. The elements of life history research outlined by Cole and Knowles in *Lives in Context* (2001) however, are of particular interest. Echoing similar sentiments to that of Barrett and Stauffer (2009), Cole and Knowles highlight principles of relationality, mutuality, empathy, care, sensitivity, and respect; the goal is to establish genuinely respectful relationships in the research process much in the spirit of collaborative ventures. Such principles served as a guide in both the recruitment of participants and in the design of this study, and are germane with respect to broader goals and implications of collaborative research.

Cole and Knowles (2001) consider relationship central to the research endeavor. They explain their view of this relationship as “complex, fluid, and ever changing with boundaries that blur in kaleidoscope fashion” (p. 27). Although they acknowledge this may seem at odds with “conventional views” which promote “distance, formality, and adherence to clearly defined role boundaries” (p. 27), I side with them wholeheartedly and embrace such a view of intimacy in my own research which strives toward the building of authentic relationships. As such, the focus may shift from “methodological correctness” to how one feels about the research process as a researcher, highlighting numerous ways of understanding (31). The concept of beginning with oneself and understanding oneself as researcher (p.45), in concert with the idea that “research is an autobiographical act” (p. 45) which both intersects and emanates from our own experiences (p. 45), are also central to this doctoral thesis. Ardra Cole, as a member of the Thursday Group, (mentioned earlier in the travel journey) continues to inspire and guide by reminding researchers that one cannot “pack lightly” for such a journey, leaving “biases, social location, and hunches”
behind (p. 49). Rather, one must ironically unpack at the onset of the journey or at least know the content of the luggage well enough before take off.

Although I characterize this research as more self-study focused, it carries strong elements of life history research in its search for the contextualized musical self of five choral music educators and celebrates an “exploration of a life through recounting memories of experiences and the meanings attributed to them” (p. 60). Indeed, this research lies at the crossroads of life history work and identity-oriented self-study research which share numerous core values as well as methods of data collection and analysis.

**Collective Biography**

Collective biography borrows from autoethnographic practices and adds spice to the dialogic power inherent in collaborative narrative inquiry. The “taking of oneself and one’s own ongoing experiences as the data” in collective biography (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 3) opens possibilities of expanding research involving story telling and “closes the gap between memories and the interpretive analytic work of research” (p. 3). Through what Davies and Gannon term the “shared work of telling, listening, and writing, (researchers) move beyond the clichés and usual explanations to the point where the written memories become as close as they can make them to an embodied sense of what happened” (p.3). Although Davies and Gannon (2006) claim a decidedly post-structural framework and their collaboration occurs between numerous researchers and the occasional student rather than a researcher/participant situation, such collaboration encourages reflexivity in the “necessary intervention in the harmonious tale we generally tell” (Davis & Gannon, 2006, p x). When seen as complimentary to the previously mentioned methodologies, collaborative biography provides a reference point from which to
begin to expand on the possibilities of self-study research. It also allows researchers to tap into the learning that results from collaboration with “critical friends” in self-study which, as Loughran (2004) offers, “appears to be linked to the opportunity to access alternative perspective on situations” (p. 158). Memory is not taken as reliable, and initial stories that surface are never taken as more true or more valid. Rather, this approach offers a different take on experiences shared by participants, evidenced especially in the focus group sessions featured in the design of this thesis document. Davies and Gannon (2006) explain:

We take the talk around our memories, the listening to the detail of each other’s memories, as a technology for enabling us to produce, through attention to the embodied sense of being in the remembered moment, a truth in relation to what cannot actually be recovered—the moment as it was lived. This is not a naïve, naturalistic truth, but a truth that is worked on through a technology of telling, listening, and writing (p. 3).

The most exciting thing regarding Davies and Gannon’s work is their interest in developing imaginative strategies of interrogation, interpretation, analysis, including their openness to searching out “different linkages or new alignments” in texts. They embrace both the overlapping and diverging nature of collaborative work, and their research exists to “understand the processes of selving rather than to discover particular details about individual selves” (p. 7 emphasis added).
Embracing Interaction at the Intersection:
Revisioning Self-Study

As I reflected on the process of self-study and the time (and guts, and encouragement) it took for me as a researcher to begin to critically reflect on the role of music in my life, I realized the journey was significant. Any attempt to understand the formation and continual re-formation of a musical identity, and examine how one’s concept of their musical self has influenced their practice, is in want of an incubation period for ideas and understandings to mature, if ever so slightly. In considering the limitations of the interview process, the main vehicle of data collection in narrative inquiry and life history methodologies, it became apparent that a study which allows the participants to become co-researchers, take ownership of their investigation of self, link and learn through dialogue with others as in collective biography and collaborative narrative inquiry, and journey through a guided and contained self-study rooted in life history methods may offer a more in-depth and idiographic exploration of choral music educators’ stories and perspectives. The desire to invite dialogue from multiple participants, and create a collective, rather than seeking to form a single researcher/participant relationship, became increasingly attractive to me as a researcher. I felt this to be necessary in order to make connections and seek illumination through interaction and truly embrace collaborative inquiry on a broader scale. It also provided a model of professional development as previously stated, transferable to varied educational situations. Therefore, I propose a pause in the journey at the intersection of collaborative narrative inquiry, reflexive inquiry, collective biography, and identity-oriented self-study to form a collaborative self-study as a framework for this research.

Such a process provides a means of understanding more fully the nature of choral music educators’ personal practical knowledge and allows co-researchers to delve more deeply into their musical life history and musical identity formation within a supportive environment. Thus,
as narrative inquiry begins with “experience as lived and told in stories” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 128), collaborative self-study invites both researcher and participant(s) to re-discover and re-tell their stories through a process of self-inquiry and dialogue with colleagues regarding such inquiry.

Much narrative research relies on in-depth interviewing as the main vehicle for collecting data. A one-time shot at telling a life history is greatly constraining. My desire was to create a set-up with space for greater freedom so the initial data collected might surface in the form of incidents, stories, and anecdotes in linear, segmented, or fractured form. As such, texts could, as Grosz (1995) suggested “be read, used, as modes of effectivity and action which scatter thoughts and images into new linkages” (as cited in Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 5). In this manner of thinking, participants are placed in a position to come to terms with their stories, choosing, after reflection, which ones they would like to share and how they would like to “compose” their lives. They may also look to others’ stories to illuminate, contradict, interrogate, and inspire their own tellings. Thus, in recognizing a highly collective component, collaborative self-study provides a theoretical base from which to situate this study and pursue the research questions previously stated.

**Possibility and Potential: Collaborative Self-study**

The designation of a study in choral music education as collaborative self-study also serves to combat issues of performativity. Conductors are performers. Previous personal experiences with educator-participants “performing” in the interview process gave me cause for concern. Hearing tales of educators as research participants being “stressed out” and “busily preparing” to be observed (!) in classrooms and rehearsals, or dramatically changing character after the ‘record’
button was pressed, necessitate not only that a researcher’s interview techniques be solid, but that a true environment of learning and sharing be established. This study seeks to emulate a truly collaborative and interactive research endeavour. I look to personal experience methods, characterized by Clandinin and Connelly (1994), as *relationship methods*, to bring unexpected insights that may change the participants’ view of past experiences (Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995), allowing them to interrogate each others’ stories in a supportive atmosphere.

Narrative directs our thinking towards relationships. When we focus more closely on relationships, “the self/other boundary” is blurred (Varaki, 2006). The sharing of such thinking after the co-researcher has had personal time to reflect strengthens the possibility for reflection regarding *mutual actions* and actions we’ve shared with others. It also reminds us that we are who we are not just inside ourselves, but also in relation to others. Bresler (2006) refers to narrative’s “generative power” of personal connection as an act of coming to understand the world empathetically, negotiating and exploring polysemic meanings. As such, the principles guiding life history research (Cole & Knowles, 2001) are concomitantly realized.

In its attention and care for the individual co-researcher, collaborative self-study research gives authentic voice to the choral music educator, attending to the possibilities inherent in the relationship between narrating a story and developing self-knowledge (McCarthy, 2007, p. 3). Most importantly, it has the potential to open the door for future studies of a similar nature, creating a welcome atmosphere for the choral educator to explore all aspects of their personal practice and the ways in which music has impacted their lives in general.

There is another perspective to consider when discussing the centrality of relationships in self-study. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) outline characteristics of “self-study of practice” research which are of interest. Although their methodological sphere appears to be a specific
branch of self-study research claiming a definite epistemology and ontology related to classroom practices, it has something to offer to those engaged in life history or autobiographical forms of self-study. Pinnegar and Hamilton insist that the self is not meant to be the sole focus of the research: “the self studying his or her own practice and human practice always involves others either in the immediate present or in the reconstructed memory of interactions” (p. 13, emphasis added). As such, it is the relationship of self to other that is a “central part” of the work (p. i), i.e. the relationship between the self and those involved in the shaping of this self throughout their practice. When applied to identity-oriented self-study for music educators, this concept expands to consider the “others” not only in our teaching/conducting practice but in our musical lives and life history. Additionally, it prompts us to be mindful of the deep value of these relationships. Thus, we may recognize a heightened sense of relationality in such research.

Music educators have been lamenting of late the scarcity of writings involving teacher reflection in the general choral field (Turcott, 2003; Countryman, 2007). It is my hope that such writing will reach a broader audience, encouraging choral music educators across the country to engage in personal contemplation, reflection on relationships, and, as Connelly and Clandinin (2000) suggest, review the “rhymes and rhythms” in the patterns of their practice in a quest to find the “true resonance” desired by researchers in narrative inquiry within music education (Barrett & Stauffer, 2009; Bowman, 2009).
CHAPTER TWO

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Construct Clarification, Discussion of Related Literature, Significance

Literature in qualitative studies has the potential to be supportive and illuminating; it clarifies, connects, sparks interest, contrasts, contradicts, and assists in interrogating context. The related literature in educational research can function in numerous ways. Literature in qualitative studies is typically not addressed extensively at the onset of a study in order to allow unconstrained views from the participants to emerge (Creswell, 2005). Rather, beyond identifying the need for a study, pockets of relevant literature may surface throughout a study in order to illuminate theoretical and conceptual foundations, clarify ongoing analysis, or bring to light comparisons and contrasts regarding “existing ideas and practices advanced in the literature” (Creswell, 2005, p. 80). I engage with relevant literature throughout this collaborative self-study (as evidenced in the opening narrative) in order to elucidate emergent themes, patterns, and recurring motifs. The goal of this approach is to aid in the connection of choral educators’ life experiences, beliefs, and attitudes with their professional knowledge, current practice, and the experiences of others. It is also my hope that relevant literature may expand traditional views held by the music education community. Cole and Knowles (2001) liken the qualitative research journey to the meandering and indeterminate path of the butterfly: “it is not possible to predict at the outset where the inquiry process will lead as it seldom goes directly back to the places set out in an initial review of literature” (p. 64). This is in keeping with the emergent nature of qualitative research. That being said, in preparation for my journey, I felt compelled to explore related areas of research in
an effort to situate this study as well as provide a departure point for a broader line of thinking concerning the self-study tradition.

It is worth noting that I was unable to find evidence of large-scale research which was exclusively self-study focused in the choral music education discipline. That is to say, that no dissertations in the choral field, to my knowledge, exclusively employ methods based in life history methodology which carry the same epistemological and ontological focus as that of self-study: critically investigating one’s current and past self with the goal of improving one’s personal pedagogy. In fact, despite the embracing of self-study in education, self-study as a methodology is not mentioned at all in the recent 2008 publication of *Exploring Research in Music Education and Music Therapy* by Ken Phillips, nor is it to be found in alternative music education research texts. That is not to say that shorter personal biographies or self-stories are not employed to situate one’s self as a researcher, especially within the field of narrative inquiry. This is an established practice within the scope of qualitative research. Self-stories are often shared in order to illuminate a researcher’s path to a particular research purpose or identify the need for a given investigation. Self-study’s vehicle is personal narrative, but not all personal narrative is self-study. Research regarding the self, including critical retrospective examinations where emphasis is placed on developing awareness of one’s current self and one’s development as an instructor (Louie et al., 2003), appears to be rarer in music education research. Peter deVries (2000) autobiographical examination of his practice as a primary music teacher and Lee’s (2004) dissertation, which contained autobiographical writing characterized as creative non-fiction, appear to be the most relevant engagement with this type of research into music teaching. Butke (2003) suggests that it is neither an established nor encouraged tradition for choral music educators to reflect on the influence of music and the arts in their lives, or to critically evaluate their practice. This research aims to change that. Just as Patricia O’Toole’s
(1994) groundbreaking dissertation delivered a radical reading of the choral music discipline and encouraged conductors and teachers to examine power relations inherent in the discipline, this study invites educators to examine themselves, their own stories, and the influence of these stories on their current and past practice. Thus, by engaging in self-study regarding their involvement in the practice of choral music education and the role of music in their lives, educators may better come to understand the extent of their professional teaching knowledge, the impact of context on their teaching practices, and may come to identify and better understand ideologies and power relations imbedded in their discipline. The literature cited in my journey of coming to understand the potential for self-study (p. 5) represents the core construct of this dissertation. The detailing of the constructs and related research which follow serve to further situate this study and unveil its potential significance to the field of choral music education research.

**Qualitative Research in Choral Music Education**

Qualitative dissertations in the choral music education field, although limited in number, have addressed various aspects relative to this proposed research. Many of these dissertations are interested in differing facets of student, teacher, and student-teacher experience and knowledge construction. Younse (2004), for example, investigated the construction of the self through the construction of self-knowledge in the classroom by way of narrative analysis. His focus was on the resultant power relations stemming from interactions with students and music, and the manner in which music educators have come to structure their learning environments. Another dissertation which focused on power relations in the choral setting was Patricia O’Toole’s (1994) which employed a feminist poststructural framework.
Work with preservice teachers has been popular especially in the area of identity research. Richardson’s (2006) exploration of the knowledge inherent in the lived experiences and narratives of preservice choral teachers through a process of collaborative narrative inquiry called for a more holistic approach to preservice teacher training, while Schmidt’s (1994) research attempted to draw connections between pre-service teachers’ perceptions regarding their student teaching, and experience-based influences on those perceptions and their beginning teaching practice in the music classroom. Meaning derived from community members’ (Willingham, 2001), high school students’ (Arasi, 2006; Piekarz, 2006), adolescent boys’ (Adler, 2002), college students’ (Kempton, 2002), and immigrant students’ (Carlow, 2004) choral experiences have been examined, as have conductors’ experiences and understandings with regard to gesture (Chagnon, 2001; McCarthy, 2006; Garnett, 2009) and the nature of female choral conductors’ experiences (Brenneman, 2007). Many qualitative dissertations, however, ultimately focus on pedagogical or technical improvement such as the influence of teacher beliefs and routine on student motivation (Saunders, 2005; Rieck, 2000), exemplary choral teaching practices (Borst, 2002; Jenkins, 2005), the process of coming to know musical works (Silvey, 2002), and undergraduate conductor/teacher planning processes for rehearsal in the choral context (Snow, 1998).

Although Sharlow (2006) investigated choral conductors’ definitions of community within a choral ensemble, the lack of community created among choral educators and their understandings of their professional knowledge lead Countryman (2007) to proclaim that she had found “no studies that featured music educators discussing the big questions of professional practice, either in dialogue or individually” (p. 25)! She attempted to rectify this by inviting experienced music educators to discuss key issues in music education in her study of former high school music students’ experiences of music. Thus, a “gap” in the research is revealed, a gap that
if viewed as opportune, may serve as a location for action and understanding to grow in the space-in-between (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 3) by following Countryman’s lead.

Although the field continues to grow, qualitative choral music education research is ripe for expansion in numerous areas which would collectively represent a shift toward greater communication and the development of new knowledge and understandings relative to our discipline. Such areas provide pillars on which to build the conceptual framework of collaborative self-study as a methodological approach. The meandering path of the research process may call out for expansion in other, more varied areas at a later date. For now, these constructs, in addition to the body of literature concerning self-study, and their significance and potential conceptual contribution to this research are outlined below.

**Professional Development**

This study seeks to provide a framework for future choral music educators to engage in a meaningful, on-going, and accessible form of professional development. In undertaking a collaborative self-study, educators must examine their practices to uncover basic beliefs and values that have influenced their actions (Cole & Knowles, 1998). It is only after engaging in such reflection that they are able to make necessary changes in their teaching practices (Whitehead, 1993). In short, this study lets choral music educators know that it is okay to step down from the podium to view their practices from a new vantage point and in cooperation with others.

There is a paucity of research literature on the professional development of music educators (Hookey, 2002; Turcott, 2003; Verrastro & Leglar, 1992). Similarly, there is a limited amount of research that has explored the “professional” knowledge of music educators (e.g.
Black, 1998; Arnold, 1991; Goolsby, 1996; and Duling, 1992; as cited in Hookey, 2002; Countryman, 2007; Turcott, 2003). As previously mentioned, such studies often focus on the technical aspects of knowledge, that is, the means of creating the best performance or increasing the efficiency of music making. Thus, alternative avenues of professional development must be encouraged. Cole and Knowles’ (1995) belief in the inherent value of self-study research as a form of professional development gives hope to music educators that reflection can occur in multiple forms and through our exploration of personal narratives. The design of this study, particularly the third focus group session format, provides a model from which future educators may draw in order to begin their own reflexive journey of continual personal professional development.

**Reflective Practice in Music Education**

Butke (2003) suggested that the nature of choral music is more product-oriented than process-oriented. Thus, the development of reflective thinking is necessary if conductors and educators are to strike a balance between their own philosophies, prevailing philosophies of the choral tradition, and the demands of the average classroom or community choral program. This self-analytical approach to teaching is necessary for the development of a new breed of choral music educator. Such educators, who are charged with the creation of an environment which provides musical enrichment and inspiration to so many, must possess skills beyond the prepackaged methodologies delivered through standardized curriculum (Apple, 2000). However, the scarcity of research surrounding visions of teacher and teaching as reflective, innovative, and transformative suggests that little of this view of teaching has found “resonance in music teacher
preparation programs” (Schmidt, 2007, p.1) and in the choral music education field at large (Butke, 2003).

The concept of reflective teaching has evolved over the last thirty years to the point that giving a clean-cut description is not an easy task (Grimmett & Erickson, 1988; Liston & Zeicher, 1987; Valli, 1992). Baird (1992) describes reflection as a conscious, purpose-related process, while Ross (1990) suggests a structural element exists to reflection’s characteristic careful, contemplative thinking. Brookfield’s (1992) definition of reflection offers clarification: it is a “thoughtful consideration and questioning of what we do, what works and what doesn’t, and what premises and rationales underlie our teaching and that of others” (p. 59). Perhaps Freese’s (1994) definition fits the elements of a collaborative self-study research agenda best: “the process of making sense of one’s experiences by deliberately and actively examining one’s thoughts and actions to arrive at new ways of understanding oneself as a teacher” (p. 898).

In Marla Ann Butke’s (2003) dissertation involving choral music educators engaged in reflective practice, she discusses the derivation of the word reflection from the Latin “to bend back” and suggests that similarly, a reflective teacher thinks back on what is seen or heard thus becoming a purposeful thinker (Butke, 2006). And so, through reconstructing, reenacting, or recapturing the events, emotions, and accomplishments of teaching episodes, professionals are able to learn from experience (Schulman, 1987). This purposeful thinking can enable a teacher to transform their practice (Butke, 2003; Greene, 1986; Newman et al., 1998; Schmidt, 2007; Woodford, 2002). I regard such critical thinking as an integral part of self-study research in keeping with the practice of reflexive inquiry as described by Knowles and Cole (1994).

John Dewey’s ideas are generally regarded as foundational in terms of reflective practice. His ideas concerning the nature of experience are also foundational to the field of narrative
inquiry (Chase, 2005, Clandinin & Rosiek, 2005). Building in part on Dewey’s writings, Donald Schön (1987b) discusses his view regarding the nature of professional knowledge, or what he describes as “the epistemology of practice” (p. 2). Schön contrasts the concept of a formal, categorical knowledge—what he calls “school knowledge”—with a kind of knowing-in-action. This knowing-in-action is comprised of two types of reflection: reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action.

Reflection-on-action involves deliberate thinking about one’s teaching after it has occurred (Schön, 1987a). Schön’s ideas have surfaced in reference to conducting musical masterclasses and improving rehearsal techniques, but the implications are more far reaching than improved music making. Reflective practice has come to employ such methods as journal writing, portfolios, and discussion. Such a framework is foundational to narrative inquiry and relates directly to what Connelly and Clandinin (2000) term “professional practical knowledge.”

**Personal Practical Knowledge**

Narrative approaches to research concerning teacher education and teachers’ perspectives regarding their practice have increased dramatically over the past number of years (Beattie, 1995; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, Cole & Knowles, 2000). The bridge between Dewey’s (1938) concept of experience and education, and the phenomenological school of thought’s understanding of lived experience as knowledge, was solidified by Connelly and Clandinin’s pioneering work in narrative inquiry (Richardson, 2006). The understanding that personal practical knowledge, recognized by Connelly & Clandinin (1982) as embodied knowledge and professional practice knowledge in action, is continually constructed on a narrative continuum (Cole & Knowles, 2000) as a result of lived experience. The idea that this experience informs our
individual knowledge factors heavily in the design and conceptualization of this study involving self-study and life history methods.

Personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000) rejects the positivist framing of teacher knowledge and allows, through a process of narrative inquiry, a broader understanding of how meaning is made on multiple levels (Richardson, 2006). The recognition of this professional practical knowledge as stemming from personal experience, one’s perception of such experience, and its impact within their classrooms and rehearsal spaces, serves as a starting point for evaluating how such experiences have shaped choral music educators’ past and current practices. As such, it provides a foundation from which to realize a conceptual framework for my research. In this study, however, I wish to embrace a broader conceptualization of professional knowledge. This conceptualization acknowledges both personal factors such as life experience, attitudes, values and beliefs, as well as contextual factors such as institutional and ideological forces in the shaping of one’s personal practical knowledge.

Music Educator Identity

From the onset of my initial self-study, it became clear that there was no escaping the issue of teacher identity in music and music education and its relation to my own perspectives surrounding music in my life and subsequent teaching practice. This continues to be a hot topic among academics in music education, and yet the field has not broadened terribly much since the late 1990s primarily because the focus remains fixed on identity construction and negotiation in pre-service teachers and “identities in music are routinely conceived in terms of a dichotomy between musicians and non-musicians” (Gracyk, 2004, p.3). Countryman (2007) acknowledges that identity research spans “disciplines of psychology, sociology, cultural studies, and critical
theory” (p. 18), but although music teacher identity has peaked the interest of numerous music educators, much teacher identity literature primarily draws on “interactionist and constructivist theoretical frameworks” (Brewer, 2009, p. iii; Dawe, 2007).

Woodford (2002) defined identity as “the imaginative view or role that individuals project for themselves in particular social positions, occupations, or situations” (p. 675). Perhaps it is due to the honing in on the gap between this imagined future in teaching, and a student teacher’s current reality, that research examining preservice teachers has been popular. I would suggest the convenience of these preservice teachers, i.e. students, to researchers also plays a strong role. Brewer (2009) studied the role-identity development in preservice band music educators via an examination of their conceptions of effective music teaching while Paul (1998) looked at teacher-role identity in undergraduates. L’Roy investigated music education majors’ occupational identities and Beynon (1998) discussed preservice teacher identity negotiation. Conkling (2004) used narratives of preservice music educators to study identity in what she termed “professional development partnerships” versus more traditional forms of music preparation. Cox (1997) put forth that the nature of primary and secondary socialization in music teachers appears to be the most salient factor in the construction of identity, even though her investigation involving undergraduates revealed that music identity was substantiated by friends, family members, and private music instructors. Prescesky’s (1997) findings echoed the influence of multiple factors in identity construction. Her student-teacher-participants’ perceptions of their “selves” were rooted in childhood memories as well as models of practice and some constructed images of self-as-participant. This led to a perception of unity and resonance between musical and educational identities. Mark (1998) discovered that the unique challenge of artistic claims, burdened with contrasting and contradictory social and professional reference groups led to a “praxisshock” of sorts when pre-service teachers entered the professional world while Frierson-
Campbell (2004) revealed the instability of professional identity of music educators that continues well into their practice. Thus, it appears that the problem of musical and pedagogical conservatism and lack of social relevance in a changing, postmodern educational world is a pressing problem left unaddressed by current post-secondary teacher education practices (O’Toole, 1994; Roberts, 2000; Woodford, 2002).

Traditionally, it has been proposed that identity in music education is limited to two categories, that of performer or educator (Bouij, 1998; Gracyk, 2004; Roberts, 1991; Woodford, 2002). In fact, Bouij (1998; 2004) proposed teachers form their role-identity at the intersection of their self-concept as teacher and their self-concept as musician. However, Bernard (2005), in response to a perceived focus on teacher-identity rather than musician-identity, acknowledged identity’s personal nature regardless of its social construction and proposed viewing pedagogy as “interactions inside other interactions” (p. iv-v). To summarize, although the field continues to expand, much music educator identity research has focused on preservice teachers, and the field of teacher identity research in music has been viewed from a primarily sociological viewpoint with a few exceptions (e.g. Lee, 2004; Schmidt, 2007). Perhaps this focus is in need of expansion.

It must be acknowledged that attempts have been made to advance identity research in music education in some new directions. Patrick Schmidt’s (2007) framing of identity away from the notion of roles and toward teaching as an act, is one such example. Other examples surface in the papers in MacDonald, Hargreaves, and Miell’s *Musical Identities* (2002), which offers a psychological viewpoint. They encouraged expansion past the current boundaries of thought in music education identity research so that academics might “be sensitive to (and) embrace diversity of thought as a point of departure for ongoing and future work” (Hargreaves, MacDonald, Miell, 2003, p. 5). They remind that no single discipline has “exclusive rights to
identity research nor can each identity research project be informed by all current thinking on
identity” (p. 3). This gives pause for thought.

While this study recognizes the rich symbolic interactionist tradition in identity work, it
aims to contribute to the body of literature and understanding of music educator identity through
a personal, reflexive process involving teachers at different stages in their professional careers in
hope of broadening the scope of literature in this area. Danielewicz’s (2001) previously
mentioned notion of a continually negotiated identity shaped by life stories provides an impetus
for self-study in choral music education and a point from which to contribute to such academic
literature. However, the focus on the self rather than identity is a point worth noting. In turning
to a label such as self-study research and away from “identity-work,” focus shifts from a
primarily sociological perception of identity in music education research and invites more
divergent, multi-disciplined views. This is not in any effort to disregard or devalue past thinking
on teacher-identity formation in music education, but in order to interact, expand upon, and add
dimension to such literature by branching out in new directions. The next chapter represents such
an exploration. It attempts to truly embrace multiple ways of knowing, and conceptualizing the
self. It represents an epistemological adventure which seeks to give credence to self-study’s aims
and methods in light of new approaches to thinking about this thing we call self.
CHAPTER THREE
EXPLORING CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF THE SELF

“Identity” to “Self”: A Quest for Common Essence

After my initial self-study and the understanding gleaned both in attending classes on qualitative research and in developing my approach to this doctoral thesis work, I realized there was something missing from self-study literature that I needed to work through: conceptualizations of the self (ironically). As a Masters student, I focused almost immediately and intuitively on “identity” in music education literature, but I didn’t seem to find what I had expected in such research. I wasn’t entirely sure what exactly I wanted, but I knew I wanted more. I felt that identity work in music education had done somewhat of a disservice to itself, in that the nature of “the self,” for the most part, seemed to have been subverted by primarily dealing with identity conceptualized as a labeling of ones’ self attached to a specific role (Woodford, 2002; Bernard 2004; Schmidt, 2007). Having an identity meant identifying and defining oneself in relation to social roles in a manner which implied “a rigid and more deterministic approach” (Schmidt, 2007, p. 22). Thus, the scope of identity research appeared to me to be constrained and our openness to varying conceptualizations of this thing we music educators call “identity,” including any actions that might arise from such views, necessarily followed suit. Without other ways of looking at identity, how could preservice teachers or current music educators hope to get off the dualistic “am I a performer or an educator?” tightrope we seemed to be walking (Dawe, 2007)? Could there be, as Schmidt (2007) suggests, another way of looking at the self other than just “adapting to a role” (p. 23)?
As a qualitative researcher of the postmodern variety, I characterize the self, in general terms, as complex, multidimensional, flexible, changeable, and as Anderson (1997) suggests, not fully capable of being described. This may appear to be in direct conflict to previous identity research in music education which strives to do just that by categorizing and compartmentalizing identities “with relation to the role we feel we must play at any given time” (Bernard, 2005, p.30). I seek a view that moves beyond compartmentalization; a view that might lend itself more readily to the ideals of messiness and muddiness inherent in reflexive research in an attempt to describe as fully as possible the nature of our choral music selves with attention to interconnectedness between so-called “compartments,” rather than any play for a hierarchical organization. I see a view which acknowledges that identity is a label, while the self is a story. Could we as music educators look to interaction and connection to illuminate ways of knowing rather than to division and identification in order to categorize and label? Could a broader conceptualization of the self help move choral music educators move away from “socialization processes into ‘commonly’ understood and accepted visions for teaching and learning” (Schmidt, 2007, p. 3) and to a more relational nature of identity (Green, 2005)? Could we discover our common essence?

From my own perspective, I had never battled the educator/performer issue. I had always felt that they coexisted contently within my psyche and I was in an atmosphere during my undergraduate degree that acknowledged, even promoted, this position. But something had to have sparked my identity concerns at some time during my practice. I thought back in an attempt to uncover where it was in my practice that I first began to feel friction surrounding my ideas regarding teaching. Where was it that tensions first began to surface? Why was I so drawn to the topic of identity—to research that looks to unfold such subjective issues, meanings, and ideas? Then it came to me…
A favourite moment of mine in the movie *School of Rock* occurs when Jack Black’s character ‘Dewey,’ the rock musician posing as a teacher to make some quick cash in an effort to avoid eviction, explains to his students that the first thing in forming a rock band is talking about your influences because “that’s how you can tell what kind of music you want to make.” A bit later in the film he acknowledges how band members need to share their musical ideas with bandmates in rehearsal so that these ideas can be experimented with, integrated, morphed, molded, shifted, and shaped into a cohesive unit indicative of an interactive and collective effort (my terms, not his). All this goes down, of course, in the name of “stickin’ it to ‘the man’.” Watching these scenes I realized how few times during my grade school years I had been invited or required to bring my musical ideas to class or was allowed to share my tastes and influences. Furthermore, I began to realize how few times I had invited ideas and input from my students when I had taught in the school system. Recognizing their influences and the views they were bringing to the classroom had not been a concern of mine. From a self-critical standpoint I admit I rather viewed them as a moldable and manipulatable group of selves, eager to adopt my musical ideas and values. The social roles of teacher and student that we occupied presented clear boundaries and codes of behaviour, and consequently one could generally imagine how the immediate future would play out; with few surprises. I had become “The Man.”

My first teaching job was in a fairly culturally homogenous setting in a small Manitoba town. From here I returned to my home city of Winnipeg where I taught in a
school boasting one of the most economically and culturally diverse student populations in the city. I encountered, for the first time, feelings of doubt regarding my previously held notions about the relationship I had with my students. I felt that the choral music I had chosen, the accepted format of the choral rehearsal, and general goings-on of the concert year were somewhat of an imposition on the various values and traditions represented in my classroom. Yet, the only major concession I made was to make the “Christmas” concert a “Winter” concert. The belief that, as a music educator, I was doing something valuable, that my music program was changing lives and enhancing self-growth and self-esteem, was so strong, it had blinded me to the possibilities of interacting in dynamic and truly communicative ways with my students. And so, although I did it with the best intentions and a love for my students—that is not what’s being debated here—I paraded on as I had been trained to do in my bachelor degrees; with an agenda aimed at masking the ambiguity and complexity of reality in my program, rather than maintaining respect for it (Bowman, 1994). Witness the power of music education as advocacy. Witness the downfall of a lack of self awareness and reflection.

Specifically, another aspect of my teaching career had stirred up doubts. I was struggling to reconcile my experiences as a private voice instructor with my community and school conducting experiences. One was so intensely personal. The other was becoming increasingly disconnected. These experiences were so different from each other but I had anticipated they would be so much more complementary. In listening to the stories, concerns, confusion, joys, individual tastes, interests, and influences of my students in their private lessons and dialoguing about the best choices for them as individuals, the gap between my awareness and concern for their complex self and the
selves I was actively de-personalizing in the choral setting were most vigorously exposed; two distinct forms of music education had presented themselves. More alarmingly, two distinct forms of a music educator self had surfaced in me, and were battling for supremacy in my seemingly multiple personality-plagued mind. Was I the educator who made choices based on the individual, ready to shift and change course when warranted in order to aid them in their musical journey? Or was I the classroom teacher, bent on unification, addressing specific musical skills, relying on the comforts of predictability and ignoring the possibility that my actions were perhaps irrelevant to the lives of many of my students?

These were the questions that I carried with me as I embarked on graduate studies. They provided the impetus for explorations in music identity research and reflective practice, coloured my thinking in philosophy, and guided my quest to discover the type of researcher I wished to become as I began my dissertation journey. The discovery of self-study research methodology was a turning point for me. It gave me hope that I could obtain a fresh perspective on identity research—that if I looked into my self, perhaps I could find something more that just roles I’ve played in my life of as a choral music educator. It illuminated possibilities for me to critically examine both my self as a researcher and my self as a music educator; two aspects of my personality that I had previously felt were quite distinct from one another, but wished could interconnect. I was drawn to the hope that there were more utopian moments to be found in self-study; the point where “the self is invited to be more than, or better than, itself” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004, p. 340). But then I began to wonder about the bigger questions so many thinkers have wondered about before me: What is a self? How do I conceptualize of my self, other selves, and our relationship to each other? What self am
I speaking of in self-study? How is this self constituted? How do I envisage and describe this self?

* * * * *

The remainder of this chapter traces various conceptualizations of the self through historical, philosophical, sociological, psychological, and finally neurological perspectives in an effort to expose both connections and antimonies of the self as conceptualized in multiple disciplines. As self-study claims an epistemology and ontology rooted in relationships and a commitment to the recognition of multiple ways of knowing (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004), an exploration of the *relationships* and *connectedness* between multiple disciplines celebrates such a stance. Moreover, a divergent manner of thinking and connecting is deeply rooted in my way of relating to others and being in the world. Exploring neurophilosophical ideas put forth in Douglas Hofstadter’s (2007) *I am a Strange Loop*, or neuroscientist Joseph LeDoux’s (2002) theory of the synaptic self which “reflects patterns of interconnectivity between neurons in the brain” (p.2), and Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi’s (1993) ideas surrounding the nature of complexity, suggest that we may greatly expand our current conceptualizations of the choral music educator self and the resultant implications for music education. In striving for complexity and continual reflexivity in music education, one may begin to envision a music educator self characterized as relentlessly communicative, cooperative, and interactive; in short, a choral music educator in a constant state of becoming.

The theories explored in this chapter weave their way in and out of discussions and narratives presented in subsequent chapters of this document. Here they are presented to establish broader ways of engaging with the construct of “the self” and in order to strengthen the epistemological and ontological approaches of this research. This exploration of the self is
greatly reduced, but gives a taste of the numerous lenses that have sought to shed light on this phenomenon over the ages. Just as this research seeks to illuminate how our musical selves have come to be formed, so to must we inquire as to the formation of this thing we call *self*.

**A Crazy Little Thing Called Self**

Our self is something we *think* of as whole, but we *see* in fragments. We think of it as distinct and unique, but never experience it outside of its environment. It is the self we bring to the classroom, the private lesson, the practice room, and the performance. It is the self inherent in our philosophizing regarding music education and deeply invested in our academic writing. It is a self ever changing, yet still retaining some strange sense of continuity over time; a self that is both fleeting and enduring, commonsensical yet elusive. Although our capacity as humans for self-reflective activity, that is subjectivity, is commonplace, a definitive understanding of this subject appears to elude us. Rather, we consistently rethink and recreate our concept of the self, musing over its meanings and implications, its interactions and influences.

In *The Future of the Self* (1997), Walter Truett Anderson suggests that “we live out our lives as the selves we believe ourselves to be (1997, p. xii).” Just who this “self” is has been a central question in philosophical and psychological discussions for ages. The self in philosophy is generally used to refer to the ultimate locus or core of personal identity, the agent, the “knower” involved in our cognitions and actions (Anderson, 1997). Certainly conceptualizations of the self over the years in various disciplines have exposed themselves as both contradictory and complimentary, yet a common theme is sustained; reflective philosophical thinking must be grounded in some way, for example in brain, spirit, God, nature, society, body, or a combination of these (Atkins, 2005). Naturally, different conceptions will give rise to different questions. The
idea of self is at the heart of how we think and act as a society and as individuals to such an extent that it warrants deep consideration rather than its general take-it-for-grantedness. And we have a greater chance of success in understanding if we develop a little more awareness of the different kinds of ideas about the self, or as Anderson (1997) points out, that there simply are different ideas. But it is the recognition of similarities, or perhaps more to the point, the interconnectivity which is revealed upon seeking complementary attempts to comprehend the same universally occurring phenomenon, which place us in a position to expand our current understanding of ourselves as music educators and draw connections between varying disciplines, thereby setting the stage for the development of true complexity in the lives of choral music educators.

The Self throughout Antiquity: Changing yet Remaining “The Same”

From the time that the Greeks asked “What is this sense of self that changes yet remains the same?” (Martin & Barresi, 2006), their musings have inspired generations of Western thinkers. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus is famously credited with the statement that one can never step in the same river twice. His protégé Cratylus, it is believed, dramatized this position by claiming that you can never step in the same river once (Anderson, 1997; Robinson & Groves, 2004; Martin & Barresi, 2006). Heraclitus then, was the first recorded thinker who introduced the problem of the identity over time of objects that change, or how something changes but nevertheless remains essentially “the same.” Heraclitus suggested an unstable sense of self, one without certainty and permanence, in no way the bounded, unique, integrated character Clifford Geertz (1973) would later speak of as the essence of modernity.
Heraclitus’ more famous contemporaries maintained this idea of a self in constant flux; an idea central to many views on teacher identity. Plato, through his dialogues in *Symposium*, put forth the notion that the identity over time of every “mortal” thing must be understood in terms of a relationship among its parts which are ever changing (Bremmer, 1987). This stance, termed *a relational view of the identity of objects over time*, is the view to which most current personal-identity theorists subscribe (Martin & Barresi, 2006). Plato contrasted this view of identity through change, with an unchanging divine immortality, that is, the existence of a changeless realm beyond the material world where one’s self and one’s psyche (soul) resided.

Aristotle too, pondered the idea of a changeless realm. For him, this realm was existent in every material object. This allowed objects (humans included) to remain the same in spite of changing (Martin & Barresi, 2006). These views set the stage for philosophical discussion in the Western world. However, through mythology, in the sense that personality traits were manifested in various gods and thereby open to an objective viewpoint, the Greeks also set the stage for psychology. The voices of the gods spoke within the human mind and could be heard (Feinstein & Krippner, 1988; Anderson, 1997).

The French sociologist Marcel Mauss, believed that the Romans, with their concept of the person, also made an important contribution to Western thought concerning the self. The Roman’s *persona* meant that your status, family, etc. were officially recognized, that is, inextricably tied in with the legal system (Mauss, 1985). Personhood, for the most part, appeared to be almost a tangible *thing* you either possessed or did not. Slaves, for example, were denied a person, meaning they had no personality, no ownership of body, no ancestors, no name, and no goods of their own (Reydams-Schils, 2005). According to Mauss (1985), this legal conception of self became the basis for the Stoic philosophers’ moral sense of self which was later developed
by Christians into the idea of a person as a metaphysical entity with an immortal soul (See the writings of Cicero, Lucretius, and Marcus Aurelius).

It was Augustine who converted Platonic ideas into the thoughts of God and in doing so made a rather sharp distinction between the outer and inward self, linking Plato’s concepts with the modern mind (Taylor, 1989). For Augustine, the soul lay inward and the body was something akin to an animals. It is easy to see why he is often seen as the forerunner to Descartes.

**Descartes and the Dawning of Empiricism**

In the seventeenth century, an age of political, religious, and philosophical turbulence, as well as scientific upheaval, a bold thinker came to the conclusion that there was only one fact that he could trust: the “I” that comprised his self-awareness, and allowed him to doubt all else, could not be doubted. “He thought, therefore, he existed” (Anderson, 1997, p. 18). René Descartes’ attempt to reconcile natural philosophy and rationalism left us with a self that comes off as a kind of mechanical mind (Atkins, 2005). Because Descartes regarded subjectivity as the direct expression of God, his philosophy is oriented toward the truth of perception. Our contemporary ideas concerning self and subjectivity stem from Descartes’ problematic description of the human situation both in terms of natural philosophy and rationalism, and his attempt to negotiate what he viewed as the mutually exclusive nature of matter and thought. Thus, an overview of the history of philosophy regarding the self reveals a consistent negotiation and reasoning of these twin concerns (Atkins, 2005).

By the eighteenth century, the self became a major topic for philosophers such as David Hume, Immanuel Kant, and John Locke. Hume, who had a love of pointing out paradoxes, attempted to “dispense with God,” and rejected a metaphysical notion of the self (Taylor, 1989).
He reasoned there can be no sense of permanent identity since the self as a mind, its contents is always changing, in incapable of carrying a sense of permanent identity (Atkins, 2005). Hume, as a minority voice, concluded that the identity ascribed to the mind of man is only a fictitious one. He looked for a constant and variable impression of the self and could find none. Thus, he deduced that the only way to “catch” one’s self is through some perception or other, and since perceptions come and go, the self is always in flux (Seigel, 2005).

Had Hume’s ideas, in some aspects almost Heraclitean in nature, been more kindly received, a phenomenal self conceived as a social construction of reality may have been given an earlier birth. Other thinkers, however, were quick to override the paradoxes. In Locke’s reasoning on the subject of the self, science is put to the service of God through an identity shaped around moral responsibility. Locke’s theories are representative of the enlightened period. He theorized that human beings came into the world a blank slate and so parental and social influences were important in shaping the self (Seigel, 2005).

Kant undermined Hume’s ideas by presenting his concept of the “noumenal self,” that is, a cohesive sense of continual self which allows one to discern self-boundaries (Anderson, 1997; Seigel, 2005). This idealist view marked the emergence of the modern self; a self fooling its self that it was discovering the truth about the self rather than making a truth that would satisfy the scientific and political agendas of the day (Anderson, 1997). In particular, Kant’s critique of Descartes is extremely influential in that it gave rise to two philosophical lines of thought: analytical philosophy of language and philosophy of mind were born of the emphasis on linguistic forms of the objective conditions of understanding. In contrast, the line of thought that emphasized the subjective nature of understanding led to phenomenology (Atkins, 2005).
The Phenomenological School of Thought

The phenomenological school of thought in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s gave rise to a greatly heightened interest in social conceptions of the self. Martin Heidegger reconceptualized the self as a dynamic system of interrelationships of meanings or signification, and concluded that human existence, at a fundamental level, is a making intelligible of the place in which we find ourselves (Lechte, 2008). G. W. F. Hegel, in his revelation of an idealized self, considered the mind to be the basis of the universe, and Husserl’s concept of the transcendental ego denied the possibility of empirical observation, declaring that only phenomenological description was possible as everything that exists is an object (Taylor, 1989). This line of thought morphed into the claim that this ego was correlative to the world, and that the world is not for any transcendental individual, but for an intersubjective community of individuals (Lechte, 2008).

Poststructuralism: Power and Resistance, Gendered, and Corporeal Selves

The dawn of poststructuralism brings with it a profoundly new line of thinking and reflection. Poststructuralists acknowledge a discursively constituted self, a self subjected to and manipulated by discourses of power in an increasingly complex, destabilized, and multivocal world (Atkins, 2005). Jacques Derrida attempted to show that the claims of autonomy that had developed in the western tradition were false claims (Critchley & Mouffe, 1996). Consequently he reasoned, the selves which we thought of as having some degree of autonomy were actually deluded in thinking they could acquire epistemological clarity through discursive reason (Seigel, 2005): on first view, a somewhat bleak picture.

Michel Foucault, according to Seigel (2005), put forward two opposing views about the self at the same time. In the first view, the self appeared as deeply subjected to exterior
domination; the second portrayed it on the point of some radical kind of liberation. Regardless of these potentially conflicting views, Foucault gives us a critical-awareness of the self. By studying our histories and recognizing the ways our selves can be constituted and constructed (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000) he urged us to develop theories that acknowledge the self without abandoning the self, its material conditions, or its desire for coherence, even if it is only temporary and partially illusory. Foucault helps contribute to an affirmative postmodern position through post-structural thinking on subjectivity (Atkins, 2005). Power is repressive and productive, diffuse and pervasive; it infuses all force relations. As power relations are always shifting and transforming, identities are constantly in process as they are (re)constructed within this moving framework. Robert Fillion (1998) refers to Foucault’s possibilities for critical-awareness as “self-wariness.” Through this process our identities are recognized and loosened. As a result we become aware of the larger picture, the discourses and social situations we are caught up in. The second purpose of this dissertation attempts to explore this larger picture as it applies to the choral music discipline.

Judith Butler submitted that individual self is only made possible through one’s connection to others (2004). Butler contends that subjectivity is historically and performatively constructed as part of discursive, rather than biological systems. For Butler, the acquisition of language is itself a gendered process, and a body with a dynamic role in structuring our subjectivity is a central theme of feminist philosophy (Atkins, 2005; Charlap, 2008). For example, in The Second Sex (1976), Simone de Beauvoir argued that women’s subjectivity and social oppression was partly an effect of their embodiment in that their biological role was used advantageously by men to further their own interest (Atkins, 2005). Jerrold Seigel (2005) agrees, adding that women’s bodies impose different experiences on them than man’s, and that they have had to accept a dominated social position through most of history, allowing for much less
autonomy than men. These circumstances have certainly had an impact on the female experience of selfhood. A survey of the self throughout history leaves the reader without a substantial feminine perspective leading to the grim realization that views of the self have been shaped by gender considerations. In fact, one may begin to ask if a feminine self has existed in a historical sense until more recent times. Certainly there has been little exploration of gender issues in choral music. Janet Brenneman’s doctoral thesis (2007), however, made headway in this direction, addressing personal experiences of women conductors with a focus on gender-related influences. Therefore, we must look to the extension of poststructural theories of the self in an effort to expand discursive possibilities for creating and (re)creating selves.

Jason Zingsheim (2008) offers one such extension. His conceptualization of the self is a form of working subjectivity where both social and individual practices function to continually reconstitute or renegotiate identity. Through the imaginative and pop-culturally relevant vehicle of mutants and heroes, Zingsheim challenges us to expand the norms of recognition by embracing “multiple incarnations of identities both within and between individuals (2008, p. 19).” Consequently, identities emerge through processes of domination and resistance as well as the space between these. In such a space, identities mutate and provide a unique perspective on this thing called self.

The Contemporary Identity Crisis

Plato inspired the modern self-concept which defines each of us as an individual with a distinct identity that remains the same wherever it goes. Anderson (1997) suggested that although this idea “served its purpose reasonably well,” it has rapidly eroded in the face of a postmodern world where varying aspects of it are undermined by different currents of thought and action.
Many poststructural and postmodern philosophers insist that the self is constructed; assembled and reassemble in different ways by individuals and societies. The postmodern self is seen as “decentered, multidimensional, changeable” in an attempt to adapt to circumstances of the contemporary world (Anderson, 1997, p. xv-xvi). Biologists would say that if an organism is to survive, it must be at least as complex as its environment (Taylor, 1989). Anderson (1997) suggests that a more radical solution (if only seen as such from a Western standpoint) is needed; the self should be abandoned entirely and replaced with a deeper sense of the “human being” which he defines as “all that you are—biological and psychological, conscious and unconscious” (1997, p. xv). In contrast, and in a most poststructural light, the current concept of “self” is loosely defined by Anderson as the person one constructs with words and with the help of those who surround it. This “self” is discursively and socially constructed and subsequently, he argues, the language we use to identify various aspects of our lives like nationality and our profession—that is our social roles—becomes the self; i.e. performer or music educator. This self takes over consciousness and becomes synonymous with the “human being” you are. And so the self in this sense amounts to nothing more than a series of “identifying” and requires deconstruction or even, as Anderson suggests, obliteration. The self that can be easily identified is at the same time easily labeled. Once something is labeled it is easily categorized; it is easily dismissed.

The above vantage point is relative to the view of the postmodern “disappearing self” (Taylor, 1997; Anderson, 1997; Seigel, 2005). Baudrillard (1994) proposes that there is no longer any real or authentic self in today’s oversaturated, hyperreal world. Rather, we are just one more image awash in a sea of images and these images no longer represent any concrete self or territory, they merely signify other images. As such, the postmodern self is “a copy of a copy of an original that doesn’t exist” (p.95).
Anderson uses his concept of the “human being” to offer hope. Where as a “self” craves stability, retains a strong sense of boundaries, and maintains its existence through continuous description, a *human being* is always changing, has no clear sense of boundaries, and “cannot be described fully” (p. xv). It is this conceptualization we must embrace as our understanding of the self, he contends, rather than being forced to create multiple selves on a continual basis which may change radically throughout the course of our lives. Would it serve us better to conceptualize our music educator selves as music-educator-human-beings?

**Sociology, Social Psychology, and the Interacting Self**

“One of the major concerns of sociology is to explain how membership in social groups large and small, affects human behaviour and how some groups behave differently than people in other groups” (Hewitt & Treevan, p. 3). The lines between sociology and social psychology are often blurred. In fact, Charles Morris suggested that the American Pragmatists (Mead, Blumer, Peirce, Dewey) belonged to an old tradition which failed to see any sharp separation or antagonism between the activities of *philosophy* and *science* (Morris, 1964). Perhaps it was this outlook which allowed them to recast the self as a social self. It is certainly an outlook which is finding its way back into current thinking on the self and others in the work of V.S. Ramachandran and other so called neurophilosophers, but more on that later.

George Herbert Mead, known as father of symbolic interactionism (although the term was coined by his student Herbert Blumer in 1937) presented a social psychological view of the self which studies underlying symbolic and personal dimensions of human interactional experience. In *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), Mead’s seminal work, he describes how mind and self arise out of social interaction. The mind is viewed as a form of participation in an
interpersonal (i.e. social) process (Hewitt, 1997). So to Mead, selves are *products* not *preconditions* of social interaction; they are flexible in nature. This “flexibility” is rooted in language rather than contextual adaptation. The self is formed at the same time communication begins. Mead distinguished “I” and “me” in each of us—the “I” is the self you know inside you and “me” is the interactive self, the empirical self. This is the self that acts specific to roles played in social settings (Mead, 1934).

Building on Mead’s theories, Herbert Blumer (1969) suggested that “individuals respond to the meanings they construct as they interact with one another” (p. 2). As such, meanings of social objects arise out of social interaction and are not in objects; meanings are modified through an interpretive process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2000). Thus, meanings are never fixed. In a complimentary fashion, Kurt Lewin’s personality theory delineated the importance of both personal and situational factors and set the stage for viewing behaviour as a joint interaction of the personal and environmental (Barakett & Cleghorn, 2008). And so, in symbolic interactionism, a favourite of those working with music educator identity (Brewer, 2009), the world is in the person and the person is in the world and the two are connected through “the circuit of selfness,” which Sartre declared, “it is a synthesis of being, action, meaning and consciousness” (1956 as cited in Lindesmith, et al., 1988, p. 5). Thus, the self seeks out interactive settings in the everyday world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and consequently, this symbolic interactionist approach reveals that the meanings of identity lies not in people, but in the *interaction* itself.
The Psychological Self

Psychology offers a contrasting view of the self. The self in psychology is seen, for the most part, as the cognitive representation of one’s identity: the self as “I” (subjective knower), and the self as “me” (object that is known) (Gray, 1994). Psychology positions the self as playing a role in motivation, cognition, affect, and social identity. In psychological literature, the self is often representative of the thoughts, insights, ideas, and conclusions that one possesses about one’s self; its overall personality or organism.

The terrain of psychology is vast, and numerous areas address issues of self and identity through experimentally based social psychology, humanistic psychology, psychoanalytical/psychodynamic psychology, and social constructivist approaches. Early psychology presented the model of a self which was an ideal picture of mental health, if not entirely achievable in practice. This began with Freud’s goal of the development of a strong and healthy ego (Gray, 1994), and continued through Erik Erikson’s account of a person’s journey through the “identity crisis” to become a stable, mature adult, solidified a view of psychology emphasizing “inner continuity and sameness” (Trahan, 1994, p. 35). Even Jung’s proclamation revealing the unity of consciousness as an illusion, contradicted his goal of developing an “individuated” personal self through therapy. As such, early psychology sent an overall message that Anderson (1997) characterizes as “get your act together; be consistent, integrated, authentic, whole” (p. 34). But that consensus unraveled.

William James, often referred to as the founder of the self in psychology, is credited with forming the first comprehensive psychological postulation of the self (Seigel, 2005). For James (1981) the self was persistent over time and was dynamic, grappling with the concepts of “I” and “me,” and looking for differentiation. However, James also promoted the idea that the self was
multidimensional, comprised of material, social, and spiritual “me’s” as active processors of experience. These conceptions opened the floodgates for numerous theories involving multiple selves. Heinz Kohut (1971) for example, believed there were multiple selves that were facets of an overarching self, and in 1972, Kenneth Gergen would introduce a human being with “many masks” (Lifton, 1994).

Carl Rogers (1961), in the humanistic tradition, reasoned that if one develops to their fullest extent, they become their “real self” which is not a static condition but a fluid process of becoming—a healthy person lives existentially and is open to experience. The 1980’s in particular showcased a “multiplicity” within the self (Hertler, 2008). The widely referenced Jamesian version underwent substantial amendment, and a new theme emerged in the form of a more dynamic self understood as an open system, seeking new information and contacts willing to move and change. This created a space for “the possible self” (Markus & Nurius, 1986), a mental representation of what we could be in the future as either a hoped-for self or a feared-self. In Making Stories (2002) Jerome Bruner gave credence to this idea by proposing that we consistently construct and re-construct the self “based on our memories or the past and our hopes for the future” (p. 63). In this respect, our self talk is “like making up a story about who we are” (p. 64). Such dynamic thinking also set the scene for the likes of postmodern psychologists such as Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1993) and Robert Lifton (1997) the likes of which Anderson (1997) suggests “dare us to think fundamentally new and different thoughts about who and what we are” (p. 34). In this sense we are able to see psychology as being less about one’s personal mental health and having more to do with questioning our major assumptions about social behaviour, an outlook almost more increasingly philosophical in nature. It is such work that begins to bridge the psychological, sociological, and philosophical which can provide fresh insight into this thing we call self.
Robert Jay Lifton and the Protean Self

The 1980’s set the stage for Robert Jay Lifton’s revision of the psychology of the self. The “Protean Self,” a reference to Proteus, Greek sea god of many forms (Lifton, 1993, p. 1), refers to the multiple dimensions of the self that are much part of the context of the fluctuation and mayhem of modern society. Lifton, through his early studies in brainwashing (1963) arrived at the conclusion that we can change our minds not just about what’s true, what’s right or wrong, but also about who we are. He concluded that traditional societies and ideologies of the modern world exploit this fact, manipulating us in a profound manner. This approach reveals an innate changeability to human consciousness. But Lifton’s *Protean Self* (1993) is not afraid to change; in fact it is most willing to engage in *continuous* change. In fact, this self is resilient in the face of change, in no way a “disappearing” or emendable “fragmented self” of the postmodern era.

The *protean self* may be viewed as the characteristic manner of dealing with the onslaught of stimuli in our lives. Ideas of post-modern diffusion, irreparable fragmentation, or disappearance of the self are shunned, as is any state of fixedness or firmness. Rather, the *protean self* stresses the possibility for alteration and restoration. It is capable of morphing in order to best suit a given context and dialogical theories cannot unquestionably synthesize or unify it. Lifton contends that “ones’ narrative will invariably be full of alterations, ‘sub-narratives,’ tangents and shifts, but through it all, the propensity to organize and re-organize is what will remain stable” (Lifton, 1993, p.30). So in contrast to a continuous and stable self, the *protean self* is engaged in the “slowly advancing act” of persistent and affirmative change (Lifton, 1993); a goal parallel to the transformative possibilities of self-study research.

Lifton’s concept of proteanism looks for fluidity in its form. But unlike some of its predecessors (see Kenneth Gergen’s *Saturated Self* (1991), for example), it has the ability to
recognize complexity and ambiguity as representational not only of maturity in its conception, but also of our ability to *ground* it. Thus, it is a balancing act “between responsive shapeshifting and efforts to consolidate and cohere” (p. 29).

The self becomes an engine of symbolization, as Lifton puts it, continuously receiving, re-creating, and extending all that it encounters. Every manifestation of this formative process involves the entire self and all of its previous experience. Lifton expresses that “in functioning as an open system, the self is always capable of revising its own meaning structure,” what Langer called “the constant reformulation of . . . conceptual frames” (p. 29). Lifton’s model has much to offer and serves an exciting link between poststructural and postmodern theories of the self on the contemporary psychological landscape. Moreover, it offers self-assurance in its decidedly hopeful outlook and illuminates in a most fascinating manner the underpinnings of qualitative research and the hopes of the contributing methodologies which this dissertation’s theoretical framework.

**The Contribution of Complexity**

In *The Evolving Self*, Mihalyi Csikszentmihalyi (1993) looks beyond his former explorations of happiness and the psychology of optimal experience (1990) to consider what is necessary for us to grow as individuals and as a society. His thesis is that “the good life” can only be achieved by becoming fully conscious. “To know ourselves is the greatest achievement of our species,” (p. 31) he writes. To this end, we may build a meaningful future on the foundation of our understanding regarding our evolutionary past. The term evolution, a principle biological in nature, may be taken in a broader sense to encompass that which allows us to continually adapt in the face of ongoing change much like Anderson’s (1997) “human being” and Lifton’s (1993)
proteanism. It is whether we allow creation and growth to outweigh entropy in our evolution which is of the utmost importance. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) looks at our evolutionary heritage, that is, the genetic and cultural forces that have brought us to where we are today. He contends that our genes can often give us a distorted view of reality, just as our “memes,” loosely defined as our cultural programming and initially shaped by the mind, turn around and begin to shape our minds (p. 120). Unless we strive to understand how they shape the way we think and act, it is difficult to gain control over consciousness; our awareness of self and surroundings. To this end, the development of culture and consciousness depends on the promotion of complexity in society.

Csikszentmihalyi’s (1993) particular conceptualization of complexity involves the dialectically linked processes of differentiation and integration. He explained, “differentiation refers to the degree to which a system is composed of parts that differ in structure or function from one another. Integration refers to the extent to which these different parts communicate and enhance one another’s goals” (1993, p.157). It is the balance of these two which provides complexity. The message then, is that we must recognize and develop individual uniqueness while at the same time identifying with larger processes at work in the world. In this respect, attention to self becomes as important as the development of our understanding of the social processes which shape it. Such thinking grounds the overall purposes of this thesis.

Csikszentmihalyi (1993) characterizes the evolving self as one who strives to transcend the narrow interests built into its structure by evolution and begins to take control of the direction in its turn, offering a unique sense of agency. Our self, that is having a self-reflective consciousness, allows us to write our own programs for action, and make decisions for which no genetic instructions existed before. Instead of different ideas competing for prominence, the brain experiences the totality of these impulses as forming a distinct self capable of “taking
charge of the domain of consciousness, and deciding which feelings or ideas should take precedence over the rest” (p. 23). Once there is a self, “it begins to make claims like any other organism” (p. 24). In this sense it will attempt to accumulate more, feel the need for power, and strive to promote its beliefs ahead of its body. Thus, our future, Csikszentmihalyi suggests, “depends on the kind of selves we are able to create and the social forms that we succeed in building” (p. 24). Here we see another view germane to the goals of this thesis; the hope to find a method capable of pursuing such personal growth, and a means of uncovering the complexities inherent in the continually evolving choral music educator self.

**Neurological Ways of Knowing**

Research involving the topic of music and the brain appears to have become quite fashionable as of late (observe the ruminations of the likes of Oliver Sacks (2007), Robert Jourdain (1997), and Daniel Levitin (2006) at Chapters and Indigo locations everywhere). Most of these researchers are interested in uncovering the quizzical nature of musical experience, its evolutionary beginnings, music’s role in our lives, and the quirky connections between brain impairment and musical understanding. Literature connecting brain research and music education, however, remains sparse (Jensen, 2000). Perhaps too many have conceded to Flohr and Hodges (2002) declaration that “a direct translation from neuroscience research into music education at this time is very problematic” (as cited in Reimer, 2004, p. 22). Skimming the index of Peretz and Zatorre’s *The Cognitive Neuroscience of Music* (2003) one is unable to find mention of music education. Understanding what specific parts of the brain contribute to music cognition may be viewed as prosaic and reductionist, as Reimer (2004) points out. As a result such thinking may appear to have little to do with our everyday lives in the music classroom. However, I would like
challenge this view and submit that neurological theories of the self may have a great deal to contribute to music education, not in their specific scientific detailing, but in their ability to link biological structure, physical being, and emotional experience as Anderson’s (1997) definition of human beings suggests, and for the very simple fact: our brains are who we are (LeDoux, 2002). In this respect, it is not the studies which reveal particulars of music cognition, emotion, or memory’s link to music which may be the biggest contributors to music education and philosophy, rather, neurological theories regarding the self may offer new insights, in particular urging communication between multiple disciplines in their ability to reveal antinomies and encapsulate the dialogical and dialectical nature of the self.

Antonio Damasio is one neurologist who puts forward what could be termed “a neural self.” In Descarte’s Error, Damasio (1994) relates that body and brain communicate in endless and complex cycles of interaction. What they produce is almost an illusion of a simultaneous, holistic existence. Such clarification provides much in the way of enlightenment regarding philosophical reasoning of the past, but there is much more. Most interactions with our environment, including society, take place is in pursuit of a state of “functional balance” (p. 225), and, as Damasio contends, “perceiving is as much about acting on the environment as it is about receiving signals from it” (1994, p. 225). Damasio clarifies, “at each moment the state of self is constructed from the ground up, it is an evanescent reference state, so continuously and consistently reconstructed that the owner never knows it is being remade unless something goes wrong with the remaking” (p.225). So just as western philosophical thought began with the Greeks meditation on “this thing that changes but remains the same,” we see neurological theory offer up a most plausible explanation: the consistent perspective as if there were indeed a knower and owner appears to be rooted in a relatively stable, endlessly repeated biological state (Damasio, 1994).
Damasio posits that the neural basis for self resides in “the continuous reactivation of two sets of representations” (p. 238): a key representation in an individual’s autobiography (which contains large amounts of categorized facts about an individual) and a primordial representation of an individual’s body and “how that body has been lately” (p. 238). This provides us with two kinds of consciousness which can be said to correspond to two kinds of self, a core consciousness or endlessly created transient being and a traditional notion of self, that is, autobiographical and linked to identity (Damasio, 1994, p. 238). Thus consciousness is seen as a process rather than a thing and our personal narrative is what gives it cohesion. Descartes appears to have been on the right track, his failure seems to be that he was a product of his time.

Our current body states are incorporated so continuously into the concept of self that they promptly become its past states. That is, what you are experiencing now was experienced moments ago. Thus it appears to be most accurate that we can never step into the same river twice, we are somewhat of a “disappearing self,” and Foucault is not far off the mark in his description of a temporary and partially illusory self.

Damasio’s neural self has much to offer in the way of a new conceptualization of the self and aids in understanding how the self has been represented throughout history in different disciplines. What it is in want of is a connection to others.

**The Synaptic Self**

An invitation to consider such connections is presented in Joseph LeDoux’s *Synaptic Self* (2002). LeDoux is not a neurologist who is particularly interested in music research. In fact, he offers no discussion of music and the brain in *Synaptic Self*. LeDoux’s work instead represents psychology’s evolution into brain science, which holds philosophical implications as well. Much
of LeDoux’s work is focused on emotions (see also *The Emotional Brain*, 1996). His compelling and complex scholarship in this area deserves an exhaustive exploration, however, a more generalized explanation, as that of the historical self, will have to suffice here.

Of the brain’s estimated one hundred billion neurons, each averages ten thousand connections linking it to other neurons. A “synapse” is the small gap between neurons (p. 2). LeDoux explains:

> When a neuron is active, an electrical impulse travels down its nerve fiber and causes the release of a chemical neurotransmitter from its terminal. The transmitter drifts across the synaptic space and binds to a dendrite on the receiving end, thus closing the gap. Essentially, everything the brain does is accomplished by the process of synaptic transmission. (p. 2)

LeDoux’s idea that the self is created and maintained through synaptic connections provides what he assures is a “simple and plausible explanation for how the enormously complex psycho-spiritual-sociocultural package of protoplasm we call our self is possible” (p. 12). This self then, is presented as the totality of what an organism is physically, biologically, psychologically, socially, and culturally. Although it is a unit, it is not unitary. It includes the things that we know and things that we do not know, things that others know about us that we do not realize. LeDoux adds, “it includes features that we express and hide, and some that we simply don’t call upon. It includes what we would like to be as well as what we hope we never become” (p. 31). It is relative to Anderson’s (1997) previously mentioned view of the “human being” but far vaster in scope, and recalls the imagined view of the self as expressed in sociological definitions of identity, but with much more depth.

The brain works much like a larger social structure. It works by forming intricate networks among cells (LeDoux, 2002). This idea of networking is the brain’s own jam session; a
neuron on its own is not productive, but put many together and let them communicate with one another and through electrical and chemical reactions, you literally get “brainstorms”; the creation of new ideas (LeDoux, 2002). The connecting of thoughts through this impromptu ability in the brain allows things to progress; a neurological focus group session, if you will.

How does one account for multiple selves of William James or the multi-dimensional aspect of various I’s and me’s? We do not manifest all aspects of the self simultaneously, LeDoux clarifies. We may even have different aspects which appear contradictory. However, this simply means that various components of the self “reflect the operation of different brain systems, which can be, but are not always in sync” (p. 31). It would be easy here to fall into the trap of categorizing and compartmentalizing the self in relation to roles. However, the synaptic self subverts such attempts at predetermination. Because there are a variety of different brain systems that store information implicitly, a space arises which allows for many aspects of the self to coexist (p. 31). Thus LeDoux confirms that the self is not static, but added to and subtracted from genetic maturation through learning and forgetting, experience and aging (p.29), or as Csikszentmihalyi and other psychologists and biologists suggest, genes and memes. This aspect bears relation to the postmodern notion that the self is socially or discursively constructed.

Brain physiology itself is at once universal, representing an overall structure, while at the same time being incredibly individual and thus diverse. The very nature of the synapse suggests that it cannot be compartmentalized, easily organized or labeled because it is the very locus of interconnectivity and communication, and thus is the ultimate space of possibilities. Therefore, the synaptic self offers not a totalizing view, but a lens through which other conceptualizations of the self may coexist. Recognizing the complex interactions occurring in our brains, we may adopt a fresh perspective on the self and gain clarity in understanding our own self and its relation to others.
Revealing our Commonessence through Strange Loops and Intimate Connectedness

Douglas Hofstadter, a Pulitzer Prize winning philosopher of the cognitive scientific variety, encourages us to look at the “deep and tangled self-model” through his concept of the self as a strange loop (2007). He characterizes the self or what constitutes “I”-ness as being (hold on to your hat) a peculiar type of abstract; a locked-in loop of self-referential shifting from “one level of abstraction (or structure) to another, which feels like an upwards movement in a hierarchy, and yet somehow the successive “upward” shifts turn out to give rise to a closed circle” (p. 102); a mobius strip self of sorts. Hofstadter puts it succinctly; “a strange loop is a paradoxical level-crossing feedback loop” (p. 102). In such a system, everything which seems somehow precise reveals itself as fraught with ambiguity (p. 107). Certainly here, no predetermined roles exist.

What Hofstadter finds so “wonderfully strange” is that we as humans are only focused on the highest level of brain activity, the symbolic level, in understanding our realities. This symbolic level holds “concepts, meanings, desires, and ultimately, our selves” (p. 196). It is a meaningful structure that requires suitable mapping to be understood. But this mapping is not the ‘be all end all’ of meaning. It is again the interaction and communication between meaningful structures, and their adaptability and re-structuring, that constitutes the self. This, contends Hofstadter, is how the human mind works:

By the compounding of old ideas into new structures that become new ideas that can themselves be used in compounds, and round and round endlessly, growing ever more remote from the basic earthbound imagery that is each language’s soil. (p. 201)

Each human being represents a vast meaning structure or pattern. This pattern which includes hopes, dreams, memories, reactions to music, a sense of humour, self-doubt, beliefs, attitudes, and values is to a certain extent sharable with others at a neurological level (p. 230) as well as through language. If one subscribes to a belief in the “noncentralizedness of
consciousness, in its distributedness” (p. 230), that is, that consciousness (being aware of an “I”) doesn’t need to reside in any one particular brain, the possibility of soul-sharing opens up. Through our self story-telling, our sharing of artifacts which house much more than static representations, we place tiny fragments of ourselves in other’s brains, Hofstadter explains. The idea that we can co-feel, that our sense of self is tied up in other’s patterns and strange loops, is a beautiful sentiment. It implies that we, through a sense of shared goals and experiences, somehow live inside each others selves; we can have a shared identity. Our self patterns have even more triggering power that we first perceived and the idea of resonance is imbued with a new sense of awesomeness, moving beyond constructive interference. A person becomes “a point of view” (p. 234) capable of being internalized by another meaningful structure or pattern. Here we are confronted with the “unexpectedness of universality” (p. 242), the dialogical nature of the self at a neurological level.

Not only can the self be perceived as a “point of view,” we, as human beings, are able to take on another’s point of view. Here, V. S. Ramachandran’s (2007) work in the area of mirror neurons is of particular interest. He views our ability to take on another person’s point of view as a process that evolution has turned back on itself, allowing us to become self-aware. The formation of self then is considered a recursive process. Ramachandran submits consciousness may have evolved in a social context, going to far as to suggest, “‘other awareness’ may have evolved first” (2007, p. 1). Our shared identity and our sense of shared goals and experiences are explained through the existence of mirror neurons, essentially neurons which fire when we see others performing a task, or imagine how others feel at any given time. This is why they have been dubbed “empathy neurons” (Ramachandran, 2007). The sensation of taking on another’s vantage point then, is explained through the firing of mirror neurons “that originally evolved to help you adopt another's point of view (but has) turned inward to look at your own self. This, in
essence, is the basis of things like "introspection" (p. 4). Thus, our “empathy neurons” dissolve the barrier between self and other. In fact, in *Phantoms in the Brain* (1999, with Sandra Blakeslee) Ramachandran explains that if someone pokes my arm with a needle it registers in my brain; I feel pain in my arm courtesy of sensory pain neurons. If that same arm is anesthetized, in effect deactivating those sensory neurons, and I see your arm being poked, I now also feel that touch courtesy of mirror neurons. Turns out that all that separates us from one another…is our skin (Ramachandran, 2007).

Although it may seem like a leap, I see many connections in these ways of thinking on the self and engagement in collaborative self-study. Collaborative self-study provides a unique opportunity to simultaneously engage in self-awareness and other-awareness, and through the act of hearing our narrative come back at us, we may “turn inward to look at ourselves.” The effect of revisiting stories outside the self, voicing our own stories numerous times, inviting comments from others, hearing similar stories from others, and reading our stories—essentially seeing them from the vantage point of an “other”—show how narrative, collaborative, and self-study methods of inquiry can contribute to developing our empathic awareness, both of self and other. By actively searching out and recognizing our patterns of interconnectivity, we gain a richer sense of self; we undergo a transformative experience, essentially shedding our skin through narrative acts, revealing our intimate interconnectedness; our common essence, or *commonessence*.

**Music Education and the Brain**

A few scholars have begun to recognize the possible contribution of a neurological perspective for music education. Bennett Reimer (2004) suggested the lesson for music educators in regard to brain research is that every musical experience we encounter affects and changes our brains
permanently, and that this process which we call “learning” is precisely the function of music education (p. 25). Reimer calls for a consilience between brain research and the humanities, but his interests lead to a somewhat confusing goal of “educating our feelings” (p. 27). Colin Durrant (2003) writes of the human brain with an interest in the interdependency of the brain and body coined in his term “bodymind” (p. 13). Like Reimer, Durrant is keenly interested in the manner in which our brains process music and its implications for learning. However, Durrant’s specific purpose in discussion of the brain is to create a basis for a holistic approach to choral conducting and rehearsal.

In a response to David Elliott’s (1995) *Music Matters*, Wayne Bowman (2000) admitted a new found interest in neurological literature. Bowman’s concerns that Elliott’s materialist orientation to mind and selfhood require a more decisive “break from idealism and the cognitive theories of consciousness and mind that are its legacy” (p. 1) directed him to address embodiment issues, albeit in a different manner than Durrant. Inspired by his readings primarily of neurologists Antonio Damasio and Oliver Sacks, Bowman depicts philosophy of mind as “explicitly embodied” (p. 1) clarifying that it must not only accommodate the body, but “incorporate it as a constitutive element of mind” (p.1). Bowman contends that we should destabilize the musical object, and decentre the self that cognizes music so we may arrive at a point where both “subject and object become pluralized” and “mutually implicated” in each other (p. 2). In this sense, self and music both become more fluid, transient, and constructed; a departure from the insular, singular, and stable self he sees represented in Elliott’s *Music Matters* (1995). Bowman seeks to balance the scales by placing embodiment on the opposite side of the fulcrum and looks for the “corporeal moment in human cognition” (p. 1). Criticizing Elliott’s selfhood which “seems to neglect its fluidity, constructedness, and contingency” (p. 13), Bowman sketches the beginning of what he terms an “experientially-grounded, corporeal
account of music” situated at the “nexus of knowing, doing and, being” (p. 13). Is this angle in want of more attention to communication? Does a corporeal account bind us to our bodies?

I believe we need an avenue for connections, an avenue for interactions. What if we looked also to approaches such as Gould’s (2002) philosophy as experience, which she describes as “inhered with delight in uncertainty, joy in the unexpected, excitement in change” (p. 298) and which seems to embody principles of proteanism and thus “makes room for fluidity and dynamic vitality” (p. 298)? What if we embraced concepts which recognize that the ability to make meaning is at once a unique and shared experience such as Stuart Younse’s (2004) concept of dialogic interactionism, in which students’ abilities to construct their selves emerged organically from interactions and dialogues between students, teachers and the music? If we were to revel in the fact that music education is a space that encourages individuals to realize potential and engages in positive evolutionary actions, what might be the outcome? Such a view’s purpose would not be to build the best institutions, establish standards, or put forth the most compelling beliefs. Rather, it would allow creativity to consistently assert itself. Could this be accomplished through an ongoing and relentless effort aimed at recognizing complexity? This complex system, however, would not neglect its past or give up one of its parts in favour of another because its parts, no matter how diverse, are organically related to one another. Naturally, it is a challenge to recognize complexity in everyday life. I believe that music education is up for such a challenge. I feel that choral music educators are up for such a challenge. The first step is to recognize the complexity inherent in our musical selves, and embrace our connectedness to one another. Collaborative self-study can aid us in such a quest and lead us to co-feel and live inside each other’s selves.
Music Education and the Synaptic Self: A Synaptic Synergy

How can a neurological theory of the self inform music education? First, at a micro level, it requires simply that we consider the self both as the producer and processor of music and remain attuned to the various selves interacting in our classrooms and ensemble atmospheres. Secondly, through its inherently reflexive nature, it encourages the music educator to be both aware of their own self and to care for this self. Finally, it reveals to us that we are our synapses and as such, “there are always new connections waiting to be made” (LeDoux, 2002, p. 324). The synaptic self represents an embracing of complexity in its recognition of a need for a balance between differentiation and integration. Integration in this conceptualization represents more of an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) rather than suggesting any type of assimilation. Like a strange loop, it is relentlessly communicative with the goal of enhancement between many mutually implicated networks, not just the body and the mind.

This required attention to self, the embodierr of music, necessarily shifts focus away from what Gould (2002) terms “traditional and totalizing approach(es)” grounded in “linear logic, theory, and power that are irrelevant and irreducible to the lived experiences of music educators” (p. 290). Such a theory sheds underlying attempts at advocacy promising self-growth, self-awareness, or improved self-esteem. It resists standardized methods of implementation, evaluation, and the confines of institutionalization. It claims resilience and challenges long held traditions which seek to override new ways of conceptualizing music education. But it does not divide or separate us; “synaptic connections hold the self together” (LeDoux, p. 323). As such, synaptic connections hold our thoughts, motivations, and emotions together. Interaction, communication, and complexity hold us together. In a synaptic sense we are unified, but never at the expense of our own “soul-uniqueness” (Hofstadter, 2007, p. 235). There is still room to celebrate our idiographic perceptions.
At the macro level, one can almost envision these approaches as a music educator’s own perceived multiple identities begging recognition and interaction. The music educator then, conceptualized as a synaptic self, capable of inhabiting other selves through our “points of view” (Hofstadter, p. 237) provides a location where multiple approaches may coexist, not simply in a dialectical form, but relative to a more rhizomatic-like state which is described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987) as “always in the middle, between things, interbeing, intermezzo. . . uniquely alliance” (p. 25). In this space various categorical and deterministic identities of the music educator as performer or teacher, student or conductor, converge and mutate, creating a space where multiple incarnations of identities are embraced within and between individuals (Zingsheim, 2008, p. 19), and more importantly, are capable of ongoing mutation and reformation. It is a fluid space, striving for complexity in its recognition of differentiation and continual integration. It is a space where tension and ambiguity are valued within an eternally transitional, evolving form that consistently interacts with others. In short, the choral music educator self exists in a continual state of becoming, an eternal looping, and this state can be recognized, explored, and honoured in the telling of our personal narratives and in listening to those narratives told by others.

In Summary

While music educators have begun exploring brain research, no one has yet employed neurological theory as an approach to music education in itself. The majority of brain books caution that brain science is still a new area of research and there is much to be learned in the field of neurology. Perhaps as the body of research grows, and our philosophical thinking expands to include such considerations, neurological approaches will find their way into
educational and music educational thought as research becomes more accessible and its implications more clearly understood.

Reimer (2004) suggests that there may “very well be a defensible consilience of our biology and our devotion to music education” (p. 27). I am suggesting that there may very well be a defensible consilience in multiple conceptualizations of the music educator self when that self is illuminated through a synaptic lens. That is to say that a self viewed as a product of synaptic organization, encoded with the information of past transmissions, both productive and responsive in nature, represents a space in which all other conceptualizations of the self—psychological, social, moral, philosophical—are concomitantly realized. Such a conceptualization recognizes complexity as one of its fundamental features, and embraces proteanism at both micro and macro levels. It allows us to entwine, and live inside each other, inhabiting and being “inhabited to a certain extent by other I’s, each other’s souls” (Hofstadter, 2007, p. 248). It leads to a more dynamic and positive outlook in its dialogical approach; an approach which reveals and celebrates our intimate interconnectivity; our commonessence.

When I look up from my office desk I see the laminated copy of R. Murray Schafer’s “Maxims for Educators” tacked on to my bulletin board, another cherished gift from a fellow graduate student. Number eight reads: “On the contrary, a class should be an hour of a thousand discoveries. For this to happen, the teacher and student should first discover one another.” I hope my considerations of the self have positioned me to heed Schafer’s call on a most intimate level. To attempt to be both aware and responsive to my own continual shapeshifting, to strive for complexity in my classroom and academic work, and to embrace my synaptic self and the possibilities this understanding provides me as I continue on my own journey of becoming. Such considerations have certainly shaped my doctoral research journey.
CHAPTER FOUR
READY FOR TAKE OFF: RESEARCH DESIGN

If strategies of inquiry built upon a methodology guide one to their final destination, methods can be viewed as the mode of transportation. In *Exploring Research in Music Education and Music Therapy* (2006), Ken Phillips, drawing from Rossman and Rallis (1998) and Creswell (2003) reminded that qualitative research engages with multiple and interactive methods which often involve participants in the data collection process (p. 84). Multiple strategies are employed in the investigation, and the “personal self is inseparable from the researcher self” thus bringing a sense of honesty, reflecting the personal background of the researcher and the personal values they bring to the study. Ideally, Phillips expresses, “the more complex, interactive, and encompassing the narrative, the better the qualitative study” (2008, p. 84). The following design seeks to emulate such standards.

*Searching Out “Composers”: Co-Researcher Recruitment*

In coming to understand a few members of a profession we can come to better understand the profession as a whole.

(Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 32)

I sit with Henry in the bustling café. The cacophonous clinking of cups and saucers, of knives, forks, and spoons on white china plates does not distract our conversation. “It was ...poetic,” he says to me, referring to my initial self-study that I’ve politely demanded he
Heading the advice given by Hunt (1994) that one should not postpone initial contact with possible participants, I took the opportunity to discuss my initial self-study and the intuitive sparks and ideas that followed with my mentor, Henry, in the developmental stages of my research. As a recently retired, well respected choral music educator and conductor, Henry has much influence in the choral community and has many years of valuable experience behind him. He also tells one heck of a story. Connecting with Henry and informally asking him to relay his opinions regarding the possibilities of a collaborative self-study in our field and within the close-knit choral community in Manitoba was invaluable. His comments, as well as his agreement of participation, allowed me, as Oldfather and West (1994) explain, to “read” a potential participant in order to discover their feelings regarding the importance of such research. Receiving such a positive reading from Henry strengthened my conviction that self-study research could expand beyond its seemingly exclusive involvement with teacher educators to embrace the professional practice of community and school music educators.

Manitoba is my home province; therefore I have an intimate understanding of the nature of choral music education at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels of schooling and the choral environment in which these educators teach. Through purposeful selection, three
additional participants, besides Henry, whose careers represent varied lengths in the choral education field were recruited from a pool of personal contacts in the Manitoba choral community. I have been, and continue to be heavily involved in the choral community in numerous capacities. As such, there are few teachers and conductors in the choral field who have not either had some contact with me in a professional context or do not know me personally. This gives me somewhat of an “insider privilege” which Willingham (2001) suggests is created from familiarity and a level of trust, allowing the exploration of a range of responses and reflection (p. 66). Here, I followed the lead of June Countryman (2007) in problematizing the invitation of friends and colleagues as participants as it may give the impression of having already decided on a preference or having taken a particular stand (Glesne, 2006, as cited in Countryman, p. 29). Research focused on the self that is not looking to draw general conclusions, and which relies on the creation of a positive, secure, and cooperative research environment coupled with a genuine interest in the uniqueness of each research participant may avoid such pitfalls. In striving to create, as much as is possible in a postmodern world, a research environment where participants feel they are able to communicate on equal footing and express honest opinions and personal stories, the comfort afforded by previously established relationships serves to create a supportive and safe co-researcher atmosphere.

There were other factors germane to participant recruitment. In choosing participants, I reflected on the careers and extensive experiences of the choral educators I have come to know, and their willingness to engage in dialogue surrounding their experiences. My interest lay in participants who have the ability to offer insight and contribute to the development of a collaborative and cohesive research group which is so integral to a study focused on communication and making connections. Great consideration was given to participants’ current
commitments, interest in reflecting on their practice, and availability for focus groups and interviews before approaching them to participate in the study.

Drawing co-researchers from varied contexts, backgrounds, and career stages provided a variety of perspectives. Two participants, Henry and Derek, are newly retired, but still extremely active in the choral community in a variety of conducting, teaching, and advisory positions. Here, I turn to the words of Marie McCarthy (2007) and the wisdom she suggests their narratives may contribute to our profession: “The professional identity of music teachers is in large part due to the socialization within the professional community, the institutions that shape their practice during their careers, and preceding generations of music teachers. Knowing stories of earlier generations adds depth and further resonance to stories that emerge in the present” (p.9). Another participant, Elroy, is roughly my age (hovering around forty). He taught for many years in the public school system and now holds a university position which includes working with preservice teachers and Masters degree students. The fourth participant, Sonya, currently teaches in the school system and is in the first decade of her career.

Co-researchers had to be willing to commit to a research period of six months and extend their availability for member-checking three months following the research period. In reality this member-checking period extended far past this period to include the following year as I discovered how naïve my initial timeline for completion was, given that I was teaching at the same time (a popular cause of derailment for many a PhD student). The data collection methods which participants agreed to over the research period lasting from December, 2009 through mid-May, 2010 included some ongoing reflective journal writing, the collecting of personal artifacts, some informal participant observation, three focus group sessions of three to four hours each, and two semi-structured interviews of approximately two hours each. Co-researchers were
invited to dialogue with me and each other at any point throughout the study; in fact, such ongoing contact was encouraged.

Participants were initially contacted by email or phone call to set up a preliminary meeting wherein I fully explained the nature and parameter of the study before inviting their participation. A presentation of initial interview questions, as well as a clear outline of expectations and the nature of collaborative self-study research, aided in determining co-researchers’ participation. Before the onset of the research period, a personal meeting with me outlined the parameters of the study in a more detailed manner. Participants then met as a group for further clarification. During this meeting, the collaborative nature of the project was made transparent and a hand out which described the purpose of the research and provided a proposed timeline was distributed. A schedule for focus group meetings and rough interview times was agreed upon. Additionally, interview protocols and consent forms approved by the University of Toronto Ethics Review Board were distributed. Issues surrounding confidentiality were raised and significant time was spent discussing the issue of anonymity and the participants’ wishes in this regard. It was left open to the participants to decide whether they might choose to be identified by their actual name rather than a chosen pseudonym after member checking had been completed. This decision would wait until completion of the thesis and after participants had dialogued with me after seeing how their narratives had been interpreted. To that point, it would be assumed that confidentiality would be maintained and pseudonyms used so that participants felt comfortable during discussions. Thus, their involvement in the research was confined to our group. After the final chapters were completed, each participant met with me. We read the chapter aloud and discussed the accuracy of their statements in the new context of my interpretation. After this process, each participant heartily agreed to use their real name. I was glad this option had been kept open. We then discussed other names that arose in their stories.
Names of students were omitted and those whose real names were used were asked permission. There were some figures that were spoken of in a most affirmative light that have passed on; their real names are also used.

Ongoing contact and support for the process of self-discovery from the principal researcher was made available, and the addition of a journal and offer of a reflective journal writing guide based on Ballantyne and Packer (1995) reflective journal writing strategies were presented. The amount of journal writing was left to the discretion of each participant. As Marla Ann Butke (2006) warned, journals are meant to be vehicles for personal expression, rather than a burden. Some participants asked if they could record things on their computers and send writings to me as an alternative to journal writing and this was agreed upon. Each participant was given a writing journal to use by me. Some participants let me know that this wouldn’t be their strong suit and it was made clear that the level of journal writing was at their discretion as dialogue was the focus of the research, and their incredibly busy professional schedules were always to be respected.

**Sketching a Collaborative Composition: Data Collection Methods**

“I don’t like the term *blend,* Tom” I told him. He was bent on adding it to the evaluative categories on the standardized adjudication sheet for the divisional choral festival he had asked me to adjudicate.

I was bent on keeping it off.

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3 A pseudonym is used here.
We sat for a moment in contemplative silence at his solid oak dining room table, croissants and Kraft jams piled in the basket before us, cradled by the yellow floral print napkin which matched the walls of his bright, sunny kitchen.

He sipped slowly from his oversized cup of french roast, and pressed the matter slightly, “But isn’t that the most important thing that we’re trying to achieve in choral singing, Cath? Great blend?”

“No, not for me” I replied. “I like great balance. I don’t really want to hear just one bland sound. I want to hear all the voices. I want them to resonate freely. I’m concerned about the individual voices, Tom.”

I always have been.

(Journal Entry, 2009)

The choral discipline has traditionally been, and continues to be, a discipline boastful of its blended sound. Singers are asked to listen, not to hear the individual textures and varying vocal colours that surround them in the choral experience, but in order to match their own sound to those around them. They listen, ironically, to suppress the unique sounds of their individual voice so that they may “blend in” and sound like, well, all the others. A conductor/director can improve on the “blend” of the choir by subduing, quieting, silencing the disparate nuances of timbre, the subtle, individual differences in tone representative of the singers in a choir. These practical considerations characteristic of the choral discipline are contradictory to the data collection strategies available to the qualitative researcher. The dialogue and expression of co-researchers’ unique “sounds” is exactly what is encouraged throughout self-study research. The individual voice of each participant was elicited through a variety of data collection techniques involving focus group meetings, journal writing, collecting of artifacts, participant observation,
and in-depth interviews which may be thought of as representing various aspects of inquiry: exploring, inquiring, examining, interrogating, experiencing, and supporting. Such collection techniques represent various purposes of self-study research such as exploring understandings surrounding the development of identity through life stories (Danielwicz, 2001), retrospectively examining personal life history (Louie, 2003), and encouraging educators to critically examine their practice and “push the boundaries” of their own teaching (Samaras et al., 2004).

**Journals**

. . . it was not until I was invited to write this chapter that I confronted the task of thinking systematically about (how the arts have influenced my thinking). . . writing forces you to reflect in an organized and focused way on what it is you want to say. Words written confront you and give you the opportunity to think again. Thinking on its own, without the commitment that writing exacts, makes tolerable—even pleasurable—the flashing thought, the elusive image. (Eisner, 1991, p. 34)

Co-researchers were asked to keep reflective journals and to write from the experiences in their current choral situations. Journals also provided a place to record past epiphanal moments as they resurfaced, sparked by group discussion and dialogue in interviews and in collecting artifacts to share in focus group sessions. Questions, concerns, opinions, and understandings are welcome in reflective journal writing. What is most encouraged is the telling of stories relative to the musical past of the educator as they strive to link theory with practice, and connect their conception of personal musical identity to their professional practice.

Although there were good intentions at the onset of the research process, extensive journal writing played only a minor role in each participant’s personal self-study process. Some
scattered thoughts and past experiences surfaced in casual fashion in journals and brief notes were written as prompts in preparation for interviews and focus group sessions. Additionally, notes, questions, and thoughts were jotted down during focus group sessions. Since journal entries were not considered as much an integral part of the research process as interviews and focus groups, and it was understood that the time commitment during the primary data collection period was significant, the issue was not pressed upon. The journal writing that was completed was given to me and incorporated into the data analysis and representation. It must be noted, however, that co-researchers also passed on other related artifacts such as career resumes, speeches written by and about them, and past interviews. They also contacted me on a consistent basis to share thoughts that arose through emails, informal conversations in person, and over the phone.

**Focus Group Sessions**

After so much spirited talking throughout the whole four hours, there was an almost sudden pause at the end of our first session and we just kind of sat for a moment, reflecting on the journey we had just shared, kind of just “taking it in.” A collective sigh of finality followed that seemed to be threaded through our consciousness at that moment, like the final ritardando and cut-off after the piece of music has found it’s cadence; that moment you cooperatively sense the package is complete and has found some sense of resolution.

“Can you believe where we went today? I had no idea we all had such rich and interesting lives! And so different.” Derek commented in his deep low bass voice with a chuckle as he rose to begin packing up. “It’s quite remarkable. I hadn’t thought of these things in years and I ended up telling so many stories I hadn’t planned. Things you all were saying just kept reminding me of so many moments. It’s unbelievable.”

(Research journal and segment of transcription from first session, December, 2009)
Although individual interview is often the primary method of data collection in qualitative research, I turned to discussion in focus group sessions as the integral part of data collection process for this study. As noted in chapter three of this document, I struggled early on in the planning stages of my doctoral journey to reconcile the isolated view of individual interview procedures. It just didn’t seem enough for me. I truly thought there needed to be some kind of connection that enhanced the process of musical self-searching. I had a personal belief in the connectedness of self to other and was drawn particularly to Joseph LeDoux’s talk of “convergence zones” in *The Synaptic Self* (2002). Le Doux explains that brain systems learn in parallel, but this is not enough to “account for the coherent personality of the human being” (p. 315). It is the existence of “convergence zones,” defined by LeDoux as “regions where information from diverse (brain) systems can be integrated” (p. 315, emphasis added) that complete the process. Once information is integrated, it can be used in turn, to influence processing in the regions of input; these seemingly independent systems are enhanced. Such brain processes, when applied to self-formation, allow us to view the construction of the self from a different angle. Could this idea be mirrored in my research design? Yes. By incorporating focus group sessions that play an equal, if not more important role in the research process. I believed these focus group sessions would have the ability to enhance the uniqueness of each participant-self through connectedness and interaction.

Focus groups were followed by an individual interview session—approximately two to three weeks later—which provided a space where personal narratives and fractured anecdotes, little comments, queries, and incidents could be revisited, clarified, and expanded upon. Thus, focus group sessions became “exploration sessions” where we listened and told, allowing details and images to trigger our own memories. Our personalities converged. This process looks to
Davies and Gannon’s (2006) work in collective biography for inspiration. They describe such a process as having “actively excavated what was buried, amazing ourselves with what we find in our own and each others’ memories” (p. 10). Derek’s comments at the onset of this section illustrate these feelings among co-researchers. “Focus group sessions” in this respect morphed from the typical gathering of information regarding a topic to a memory-sharing session. I fully participated in the focus group venture as a participant as well as a researcher, sharing my own narrative which I was able to interrogate at a later date through listening and transcription. This process added a rich quality to the personal interviews that followed. After a period of reflection, many ideas were floating around and co-researchers were able to revisit, qualify, and add to stories and thoughts, as mentioned above. The interview process is discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

The concept of “guided conversations” suggested by Cole and Knowles (2001) was used as a method of gathering information between “friends” in which a relationship built on “mutuality and commonality” encourages purposeful, yet authentic interaction (p. 72). The focus group sessions in this study were a cross between the topic oriented nature of such “guided conversations” and elements of autobiographical self-study research (Loughran, 2004) and collective biography (Davies & Gannon, 2006). As such, it became more than a group interview situation, it was what Dimitriadis and Kamberelis (2005) characterize as a collective conversation; a perspective sharing session which, in its detail sharing and listening, makes our storytelling more fluid and, as Davies and Gannon (2006) suggest of collective biography “more open to other possibilities” (p. 5).

My hope for the focus group sessions also stemmed from Beattie’s (1995) suggestion that collaborative narrative inquiry can encourage the researcher and participants to create new knowledge through the linking of our past and current experiences into a narrative unity which
intertwines researcher and participant. With this purpose in mind, numerous methods of self-study research, expanded on below, were employed in order to elicit multiple and divergent perspectives in our *convergence zone*. The opportunity to receive support from the principal researcher and other co-researchers in the self-study process, share past stories, and collectively examine the choral discipline—bouncing ideas and understandings off one another—was greatly exciting to me as a researcher/educator. On a practical level, such meetings allowed me to share emergent themes yielded through ongoing data analysis and created a wonderfully reflexive atmosphere where I, as a researcher, could gauge my own interaction and continuously prepare myself for subsequent interviews and focus group sessions.

Morgan (2001) suggested that methods which prize a less structured approach to focus groups leaves open the possibility for numerous avenues of exploration: allowing questions to guide the discussion, the dominance of participants’ interests, flexible allocation of time, participant dialogue, and the facilitating of interaction and seeking of new directions by the moderator/researcher (p. 147). Although a less structured approach leaves open the possibility for serendipity (Knapp, 1997, Cole & Knowles, 2001), Morgan (2001) has additionally argued that good moderating is as important as good recruitment, question writing, and analysis. Thus, a solid plan, coupled with a pocketful of strategies in anticipation of possible derailment, is necessary for successful focus group sessions. As such, I developed a focus group outline incorporating life history and self-study methods for collecting stories of experience, and sparking discussion regarding participants’ attitudes, beliefs, opinions and values, necessary to understand my research question(s). Co-researchers were asked to bring collected artifacts, notes to spark personal stories and histories, journal reflections, questions and concerns, and enter into dialogue regarding the construction of their musical selves. Sessions were held, as Cole and Knowles (2001) suggest, in varied contexts to open access to a wealth of pertinent information
and “call forth responses to (the) environment” (p. 75). Each session began with a talking circle
(Wilson, 2008) type atmosphere where each co-researcher had the opportunity to talk in turn
about the focus of the session so that all had an equal chance to speak and be heard.
Conversation then blossomed into open discussion and co-researchers were (without any
prompting from me) mindful of how much they spoke in relation to others and keenly interested
in the stories of others, fascinated by our diverse backgrounds. Surprises surfaced with regard to
our upbringings, our early musical interests, and the way in which we perceived and spoke of our
musical selves.

The group meetings were four hours in length and were moderated by me (although very
loosely). They were audio-taped with a digital recorder and multiple microphones, as well as
through Garage Band on an Apple computer, and transcribed verbatim by the researcher in great
detail, paying heed to subtle nuances in the story telling such as word emphasis, pauses, laughter,
sighs, hesitation, and excitement. Notes were made during the sessions of participants’ gestures,
body language, and facial expressions as much as was possible without being intrusive to the
process and without sacrificing a genuine listening to stories. Food, coffee, and tea were
provided for snacking and a larger meal was enjoyed at the half-way point break after two hours
in an attempt to create a relaxed and enjoyable research atmosphere. The detailing of each
session follows.

Focus Group Session 1

An initial focus on early experiences and influences can provide a means to begin exploring
assumptions, beliefs, values, and intentions imbedded within daily actions (Cole & Knowles,
2000). Experiences may be shaped by context, but our evaluation of others’ experiences and our
understandings of others and their communities are filtered through our understanding of our selves. Thus, personal experience is a good place to start as co-researchers may begin sharing their musical life histories before moving to deeper explorations of context. This first session was designed to honour participant experiences, establish individual agency, and introduce our musical selves to co-researchers. The recognition of co-researchers’ narratives provided a source from which to engage in personal reflection and subsequently, a questioning of larger contexts. The focus group also provided, as previously mentioned, greater freedom as the initial data collected surfaced in the form of incidents, stories, and anecdotes in linear, segmented or fractured form.

The focus of this session was expressed to participants before we met so that they were able to prepare individually before coming and chose stories meaningful to them to share with others. We met in a newly painted classroom at the University of Manitoba which was quiet and filled with both sunlight and musically inspired artwork.

**Sharing of Initial Reflective Journal Writing**

- Participants were asked to share the thoughts and stories which arose from initial journal writing prior to first meeting. After personal reflection and brainstorming, participants had decided on some early stories they would like to share as we began to personally and collaboratively “compose our selves.”

**Collecting of Artifacts**

- Participants were asked to share pre-career artifacts which have meaning to them or spark stories or images of early musical influences. Artifacts included personal recordings of
their own music making, musical scores, books, hymnals, old concert programs, favourite records, festival adjudications, Royal Conservatory examinations, and pictures.

**Focus group Questions**

- General focus group questions were designed to generate discussion and storytelling. These questions were printed out and participants had them in front of them so that spontaneous thoughts could be either written down for later or immediately expressed, although conversations were encouraged to go where they needed:

1. Can you describe some of your earliest musical memories?
2. Who did you share these experiences with and in what context did they emerge?
3. What type of music were you drawn to, how was it expressed?
4. Looking back, did any of these early experiences lead to or influence later music making or contribute to the way you saw yourself as a musician or non-musician?
5. Can you talk about the artifacts you have chosen to bring in and their significance to you?

**Peer Interviewing**

- Engaging in peer interviewing here is seen as a means of supporting life history methods. Reflections regarding mutual actions, and actions we’ve shared with others remind us that we are who we are not just inside ourselves, but also in relation to others (Cole & Knowles, 2001). The idea for this addition to the focus group sessions was sparked by a class exercise in a graduate course with Mary Beattie at the University of Toronto. I learned much about myself and my interview partner in the process and so sought to incorporate this into my research design. Pairing off in twos to discuss, elaborate, and share invites deeper meanings to surface through slightly more intimate contact. It was at this point that the participants truly became co-researchers. One pair branched off into another separate quiet room while the others remained. After these interviews, participants returned to discuss not only the understandings that formed when they answered each other’s questions, but what they realized when listening to other’s narratives. Each interview was digitally audio-recorded so I was able to transcribe both sets of interviews. Personal interview questions grew from previous discussions in the
focus group session and emerged from aspects of conversation that co-researchers found intriguing or wish to revisit. Posed with a format of “Can you tell me more….,” “How did you….”, and “Can you reframe or expand on…..,” these questions represent the genuine interests of the co-researchers and the stories and understandings they are sharing with each other.

At the point in the focus group session where it was time to break off, immediately Derek expressed that he was very interested in some stories Elroy had been telling and wanted to know more. Henry expressed a desire to get to know Sonya and hear more about her childhood and cultural upbringing. And so the pairs were formed amicably and quickly with the hope that the next time round there would be some different pairings. After, co-researchers returned invigorated and ready to tell a few more stories and share what they thought about others stories. As a researcher, listening to the topics that were raised and the questions into participants’ pasts provided another layer of inquiry and a point of view which would have been unattainable for me without such a method. It truly allowed for greater insight into the meaning making process of the choral music educators who participated in this study.

**Focus Group Session 2**

The second focus group session moved the research process further toward one of the uses of self-study research (previously mentioned in the introduction) according to Samaras et al. (2004): “self-knowing and forming—and reforming—a professional identity” (p. 905). It took place around the meeting table at the Manitoba Choral Association where we were surrounded by shelves and shelves of choral scores, pictures and posters boasting Manitoba’s rich choral
heritage, an old upright piano, and the feeling of kinship that comes from being involved in a community of choral music educators. This session provided an arena to revisit some of the perspectives raised in the preceding sessions and began the process of exploring narratives of professional practice and the co-researchers’ understanding of these stories. Artifacts for this focus group session consisted of materials representative of professional practice and included musical scores, musical theatre scripts, curricula, cards from students, speeches written by colleagues, photographs, music tour mementos, festival adjudication sheets, gifts from students, and recordings of performances. Not all of the artifacts enjoy a description in the data representation, but sharing these mementos sparked many wonderful narratives. Peer interviewing was not available to this session due to a technical glitch with the computer that was also recording the session. Left with only one digital recorder we continued in group fashion for this session. Because of the emergent design characteristic of much qualitative research and the messiness and muddiness anticipated as the research process unfolds (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 64), “less is more” questions, free from suggestion similar to those presented in the first focus group, guided the conversations. The questions presented below framed the topic of professional practice and were again offered to co-researchers for guidance. It must be noted though, that much of the conversation simply drifted into each of these areas naturally through our discussions as we invited each others narratives and interrogated the topics that arose in discussion:

**Focus group 2 questions**

1. Are there any experiences, either positive or negative, in the course of your professional practice that stand out? Can you describe these experiences?

2. How did you decide to pursue music education as a career?
3. How would you characterize the relationships you’ve had with those in your professional practice? Who do they involve? Can you elaborate on specific instances?

4. Do you recognize an influence regarding your perception of your own musical identity as influencing any areas of your current and past professional practice? Can you describe how has this been enacted?

5. Can you talk about the artifacts you have chosen to bring in and their significance to you and those you teach/conduct?

Focus Group Session 3

The final focus group session looked to “push the boundaries of teaching” as Samaras et al. (2004, p. 905) have suggested. At the onset, we took time to revisit the themes which had emerged from the personal interviews, previous focus group sessions, and the consistent revisiting and re-presenting of our personal narratives throughout the process thus far. The hope was that this final session might, as Janice Huber (1999) discovered in her work contextualizing our place on the professional knowledge landscape, move the conversation “deeper into the underground, uncovering important self-truths that were shaping the surface of our (professional) landscape” (p. 19). The addition of Mezirow’s (1990) method of conceptual mapping—modified to suit the initial research purpose—strives to encourage co-researchers to make further connections between self and practice, and brings them within grasp of evaluating and purposefully interrogating their professional practice and its context. It represents a group of professionals examining “the issues” as Countryman (2007) suggests they do, but from a place where these issues are intimately related to their own experiences. Carrying the knowledge of each others’ experiences into this final session placed us in a unique position to understand the
issues that continually surface in our discipline from a “self-first” stance. Thus, it was in this focus group session that the final two subquestions of my research were more fully illuminated: How has prior knowledge shaped the musical self of five choral music educators? How were the attitudes, values, and beliefs formed that inhere in the musical self of five choral music educators? We returned to the same room as the first session so the white board could be used for brainstorming in our quest to “trouble certainty” as Barrett and Stauffer (2009) suggest narrative researchers in music education do.


- Co-researchers began with a story, concept or activity of concern to themselves, students or their choral programs past and present, and brainstormed to try and determine some institutional and ideological factors which might influence the concept. Concepts arose from semi-structured interviews and previous focus group sessions; questions and topics that were now floating around after our times together.

- Co-researchers evaluated aspects of their involvement with music. In describing ideas and looking for influences, inconsistencies and tensions, as well as strong connections, were sought out. They looked at:
  1. what is/was important, i.e. so that learning central to the situation for them can occur
  2. what is/was puzzling (cognitive dissonance), so that learning can result in a new synthesis of knowledge, feeling, or ideas
  3. what is/was constraining, so that learning can result in the expansion and emancipation of choice

The above points remained on the whiteboard for the session and served as a guide while we let our conversation branch off in all directions and related our feelings and opinions regarding our discipline. This provided an opportunity to look at how the choral music discipline shapes us, affects our concepts of our selves and contributes to or constrains the development of
our musical personalities. Co-researchers related anecdotes, little vignettes, as well as long held opinions and hopes for the future. The conversation wove through many aspects of our careers and musical lives lived, connecting recent and past experiences to our current knowledge and understandings, while uncovering some hidden assumptions related to our strong beliefs regarding our practice. We wore many hats both past and present: teacher, conductor, adjudicator, clinician, critic, singer/participant, student, and mentor. The conversation was rich and diverse, motivating and excited, thoughtful and animated. We brought up things we thought we knew and things we felt we just couldn’t figure out. We offered support and interrogated each others’ narratives with affirmation and understanding. It was a rewarding experience to take the time to engage in such discussion. Our selves converged. The boundaries of our current perspectives were indeed expanded and I believe this session left us, as Bowman (2009) suggests narrative inquiry should, “a more perceptive educator,” and a “more critically aware music education practitioner” (p. 217).

**Interviews**

The role of the interview in this research was to clarify, elaborate, and verify experiences, perspectives, issues, and knowledge which surfaced throughout the focus group session, and to provide an opportunity for the researcher to strengthen relationships with and among co-researchers on a more personal level. It provided a more intimate setting for the participants to share aspects of their musical self. Johnson (2001) explains that in-depth interviews usually seek “deeper information” (p. 104) and as such investigate matters of a personal nature such as an “individual’s self, lived experience, values and decisions, and occupational ideology.” He adds that the interviewer takes on the role of “an active sense maker and interpreter of what is seen or
I conducted two semi-structured interviews approximately two hours in length with each co-researcher. These interviews served to clarify each co-researcher’s understandings of the choral music phenomenon and explored, on a more personal level, narratives expressed in the focus group sessions while seeking to elicit narratives as yet uncovered by the research process. The interviews were scheduled throughout the focus group sessions. The first set of individual interviews occurred after the first session and, due to scheduling around participants busy lives, some of the second set occurred after both the second and third focus group sessions. Like the focus group sessions, interviews were audio-recorded after which they were transcribed verbatim. Interviews took place in locations of mutual agreement. Most were conducted in the co-researchers homes and three took place in restaurants and coffee shops. A digital voice recorder with noise cancellation features was used in the latter situations and this ensured that the speech of the interviewer and interviewee were clear at all times.

In addition, informal, unrecorded interviews occurred sporadically throughout the research process. These conversations took place over coffee and lunch, on the phone, in chance meetings at concerts and after rehearsals, and at conferences and professional development sessions, and were of a fairly consistent nature. Emails asking for clarification or little wonderings that surfaced when data was being transcribed and analyzed were often sent out to co-researchers and were always answered with intriguing anecdotes and vignettes. Co-researchers also sent thoughts to me as they occurred and continued to discuss the impact of our explorations of the musical self on their practice on an ongoing basis throughout the research
process. This strengthened the researcher/co-researcher relationship and ensured that data was verified by the co-researchers on an ongoing basis during both the data collection process and during analysis. Such a process highlights the non-linear/cyclical approach to qualitative (Lichtman, 2006) and life history research (Cole & Knowles, 2001) mentioned in chapter two, where a weaving of data collection and initial analysis continues in a back and forth manner, interacting with each other and the data as it surfaces.

Although this process was dynamic in nature, I decided to follow Merriam’s (1998) advice regarding the development of interview guides in structuring effective interviews to ensure there was enough of a structure to maintain a flow of ideas. I began the first set of interviews with the collection of any standardized information that had not surfaced in the first focus group session; participants were asked to talk about their general musical backgrounds and music education. Open-ended questions were posed to explore participants’ narratives and early musical identity formation.

The second interview sought to capture perspectives and understandings regarding participants’ professional practice and revisited emergent themes and recurring patterns and motifs that had surfaced thus far in the research. In the serendipitous spirit of qualitative inquiry, I developed general semi-structured interview questions after the focus group sessions had concluded, and transcription and an initial, informal analysis of these sessions had occurred. Being mindful of my research question(s), keeping interviewees on course, and maintaining openness in the interview process was essential to this process, and interviews had a great deal of flow to them since co-researchers had many stories and ideas floating around in their heads from the focus group sessions. In this respect I was able to attend to specifics in the re-telling of stories and the desires to revisit certain moments and important relationships. As an interviewer, I felt confident going into each interview knowing co-researchers were prepared to dig a little
deeper, and also felt at ease with the “how will this interview go????” question that often plagues the novice researcher.

The Travel Diary: Personal Journaling

As I have made a commitment to allow an atmosphere of constant reflexivity to guide my data collection, I heeded Johnson’s (2001) advice that “researchers must undertake considerable self-reflection to get to know themselves; they must also make a self-conscious effort to observe themselves in interaction with others” (p. 109). It is for such reasons that I kept two separate, detailed, dated journals (these journals actually grew into four). The first contained my own self-study journal writing and recorded my personal narratives of experience, as well as the opinions, assumptions, values, and perceptions, and fears which arose during the research process. This journal also included reflections gleaned from listening to myself in the focus group sessions and thinking about how I spoke, what stories I chose to tell, how I interacted with the co-researchers, and “who I was” as researcher during the interview process. Throughout this thesis document I strive to consistently expose my biases and personal feelings. The intention of such revelations is to illuminate the research journey and my understandings surrounding it. Journal writing allowed me to “make reflected choices while designing a study and watch for critical or sensitive issues that may turn up during the inquiry” (Kvale, 1996, p. 110). It also allowed me to evaluate, from a different vantage point, collaborative self-study research as a means of professional development for choral music educators of the future.

The second journal was focused on brainstorming of a philosophical and theoretical nature. It included insights and ideas gathered from readings undertaken during the research process, ideas of data analysis and representation, perspectives on storytelling, and connections from previous
research surrounding the self. It allowed me to embrace the divergent, right brain thinking that is part of who I am, while maintaining the sequence of the data process. Additionally, it allowed me to engage in conversations with invisible co-researchers of a different kind; those engaged in philosophical discourse regarding the self and identity, those who have researched in education before me, and those who think on the topic of music. Such journaling was integral to the process of making sense of the data as it continually emerged.

**Participant Observation**

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) proclaimed, “we have no idea how to decipher or decode an action, a gesture, a conversation, or an exclamation unless we see it embedded in context” (p. 41). Thus, I employed observation methods to bring contextual considerations to the research process following Cole and Knowles’ (2001) advice, “spending time in a setting—an institution, home, or workplace—can provide invaluable insights.” It is important in this discipline that participants are comfortable being observed in music-making and rehearsal situations. I let participants determine the length and extent of the observation, whether it was going to be a choral rehearsal or two, or a more extended “shadowing” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 82) for a day or few days of activities. I attempted to view participants’ life worlds through both a general and focused lens (Wolcott, 1994) and kept my research purpose in mind to avoid becoming too general in my observations. I observed all but one of the participants in a very general and informal manner in numerous public performances, workshop settings, and at church. I visited the final participant casually on an ongoing basis in rehearsal over the research process at their invitation and eased my way into the rehearsal setting so that my presence became a naturally occurring phenomenon.
Observations were documented in field notes employing a short hand upon which I elaborated immediately after the observation in order to flush out the insights garnered from the visit. Creswell (2005) advises that researchers record both descriptive (activities, setting, people) and reflective field notes (hunches, insights, broad ideas and themes, feelings, behaviours). I also brought along my digital audio recorder to capture musical sounds and thoughts as I had them during and immediately after observing. Such detailed recording was essential in order to view context, as Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997) refers, as a “dynamic framework” which is changing and evolving as it is shaped by the actors (p. 59). Observations contributed to the development of narratives which allow the reader to “see, feel, smell, and touch the scene” and look to how participants composed their own settings (p. 59). It was a valuable experience as a researcher to see co-researchers enacting their beliefs, values, and personal practical knowledge, and to see them “in action” both as educators and as makers of choral music.

Since participant observation occurred on a casual basis in a public arena and was unobtrusive in nature, permission to gain entry to sites was deemed unnecessary. In some instances, I was also a participant in the setting, experiencing and reflecting on the environment from my own perspective and afterwards dialoguing with my co-researchers regarding the experience.

**The Perils of Navigation: Data Analysis**

Embracing the integrated and dynamic process of data collection and analysis in the qualitative research paradigm (Creswell, 2005) meant that data analysis consistently unfolded in collaboration with participants in focus group sessions, and interpretations developed through journal writing and interview transcription. In this sense, data analysis was part of a dialectic,
cyclical approach whereby the data was collected, reviewed, interpreted, and checked in light of new experiences and relevant literature, and subsequently refined (Agar, 1980 as cited in Wolcott, 1994, p. 11). Consequently, analysis for this research was an extremely complex and involved process which can be categorized into three levels.

**Level One: Initial Exploration and Meaning-making**

Analysis began with an initial attempt to make connections in the data through much listening. This process started right after the first focus group session and continued throughout the writing process. While emphasis is often placed on reading and re-reading transcriptions in qualitative research, I placed my emphasis on listening and re-listening. This allowed me, as an auditory learner and one who listens for a living, to pay attention to the manner in which co-researchers and myself spoke; the rhythms of our speech patterns, the way we conversed when excited or frustrated, our hesitations, our celebrations, the melodiousness of our inflections, and the tone and timbre of our individual voices as they contrapuntally connected. To write narratives that honour participants’ lives, I felt this to be an important aspect of my analytic procedure.

Before any transcription took place, I honoured my feeling toward centrality of relationship and interactions, and made notes regarding initial connections. Such connections surfaced in a simple manner in the form of observed similarities between stories, or moments where there seemed to be tension or dramatic shifts. Some stories and thoughts popped out at me because of the literature I was engaging with at the time. I kept post-it tabs and marked areas that seemed to enlighten or connect with co-researchers stories so they would be easy to track down when more detailed writing took place.
In the transcription process I looked to embrace the complexity I heard in my acute listening sessions. In this respect, I sought to transcribe verbatim, the words and phrases of co-researchers with particular attention to the elements of their speech mentioned above. Nothing was taken for granted in the sense that pauses, hesitations, word emphasis, laughter, interruptions, and any changes in tempo, were recorded. After transcription, multiple readings became a part of the data analysis process, although listening remained an integral part of my practice.

It was my initial intention to remain open to multiple methods of re-storying narratives which might consist of organizing the story elements in a temporal manner (important in looking at a musical life lived), looking for elements of setting, characters, actions, problems and resolution, or focusing on plot by illuminating events, problems, or actions imbedded in the narrative (Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Creswell, 2005). However, I was very concerned with some of the methods of analysis I explored as they seemed somewhat reductive in my estimation. I wanted my approach to data analysis to be guided from a flexible, reflexive, and reactive position and I was worried about letting little important details escape.

I returned to Douglas Hofstadter’s *I am a Strange Loop* (2007) and found my concern discussed in some most interesting terms. Hofstadter recognizes numerous parameters to our “loops” that open multiple dimensions of sophistication. One avenue through which to view such dimensions are symbols. Symbols in the brain are defined by Hofstadter as “neurological entities that correspond to concepts, just as genes are the chemical entities that correspond to hereditary traits.” As such, most symbols lie dormant most of the time, waiting to be triggered. This means that symbols inside the brain can be characterized as “triggerable physical structures that constitute the brain’s way of implementing a particular category or structure” (p. 75). The significance of this outlook is that if one has respect for the small, seemingly mundane patterns
in life—symbols and subsequently analogies—one becomes aware, Hofstadter contends, that they spring from some of the deepest roots of cognition. Therefore, analogies have the power to illuminate real situations that have “essentially the same central structure or conceptual core,” and thus, the extra meaning “is there to be read” (p. 150). In employing analogy we are essentially re-telling our own stories although they seem disguised at first glance. So if we look past the plotline and characters that are effortlessly obvious to us we can seek out a deeper meaning in the patterns, a meaning that is “transmitted by analogy between events”; the higher level of meaning (p. 154). Thus, initial analysis expanded to include “trigger moments” where the language of participants signaled a connection between their own thoughts and another’s story. Moments such as “that reminds me of the time” and “that immediately makes me think about this,” as well as overlapping conversations where one speaker was so eager to share something of interest, became significant moments. I also looked for moments of “unforced mapping” that might reveal a deeper meaning or referral. These moments surfaced in the questions that co-researchers posed to each other not only in their peer interview sessions, but also informally during focus group sessions. Such questions represent a self-reference, albeit it indirect and mediated by question.

I kept adding data through informal meetings with co-researchers which sought clarification of what I was listening to and reading. At the same time I was also adding information through participant observation and informal conversation; it was growing out of control. I felt I was drifting off course, the professional knowledge landscape fading beneath me. The data that emerged became more and more overwhelming; I realized that I needed an analytical framework quite desperately.
Level Two: Digging a Little Deeper

Wolcott (1994) advises that researchers have numerous frameworks available to them in preparation of analysis and in reaction to emerging data. Subsequently, I looked for a method of analysis that would compliment my research questions and allow me to embrace context and complexity in keeping with my epistemological and ontological leanings with regard to collaborative self-study. In *The Art of Learning to Teach: Creating Professional Narratives* (2007), Mary Beattie suggests that writing a narrative begins with “mapping out the journey” by classifying and coding. To sort stories, reflections and ideas, one begins with “major events in (a) life history” (p. 165) before elaborating on other areas that serve to chart the journey of professional learning; the topic of her book. Many of the aspects she encourages the teacher to draw attention to are in keeping with the purpose and central question(s) of this dissertation. And so I organized her suggestions into a list and kept it out while listening, reading, and writing, using it to “classify and cluster” (p. 165) data in order to make meaning. I added a few aspects to Beattie’s ideas in order to “identify major themes, subthemes, and tensions” (p. 166) in the data specific to my work:

- major events that have appeared to shape lives, epiphanal moments, surprises
- people and relationships of influence
- consistencies and continuities (I expanded this to include stories retold numerous times throughout the data collection period, and the ways the telling shifted)
- tensions, inconsistencies, paradoxes
- stories that show significant emotional content
- changes to knowledge, skills, and ways of being
- stories of learning
- stories that tell of *creation* of a professional identity and *creation* of relationships with students and colleagues
- metaphors, similes, images, descriptions
- qualities, patterns, themes that have remained the same regardless of changes in life
- sources of meaning and satisfaction, nonmaterial aspects that provide nourishment and rewards
- moments of passion, development of self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as times of doubt
- moments revealing beliefs, opinions, values, attitudes
- shifts in ways of speaking about practice, personal knowledge
- particular musical tastes and pieces of significance (my own addition)

It seems odd that one might look back on a journey and map out the terrain retrospectively. However, like an adventurer seeking lost treasure in The Temple of the Musical Self, this is exactly what must be done in the jungles of data analysis. Although the researcher has mapped out a detailed methodology, it’s like you suddenly hit quicksand! Perilously, you’re left digging in the dirt, trekking through the overgrowth, and trying to look back at where you have been so that others might build a well-paved road (dependent on approved funding) to the destination for the future. In order not to remain lost, or sink into the swamp, I took another cue from Beattie (2007); I charted out ideas visually with webs and concept maps. Gerald Edelman (2001) describes concepts as maps of maps which arise from the brain’s recategorization of its own activity. Thinking of this “recategorization” allowed me to understand how I was looking at concepts that were already of importance to my co-researchers, their own maps of maps. This reinforced the complexity of the process and the idea that I must remain attentive to their voices
as I impose my interpretation on their stories. This process also allowed me to see more clearly
the themes and concepts that were most central and of greatest importance to individual
participants and collectively between us. These understandings flowed into the writing process
for part two of this document. Rather than doing away with themes that were “less significant”
and reducing numbers of themes and sub-themes, I was able to look at how these themes and
concepts were interrelated. I saw how they influenced each other, and nuances in the data
became clearer rather than feeling superfluous, extraneous, or redundant. MindNode and XMind
computer programs were used for mind mapping along with simple charting done freehand by
me.

**Level Three Analysis: Attention to Detail and Some Fresh Loopy Perspective**

A specific consideration in the analytic process stems from Davies and Gannon’s (2006)
work in collective biography. They wonder how theory can be brought “into collision with
everyday life and thus to rethink, collectively, both the discursive contexts within which our lives
make sense and the uses to which we might put theory” (p. 4). My exploration of the self,
particularly the new and exciting ways of viewing the self through the lens of neurophilosophy
and wider reaching psychological domains, made me wonder how one could truly break free of
the linear processes that researchers fall prey to so easily, and embrace the cyclical, strange
loopiness that these new theories offer. In this respect, strategies for analysis and representation
must “both overlap and diverge” (p. 6). Thus, we may come to understand, a bit more, “the
processes of selving, rather than to uncover the particular details about individual selves” (p. 7,
emphasis added). Possibilities are opened up:
Texts could, more in keeping with Deleuze, be read, used, as modes of effectivity and action which, at their best, scatter thoughts and images into different linkages or new alignments without necessarily destroying their materiality…(texts) only remain effective and alive if they have effect, produce realignments, shake things up.(Grosz, 1995, pp. 126-127 as cited in Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 5)

In terms of specific analytic strategies, adding three categories in particular to Beattie’s (2007) list in the second level of analysis served to shift the spotlight from the development of the musical self to the influence of institutional ideologies and context on that self. These strategies are employed by Davies and Gannon (2006, p. 145) and claim a Foucauldian influence:

- conducting the self as appropriately submissive, desiring to submit to another
- becoming a line of force, desiring not to submit, refusing to submit
- working to change thought and to change relations in power

These points certainly invite the production of new alignments. However, as my focus differs from Davies and Gannon in its theoretical concentration, I feel the need to balance and even counteract investigation of the above points with an attention to what Douglas Hofstadter (2007) terms the “soul-uniqueness” of each human (p. 235). And so my last task of analysis was to determine those characteristics of our musical selves that appeared somehow exclusive or exceptional to each of our “dramatic ensembles”. This involved reviewing results from the second level of analysis and pulling out points that appeared distinctive in some way, or even inimitable. As a final process of data review, this contributed to a feeling of returning home to the self—the focus of the research—without compromising the journey in between.
Walking around the gallery I was struck at how the differences of each picture, in simple black and white, could be so intense with such subtle changes to light and shadow. One angle seemed to sharpen, another to blur. A tilt of the head, a smile, a distant gaze, gave such striking definition and acknowledgment of achievement in a silent, yet profound manner. How striking the faces were. Such care had been taken in the photography, in the presentation of the subject. Beside each photo was posted a short story of the session, sharing the experience from the photographer’s point of view; a fleeting illumination of the personality that awaited Yousef Karsh for each sitting. Here on the walls of the gallery was the scowling lion of Winston Churchill, the unique intellect of Albert Einstein, the undefeatable Ernest Hemingway, the overwhelmingly inspirational Martin Luther King, a young, yet already stoic Elizabeth II.

One photograph struck me in particular. It was of an old man sitting in a simple wooden chair playing his cello in what looked to be the stark room of an old cathedral or monastery. There was little light, just enough shining through a tiny window way up in the top right hand corner of the photo. The story which accompanied the photograph told of the moment of discovery when Pablo Casals sat down in the empty and dark room of the Abbey of St. Michel de Cuxa and Karsh realized the setting could capture the “immense strength—intellectual, physical, and spiritual—flowing from this amazing old man.” ‘How careful one must be to represent these figures in such a manner,’ I thought to myself.

Looking around at those engaged in picture gazing that day at the gallery, I was taken by how incredibly intrigued they were, studying each face so intently as they slowly moved from framed moment to framed moment, their chance at a brief and intimate relationship with such powerful subjects, such previously unreachable personas, momentarily within reach. (Journal detailing visit to the Winnipeg Art Gallery, December 2009)
“Perhaps the most pressing issue, when completion of the analysis is within grasp and consideration of the communicated form are being made, is that of audience” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 110). I am extremely mindful of the fact that the audience for this research embraces numerous perspectives. I recognize a scholarly and academic audience, but am also extremely interested in the ways my research will speak to future educators, students at both the undergraduate and graduate level of post-secondary education, and the choral community at large. I am an educator, and as such I consider the overall purpose of my research to be primarily educative. Thus, choices which represent data in a vivid, intriguing, honest, and provocative manner and have the means to “draw readers into a good and gradually unfolding story” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 102) are of great importance. Davies and Gannon (2006) emphasize the point:

... to tell the memory in such a way that it is vividly imaginable by others, such that those others can extend their own imaginable experiences of being in the world through knowing the particularity of another. (p. 12)

Some of the questions which “often occupy” Cole & Knowles (2001, p. 110) thinking when considering the possibilities of data representation in life history research, also occupy my thinking:

1. To whom and to what purpose are the understandings of this work directed?
2. What are the values of this audience and how can I facilitate the intersection of the lives of the researched with those of the audience?
3. What is the scope of representation forms that may capture their attention?
4. How can the emotional and reasoned be fused?
5. How can I assure myself that the work, indeed, is of value to audiences beyond those of the academy?
While allowing the above questions to guide representational choices, the final representation of the data is closely related to the analysis process. The point is to “devote our attention to forms that evoke, resonate, and communicate” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 118). In part two of this document, readers will encounter various forms of data representation which include both taking literary license with participants’ words, and—in as many instances as possible—representing them verbatim in order to give authentic voice to the storytellers. I have tried to convey intimate and personal moments, major turns of events, professional stories, and hopes for the future. In each case, I use the participant’s own words in an attempt to bring out individual voices. Some sections appear more metaphorical, others more literal, but I am ever mindful that I am the narrator of these lives and in the postlude of each chapter, my voice surfaces more boldly in the spirit of reflexivity. I have also allowed connections among participants to surface in order to reinforce the interactive nature of the research process, and have linked together divergent elements to illuminate contradictions as well as connections. I have bonded theory to story and story to story; experience to opinion, and prior knowledge to values and beliefs. I present snapshots in time (Beattie, 2007) creating “self-portrait(s) that are temporal” (p. 163) and reveal themes and sub-themes, highlighted by various timbres and textures in a quest for constructive interference in a zone of convergence; resonance.
Ethical Considerations and Issues of Rigor

Ethical considerations and issues of rigor have peppered this thesis document thus far. My understandings of the nature of qualitative research, my embracing of the complexity with regards to multiple ways of knowing and constructing reality, and my rejection of traditional positivist notions concerning validity and reliability dictate that the meaning-making of both the participants and myself in relation to my research purpose are at the core of this research.

Further to this stance, Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) assert that we as self-study researchers are in a time where “what counts as data expands greatly, and researchers face the difficulty of representing, presenting, legitimizing, analyzing and reporting one’s own experience as data—and of doing so in honest, not self-serving ways” (p. 15). However, they continue, the virtuosity of scholarship must surface “through the writing itself” (p. 15). Such was the attempt throughout the initial self-study presented at the onset of this journey. The conduct displayed throughout that initial journey and the following commitments to developing a rigorous study, to set minds at ease, served to assure that there were to be no navels gazed upon during the course of this study.

Numerous strategies for maintaining rigor in my work (Eisner, 1997; Merriam, 1998; Cole & Knowles, 2001) helped me to evaluate its quality at various points in the research process and in the final stages of data representation. Some of these strategies, such as my ongoing contact with co-researchers throughout the entire process to verify and clarify the data, have been noted previously, but are reiterated here for reinforcement:

- The use of multiple data sources for triangulation
- Consistent member checks to verify tentative interpretations of collected data
- Examination of tentative findings by peers outside the research process to search out researcher biases and areas of incoherence
● Maintaining reflexivity and clarifying biases through journal writing, evaluating my own self-study journey, looking for new insights and contradictions, questioning the research process on a regular basis

● Writing vivid, evocative, vulnerable text characteristic of a thick, rich description

● Looking for moments to place my own experiences and understandings surrounding the phenomena “on hold” allowing me to hear the participants perspectives from a fresh point of view

Additionally, Kvale’s (1996) “Ethical issues of the seven research stages” (p. 111) served as a guide not only for interviewing in both one-on-one and focus group situations, but also for journal writing of a reflexive nature where self-disclosure must be on-going. As such, a researcher must strive to mindful of the following:

1. Thematizing: the purpose of interviews and focus groups should be considered with regard to improvement of the human situation involved

2. Designing: ethical issues of design involve obtaining participants’ informed consent, securing confidentiality and considering possible consequences of the research for participants

3. Interview Situation: confidentiality must be clarified, stressed during the interview and possibilities in changes in self-image must be considered

4. Transcription: issues of confidentiality and the consideration of what constitutes a “loyal written transcription” are paramount

5. Analysis: ethical issues involve how deeply participants’ comments should be analyzed and how much say participants should have in terms of how their comments are interpreted

6. Verification: the researcher has an ethical responsibility to report knowledge that is “as secured and verified as possible”

7. Reporting: consequences of published reports and confidentiality with regard to institutions and groups the participants’ represent must be considered
Data was kept in a secure place during the study and will be for a period of five years following after which it will be destroyed. Artifacts, in particular, were kept in a large plastic storage box to keep them flat and protect them from moisture, dust, etc. They were returned to participants following member-checking of chapters. An ethics protocol was submitted to the University of Toronto through the Music Education Department as per University of Toronto Faculty of Music regulations.

The Winnipeg choral community is a small one. I was greatly aware that the issue of confidentiality might be difficult to “get around.” I recognize as Cole and Knowles (2001) point out, reflexive inquiry’s “potential for benefit but also for harm” (p. 139). Disclosures of any elements of the research process were avoided and discussions pertaining to personal and professional lives were kept as private as possible. The climate of the various participants’ places of work and their work with their choir members and other professionals was greatly respected. It was made clear to the co-researchers that their identities would be protected by pseudonym throughout the research process and in reporting or any future publications. However, as previously mentioned, the possibility that they may desire credit for their participation was also put forth. This issue was discussed during participant recruitment and it was understood that the final decision would require a group consensus to determine the outcome. Great consideration to the size of Winnipeg, its tight musical community, and the professional environment of the participants was given prior to the recruitment stage and discussed in detail with participants at the point of recruitment as well as at each focus group session. As previously noted, participants did indeed agree to use their real names after the final member-checking session, and were each in full support of sharing their personal narratives so others could, in turn, learn from their journeys.
**Why Go on the Trip Anyway?**

**Contemplating the “So What?” Query**

General overviews of choral music research over the past fifty years have called for what Turcott (2003) terms “real world applicability and issues” (p. 35). This thesis looks to contribute to the body of academic choral music education research. It looks to broaden the perspectives surrounding music teacher identity in its introduction of multiple conceptualizations of the music educator self—particularly through the application of neurological theories of the self—and inform the continuously expanding body of literature concerning choral educators’ perspectives regarding their discipline by way of its unique methodological design.

It is important to note that there are only twelve dissertations situated within the reflective practice discourse to be found in the choral music landscape (eleven cited by Butke, 2003), only two of which engage teachers themselves as reflective participants. This thesis contributes to this limited body of literature and, through its design, offers a point of departure for alternative views of choral music educator professional development and choral music education research as it links musical events in our personal and professional lives by telling us, as Bowman (2006) suggests narrative inquiry can, “‘how things go’ (the temporal/causal) and ‘how things feel’ (the level of emotional resonance)” (p. 8). Most importantly, it encourages choral music educators to interact and communicate regarding their discipline and their personal connection to it, allowing us to discover our own tales of transformation.
PART II

Time it was
And what a time it was
It was
A time of innocence
A time of confidences.
Long ago, it must be
I have a photograph
Preserve your memories
They’re all that’s left you.

*Bookends*, Paul Simon

OVERVIEW

Chapters five through eight of this document address the purposes of this research; first to better understand how five choral music educators’ life experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, and understandings surrounding the formation of their musical selves have come to shape their professional practice; and secondly, to discern the role of institutional context and governing ideologies of the choral music discipline in supporting or constraining educators’ professional teaching knowledge, thereby assisting in examining “those thoughts and practices that are usually taken for granted” (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p.4). More specifically, these chapters explore the research questions put forth in chapter three in an effort to uncover our tales of transformation:

- What is the “musical self” of five choral music educators?
- How have life experiences shaped the musical self of five choral music educators?
- How has prior knowledge shaped the musical self of five choral music educators?
• How were the attitudes, values and beliefs formed that inhere in the musical self of five choral music educators?

The chapters in this section introduce the co-researchers from this study: Henry, Sonya, Elroy, and Derek. The idea of presenting a life as a re-storied trail of events seemed to me grossly inadequate when dealing with the many vivid experiences that were shared so enthusiastically within our group by each participant in both our sessions together and with me privately. In fact, as a researcher, I found it difficult to come to terms with the amount of data that had to be “let go” throughout this process. In the interest of presenting a cohesive representation of a musical life lived, I have chosen to weave in and out of personal narratives relayed in co-researchers’ own words, reflecting and interacting with theory, my own thoughts, relevant literature, and themes that arose through listening and re-listening as a way of extending the possibilities of representing memory. This allows the reader to experience the spaces-in-between, characterized by Somerville (2005) as the possible moments of contemplation that occur when hearing others stories; the moments that allow us to disrupt our thinking and develop a relationship with the remembered text.

The uniqueness of each participant demands that their stories be treated in a somewhat unique manner, thus the organizational structure of this section prizes a flow of ideas (Eisner, 1998) over any particularly categorical treatment of the participants’ narratives. Some structure, however, does exist. At the onset of each chapter I situate myself as researcher first by describing my experience of one of more participant observation sessions, and in the case of chapter eight, my detailed experience encountering a participant’s artifact for the first time. These narratives, represented in arial font, serve to engage the reader by setting the stage for major themes in the each participant’s musical life stories which follow. Additionally, these short narratives highlight aspects of each participant’s personality, thereby connecting environment, action, and my
interpretation and experience of such environments and actions, with that of my collaborators. I then elaborate on my personal relationship with each participant in the most honest way possible. Each chapter also has a chronological nature to it, tracing a path beginning with their earliest musical memories and influences, followed by their journey through schooling, and finally highlighting and connecting episodes of professional life which have impacted, and continue to impact, their musical selves. These episodes also reveal how their own conception of their musical selves has shaped their practice. It is my hope that the co-researchers’ musical selves are illuminated as much as the collaborative nature of the research process through which they were revealed. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) suggested portraits must strive to capture the essential qualities of character and history. The resultant image is therefore interpretive rather than literal; an image shaped by relationship.

Varaki (2006) reminded that “the researcher-participant relationship is a mutually interactive phenomenon. Both the research and the participant have an effect on each other” (p. 2), and I have learned so much from my co-researchers. Each chapter is followed by a postlude which underlines this point. Here, I present episodes from my own self-study during the research process, interacting with the stories of my co-researchers with the goal of intersecting and interweaving researcher and participant experience (Cleaver, 2009). Additionally, I examine my own voice as a researcher, displaying what Chase (2005) terms the “complex interaction—the intersubjectivity—between researchers’ and narrators’ voices” (p. 666). Finally, throughout each postlude I pose questions that have surfaced both through reflections on the narratives in the preceding chapter and as a result of an examination of my own narratives. Cole and Knowles (2000) characterize these questions as “big” in that they do not have simplistic answers and “in a sense they might appropriately guide careerlong reflexive inquiry” (p. 23). Both the reflections and questions posed in this section emphasize the reflexive nature of self-study research.
Furthermore, the questions that surface in these postludes are put forth in the hope that the reader may be mindful of issues in our discipline while reading subsequent chapters, particularly as coresearchers narratives begin to interact and overlap more and more, and continuous connections are made.

**Overview of fonts**

*Arial*: Catherine, describing as the researcher, the experience of participant observations & encounters with artifacts

*Trebuchet MS*: Henry

*Book Antiqua*: Sonya

*Georgia*: Elroy

*Bookman Old Style*: Derek

*Comis sans MS*: Catherine, transcribed narratives from focus group sessions and interviews
CHAPTER FIVE

HENRY

Henry has taken the stage. He is the last to do so after the choir and orchestra have entered. It is a performance of Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio* and aisle after aisle of the large church is packed on a frozen December evening. I sit on my bulky winter coat as do other audience members around me, so as many people as possible may fit into each pew of dark, aged oak. Now warm inside, sheltered from the Prairie wind, I settle in for the evening, alternately glancing over my program notes and staring up at the massive organ and towering stained glass windows, the colours of which are darker without the summer evening light behind them. I wait in anticipation of the first chorus and allow my mind to wander and acknowledge my personal connection with Henry:

*How many in the audience have been under Henry’s direction at some time whether in church, community, for a weekend choral retreat, at provincial workshop sessions, at university, or perhaps back in high school all those years ago? Will they experience the performance in ways similar to me? Will they feel a strange sense of comfort as he walks to the podium and prepares for the downbeat—a sense of longing to be on stage like the singers on the risers before him, under such trusted direction? Will those singers on stage, standing in their trusty SATB formation feel that same connection I did as a member of his choirs?*

The downbeat falls, and following from broad shoulders and the open hand that we were always reminded “cradles the music,” those familiar, precise gestures I often imitated in conducting class and in my early career begin their baroque dance. The
bounce, now in three, now in one, shapes the fanciful phrases of the declamatory opening, “Jauchzet, frohlocket! Auf, preiset die Tage!”; “Rejoice, exult! Up, glorify the days!”

Within the polished syllabic pushes and pulls, the intertwining polyphonic lines, the melismatic flourishes of turns and twirls, and the united homophonic culminations there exists many relationships—many different types of relationships—both musical and social. It is a performance of a Baroque piece in a church during the Christmas season and as such there is an affirmation of the values of audience members and a promotion of their sense of ideal relationships (Small, 1998). The relationship of audience member to the performers is that of listener to performer, but also for many who came out for the evening, of supporter to conductor or singer.

The myriad musical relationships within the masterwork itself interact with its listeners on many levels: relationships between audience members and the familiar melodies and rhythms of the music; spiritual relationships between singers and listeners and the text; and cultural relationships between listeners for whom the German language of the work is one they have spoken since their youth. Each are highlighted in my thoughts. Like Small (1998) I consider the importance of these relationships because “it is the relationships that (music) brings into existence in which the meaning of a musical performance lies” (p. 193). Musical performances have been, and continue to be a significant aspect of Henry’s life. The relationships that inhere in each performance, as well as the preparation of each performance, are an integral part of the rich texture of his musical self. I recognize that Henry’s musical life has been shaped by many relationships. Like the emergent melodic themes of Bach’s fugal passages which, once exposed, begin immediately to imitate and interact, it is out of relationships that
The musical composition takes shape. So it is with the self—it is out of relationship that individual composition emerges. (written based on participant observation notes, December, 2009).

Kenneth Gergen (2009), speaking from a psychological viewpoint, proposes that all meaning grows from co-action or coordinated action, that is, relationships. Through this lens, he contends, it is possible to realize a world that is not “within persons but within their relationships” (p. 5). This view shares the same spirit as LeDoux’s (2002) synaptic self described in chapter three and parallels Bullough and Pinnegar’s (2004) assertions that the self we seek to understand in self-study is never merely individual but “is formed and maintained in relationship to others” (p. 340). Thus, the first step in a journey of musical self-study is to begin to recognize the complexity inherent in our musical selves, and embrace our connectedness to one another. Collaborative self-study can aid us in such a quest and lead us to co-feel and live inside each other’s selves. Such is the purpose of this chapter: to uncover the relationships that have been instrumental in the construction of Henry’s musical self and the values, attitudes, beliefs, and understandings which inhere in this self.

**Who Is Henry? How Do I Relate to Him as a Researcher?**

Henry is a well respected choral music educator and conductor. He has recently retired from his university post as Professor of Choral Music after twenty-eight years. Of course, in the choral community, retirement is just another phase in one’s musical life. Henry continues to direct a professional choral ensemble which specializes in Baroque music and is as busy as ever with committee work. He also serves as mentor and advisor to the next generation of choral educators and is a presence at many choral concerts throughout the year.
I first met Henry at my undergraduate audition for the School of Music many years ago. I distinctly recall being the most nervous I had ever been for a singing audition and feeling so incredibly musically inadequate that I was beginning to doubt why I was there. In the interview, Henry asked me about my student council involvement and spoke enthusiastically about my grades in school, and I knew immediately that his thinking was bigger than any worries about the student who, vocally, had a ways to go yet. I relayed to the focus group in my own stories the insecurities I battled in my first year of studies. I seriously considered quitting because things didn’t feel like they “fit.” Then, in my second year, I entered the auditioned chamber group, the University Singers, and began conducting classes and suddenly everything fell into place; that was where I belonged. I received excellent instruction in Henry’s choral techniques classes which always had wider considerations behind them than “the music.” I distinctly remember him telling us “if it’s not working in rehearsal, look to you first.” We were never to take out our own feelings of inadequacy on singers in our choirs. We were never allowed to say “me.” He consistently reminded us that choir wasn’t just about us, it wasn’t “our choir” it was the choirs’ choir, and he was careful to model this approach in rehearsal. This attitude had great impact on how I carried out my early career and when I needed reminding to keep my ego in check, Henry was there with a friendly, yet firm, shall we say, aide memoire.

Henry has continued to be a mentor and influence on my schooling and choral career and I have great admiration and respect for him. It has been illuminating for me to listen to his personal narratives and engage in a collaborative self-study alongside him, and to learn. His embracing of life long learning and humility shines through in his personal mantra shared with me over a breakfast: “I am here to learn and serve.”

Henry’s stories are full of humour, great honesty, and when called for, self-deprecation. His voice has a specific tone about it, partially influenced by the hint of the Low German accent
of his first language, the other, I would imagine, stemming from the wisdom of many years of engagement in choral music education. The rhythm of his speech is constant, unhurried, and thoughtful. His musical experiences are vast.

After completing high school, Henry attended a Bible college in Manitoba and obtained a Diploma in Sacred Music. From there he went on to Teachers College, after which he ventured to the U.S. to complete a Bachelor of Music. He continued his studies in Texas where he received a Masters in Music Education and a Masters in Choral Conducting. Years later, after establishing a respected career in Manitoba, he moved with his young family to Ohio for his doctoral residency.

Henry began his teaching career in a general grade six classroom setting long before separate music programs in the schools existed in Manitoba. He then taught at a Bible Institute for a number of years before accepting a position at the very high school he attended in his youth. Five years later, he served briefly as Interim Director of Choral Activities at another Bible College before returning to the school system once more to teach at the high school level. After he had received his Masters in Choral Conducting, he was offered the position of Assistant Professor of Choral Studies at the University of Manitoba.

**Henry’s Soul-Soil**

Hofstadter (2007) reminds that in our episodic memories of events long past, there remain vivid traces of our acts, but these recollections come to us more as vague senses, general impressions, perhaps sometimes in flashes of a picture or surroundings of our self engaged in some act which, although fleeting, was quite possibly a formative influence on our early life, and thus our developing self. Key elements in our earliest years, our early inner roots out of which grow our
souls, combine with our brain’s “fertile soil” to form what he terms our “soul-soil” (p. 257). This term seems especially appropriate for a farmboy who forged a path in choral music education where none lay before him. And, as Hofstadter suggests, many of Henry’s flashes of pictures were formative influences which contributed to the formation of his musical self.

Henry was born in a farmhouse in 1939, just off the marsh of Whitewater Lake, a small farming community now lost to time. His family was a Mennonite family in a totally Anglo-Saxon community. Educated in a one room schoolhouse through grade eight, he completed grade nine by correspondence, and was then fortunate to attend a private Mennonite collegiate which lay on the prairies surrounded by farming communities, alternating with his brother, year on, year off, so the family of farmers were able to afford the experience. Like so many, music making in the home and church shaped the earliest versions of Henry’s musical self.

Cleaver (2009) suggests that “importantly, when a child’s life has been infused with music from birth, a sense of naturalness with music occurs,” (p.43) Henry acknowledges that his musical development began before birth:

My mother sang a lovely alto purely by ear. And her alto sounded different from the rest... a lovely alto. And we heard this. We heard this from in the womb.

Woodford (2002) contends that primary socialization continues to be the most salient factor on the development of musical attitudes and values. Employing concepts developed by Borthwick and Davidson (2002), Cleaver (2009) explains that in formative influences from family, more specifically from parents, “there may be a parenting script that is a blueprint of musical values and expectations for development” (p. 40). For Henry, there wasn’t necessarily an expectation for musical development of any specific standard, however it was clear that music was valued through the sacrifice made by the family to make instruction possible. When I ask
him more about music in the home he tells me that his mother spotted an interest in him, and the family made lessons possible for the two young boys in the family:

We were a really poor family. Four people living in a two-room farm house with barren and uninsulated walls. When I think back, we were really... poor. My parents sold cream, as little as it was milking six cows by hand, and paid for the piano lessons: two dollars and fifty-cents.

It may have been providence that a pump organ ended up in the family home. Henry tells us that he remembers it being brought in, perhaps to be housed for another family, and this is what they practised on and embraced as a source of entertainment:

You couldn’t just turn on the TV or even the radio. You had to save up your cell battery time for the programs that you really wanted to listen to. So my mother passed the time on the pump organ playing hymns and simple folk songs by ear—everything in the key of E flat (we all laugh and he along with us). She would gather us around and sing with us. And that’s how we started piano lessons at about the age of six or eight. So we marched into town every week for our lessons.

There was no technique. It wasn’t a great scene for somebody who needed to be charged a bit. But it was a start. And a few years later we were able to afford to buy a piano. Rudy, my brother, played the guitar. But for some reason I had that “if it’s his, it’s not mine” attitude and so I didn’t want to play and missed out on all that goes along with studying chord progressions ... I do recall Rudy being annoyed with my constant piano playing and the stumbling that goes along with self teaching (he laughs once more).

In these early tales we see the beginnings of musical values and attitudes forming in a musical self. In his parents actions there is a sense that music is important enough that lessons on multiple instruments are made possible for the two boys in spite of a modest income. More deeply, we see Henry’s early feelings pointing already to a need to be challenged—“charged a bit”—yearning for a higher level of musical instruction as a result of an inclination toward music. Even this early on, there seems to be a sense that he is not as prepared for musical
performance as he could be, and he acknowledges that there was a feeling that somehow something was lacking in his experiences:

The teaching wasn’t good. It didn’t build confidence especially in exam time when these towering people from Toronto came to administer these exams. They were hugely intimidating.

Early musical experiences were not only part of his home life, but were brought into a community forum:

One of my earliest musical memories was singing duets with my brother and it would only happen at things like the 4H Club banquet. It was a good thing in the country, these clubs. There were clubs of every kind. We were in the calf club: you’d raise a calf and then show it at the end of the year.

When I started school there were seven of us. And my brother and I had to come over from the other district to keep the school open. Five was too few; six was the magic number. My point is, people heard us sing at the Christmas concert. By golly, you had to have a Christmas concert—that was the test for the new teacher. Poems had to be memorized and we did all those ‘Rudolph’ and ‘We Wish You a Merry Christmas’ tunes. So in the calf clubs Rudy and Henry always had to sing. He was about nine and I was seven, and there we’d be singing (and he sings for us in a comical child-like voice):

*Whispering hope (he mimics the background singers: whispering hope),*  
*Oh, how welcome my voice,*  
*Making my heart in its sorrow rejoice.*

There was laughing and nodding amongst all of us in the focus group as memories of those early requests for public displays of our musical achievements flooded back, requests that were most often met with much physical squirminess while hair was slicked back with a mother’s spit, followed by protests of “awww Mom.” Sonya, apparently, had also been subjected to the same expectations of performance of the famed gospel tune, versions of which have been recorded ad infinitum among popular personalities such as Anne Murray and Jim Reeves. Henry continued:

And so that (echo-type moment in the chorus) gave occasion for two voices to sing doing different things. We felt embarrassed because we were singing in
unison. (He imitates his childhood thoughts) I mean, at our church we sang *harmony*, and here we were singing this “low grade” unison. But we sang to please them—we were nervous as heck—but people would rave about singing ‘Whispering Hope.’

And it pleased my mother to all end.

I see in Henry’s tales numerous relationships which have contributed to the construction of his musical self: music making with mother and brother, musical acknowledgment in the school, and early musical success acknowledged by his community. A bit of noted musical interest and ability projected Henry into musical spotlight where he had his first, albeit humble, taste of musical fame. For me, this harkens back to my own tale of the “singer” label presented in the prologue, a label which emerged from a rather casual first festival performance and stuck with me throughout my schooling. Although I shunned it at times and felt somewhat confined by the labeling of my identity as “the one who does music,” I also embraced it and allowed it to carry me with greater confidence into other musical endeavours. DeNora (2003) reminds us that allocations of students into different categories of musical ability, in this case ‘talented,’ may influence abilities and values outside of the classroom. It is quite possible this was the case for Henry. His narratives reveal the formation of some early musical tastes: this is good music, this is lesser, “low-grade” music. The comparison between the two grew out of his experiences in multiple settings, i.e. home, school, and church, the latter of which was perceived as “more complicated” or “harder.” There was one venue in particular, however, which had a profound impact on his ideas regarding music, singing, and relationships.

**Musical Construction of a Soul: Congregation and Connection**

It’s not there now, the old church. The white-washed wooden gathering place that once stood so firmly on the open prairie, offering a particular foundation of comfort and guidance to those who
settled into its pews come Sunday morning, is banished to memory. It’s smaller than I pictured it in my mind’s eye when I listen to Henry’s stories and compare them to the old photograph on a CD cover he has given me. Perhaps this is because Henry’s descriptions seem to me so vivid, so full of inspiration. The simple, yet sturdy structure recognizes a time gone by, a simpler time, the sounds of which are rarely heard today in the hustle and bustle of many contemporary church lives where praise rings out accompanied by drum kits and electric bass. I lament that I cannot visit the structure, sit in its pews, stand at the front where the Vorsänger (lead singers) once stood calling out melodies to receive them back in cooperative harmony.

Henry’s experiences with music in the church have been, and continue to be, a formidable influence on his musical self. Many of his early stories stem from his experiences in this venue. At this point in his career, Henry has reflected back and realized the influences of his musical upbringing in relation to his engagement in congregational singing. As a result, he made the choice to bring those experiences to the forefront and celebrate them. In June of 2009, Henry made a recording of many of the hymns from his childhood with his professional ensemble, Canzona. This is a most poignant representation of the importance of this musicking (Small, 1998) in Henry’s life.

I think back to that performance of Bach’s Christmas Oratorio and pause for a moment of reflection myself—it was in the chorales, the most simple and stoic of forms in the oratorio where I feel most comforted, most welcomed as a listener. They were so carefully shaped, such a place of reflection and conference after the solos and duets that preceded them. Henry was engaged with the choir, his eyes never left them, and his limbs moved freely with a deep understanding and connection with the music. I sensed then, as I understand now, that Henry connected with them in a profound way. There was some type of special relationship here,
something of deeper meaning. His narratives of congregational singing reveal this deeper connection.

At the onset of the first focus group session, Henry was the first to speak. He gave a short overview which encapsulated his entire musical life (as Derek put it). After we had all “gone around the circle” and followed his lead, he told of us his excitement to share more, how others’ memories had begun to spark his own. He took four hymnals out of a bag and laid them on the table before us. All were in German and showed the wear of time in their binding, yellowed pages, and fraying edges. Flipping through them with interest, we could see that they contained selections not only in the style of hymn from the Gesangbuch der Mennoniten (Mennonite Songbook), but also of chorales, devotional songs, and gospel songs. Henry explained their significance to us:

In Sunday school we sang right from the very beginning. One hundred kids - and they sang energetically. And whoever had an inclination to lead anything became the leader. Somehow, somebody did it.

At fifteen we would join the choir. Automatically you became a youth and youth was very much encouraged in our church. The choir was a youth choir. About thirty to forty young people sang in choir every week and it was very much a social gathering—very much a social gathering. So, at fifteen you were finished with Sunday school. Then if you were in youth, you were in choir. That was the magnet that brought people together once a week. By the time I was fourteen, I couldn’t wait to be fifteen to be in the youth choir.

That choir experience was...quite influential. I remember not being quite old enough to go but I was already ordering these books. I had noticed that they didn’t have enough books anyway, so I was going to have my own so I could really “dig in.” I asked the choir director if he would order the books for me and I had even saved up money for them. And so here I came to the first choir practice with my...own...books (he mimics the pride of his young self and pulls his eyebrows up with a twinkle in his eye as he speaks the last three words with comic emphasis, and we chuckle in return at the eager teenager he shows us).
During the first focus group session, Henry relayed to us the environment of congregational singing in his church. He recognized that these surroundings had a most unique influence on the formation of his musical understandings both from a musical and a social point of view. The following excerpt is taken from the jacket cover of the 2009 recording, one of several recordings that Henry brought in to the second focus group session. Here, Henry describes in his own words the atmosphere of the congregational singing which has played such an important role his entire life:

Our church, like many other rural Mennonite churches, was built with an aisle down the middle. Women sat on one side, men on the other. At the back sat the young parents with their infants and very young children; in front of them sat those parents whose children were old enough to sit with their friends; in front of them sat the oldest members of the church. Moving forward toward the front of the church sat the teenagers. And the youngest school boys and girls sat in the front pews. Most of the youth aged fifteen and older sang in the choir.

I firmly believe that this set-up had a strong, though perhaps unintentional, influence on the development of hymn singing in our congregation. Children heard partsinging from the time they were cradled in their parents’ arms. Painlessly, they gradually began to give voice within the safety net of their peers and gain confidence in part singing, mostly by ear, though the hymns were printed in four-part harmony in the hymn book. Of course, when a number of us began with private music lessons we acquired the ability to ‘read’ the harmonisations more accurately. There was no organ, and the piano was used only for the choir. All the hymn singing was unaccompanied and led by one or more Vorsänger (song leaders). Our people sang these hymns as they waited for the service to begin, to fill the time when there were delays, at family gatherings and reunions, church business meetings, and numerous other occasions (Engbrecht, 2009).

David Lidov, in the foreword to Naomi Cumming’s work on semiotics and music entitled The Sonic Self (2000), asks us join with Cumming in recognizing “the work of music in
constructing the soul.” The *sonic self* is Cumming’s specific term for a musically constructed soul, an entity which is not “a previously existing element of personality, but a creation that comes into the impression of musical personality—being with sound.” Henry’s sonic self developed, in great part, due to his *being* with the German hymns and translations of gospel songs in such a way that there was a physical as well as emotional aspect to the participation in music:

The first time I sat alone to sing, I sat in front of my uncles, my father. Their singing voices rose behind my back and moved through me. We heard those four part hymns sung with *passion*.

That was it. I am able to make the connection. That was how the chorales of the Bach Christmas Oratorio came across. Four-part hymns not tossed aside because of their simplicity in a larger work of great complexity, but hymns sung with *passion*:

I realized how hugely influenced I was by congregational singing. It was always in the back of my mind. The recording experience helped me to articulate how it influenced me; to sing with an understanding that this was fodder for the soul.

From in the womb, through his early childhood, and his teenage years, Henry felt the physical presence of these hymns. They were not simply a part of his childhood, but a continual presence in his spiritual life:

I grew up singing them in church, sang them frequently in high school and as a student in my Bible College years. Years later upon moving back to Winnipeg, I sang them when I joined a church where the same edition of the *Gesangbuch* (from 1942) is still being used.

In reference to the nature of meaning in musical works, Small (1998) submitted that “we hear sounds in combination, both simultaneous and successive, and in our minds we place them
into relationship to create meaning” (p. 164). Small continually likens musical works, particularly symphonic works, to narrative. As narrative is a way of knowing, so too is the making of music, and Henry acknowledges this:

Four part harmony was just a natural way of knowing things. Our family sang. Our extended family sang. Other families sang. Everyone just...sang.

This “way of knowing” influenced his musical beliefs, and contributed to early attitudes as exemplified in his “just unison” performances with his brother when he held them in comparison. His four part musical way of knowing contributed to his formation of cultural pride:

But then in school I realized we only had this little *Manitoba Sings* book and it was just melody—such “low grade” stuff to me. I was used to looking into this hymn book and seeing the four parts. We were so much more sophisticated than that!

And so, congregational singing has been a way of life for Henry. Congregational singing is a cultural influence, very much a cultural narrative. Thus, there exists interplay between how Henry constructs stories and how he is constructed by cultural narratives. Bruner (1990) discusses this idea in *Acts of Meaning* through what he terms *culturism*: “how human beings in cultural communities create and transform meanings” (p. 4):

Values inhere in commitment to “ways of life,” and ways of life in their complex interaction constitute a culture. We neither shoot our values from the hip, choice situation by choice situation, nor are they the product of isolated individuals with strong drives and compelling neuroses. Rather, they are communal and consequential in terms of our relations to a cultural community. (p. 4)

Henry’s stories of congregational singing illuminate the durability of cultural values. Choral singing for him is viewed as “fodder for the soul” within the culture of his upbringing.
These hymns are sung “with passion,” four part harmony is viewed as “a way of knowing,” and singing is a way of life; “everyone just sang.” Value is placed on singing as a method of expression, community coherence, and worship. On a personal note, pride in the attainment of a perceived higher level of music making—“we were so much more sophisticated than that”—created for him a preferred musical mode of being. This music resonated with him and allowed him to make, as DeNora (2003) suggests “articulations between some aspect of culture (music) and some aspect of (his) style of living” (p. 170). This way of thinking allows us to extrapolate to questions of philosophy which address “music’s influence on social character” (p. 170). Thus, links between music and social life are forged. Choral music is about community, a “magnet” that draws people together, creates a social bond, and is, as Henry told us he believes, a “corporate” endeavour.

Another experience drives home community aspect of the music making of Henry’s youth:

In our churches there was a practice where the youth group would present a one hour program every four to six weeks. It was called Jungendverein (literally youth society or club). Its resources were chiefly the members of the youth choir—the choir that sang every morning throughout the year and without a break. This program consisted of choir singing, small vocal ensembles such as trios and quartets, selected poetry recitation, and of course, always a short sermon. When it came my turn to recite a poem, I would spend my tractor-driving hours committing the poem to memory—it was a shame not to have the poem memorized—and the goal was to out memorize the other guy!(he laughs)

Occasionally also, instrumental ensembles would play hymns and spiritual songs. This included guitars, mandolins, accordion, harmonica, the occasional violin, and piano. Most instrumental playing was self-taught and learned from the more experience players. Needless to say, congregational singing was also an important component. In July every year there was the annual Sängерfest or choral songfestival. Churches were too small, so our people would have this event in the hayloft of one of the large cattle barns in the community. People would come together on the Saturday before and clean out the cattle feed from the previous winter. It was great for the farmer—he got his barn cleaned out!
It was twenty-five feet from floor to ceiling at the biggest part of the barn and the air would breeze in through the board-to-board walls. The acoustics were something, and it was terribly fragrant (he chuckles). You’d have a gathering of a hundred and twenty to a hundred and forty people, all singing the four-part favourites. Mine was Schaff’ in mir Gott. You can imagine the effect on an impressionable teenager; it was such a social event. You hurried to wash up after being in the fields all day to go and sing. And that sound...you’d bask in that for days after.

Additionally, in relation to Cummings sonic self, we may look at how music, with its particular properties and conventional features of rhythm and harmony lends itself to “forms of being and doing” (DeNora, 2003, p. 170). There is a reflection of Henry’s attitudes and values in the form and practice of singing these hymns. The musical lines which are homophonic in nature suggest an immediate bonding, individual yet tied to one another through similarity of rhythm, intent on moving in synchrony, with specific roles of harmonic movement assigned to each voice part as much as the seating arrangement in his church. One becomes a part of this community through engagement in the act of singing. In fact, it is a right of passage at a specific age in this culture to become a singer of four part hymns.

The influence of this cultural music was so strong that Henry was unmoved by the popular music of the day:

I wasn’t even interested in Elvis and that was my generation. There’s something about the style that didn’t get to me. The imprint was already there so strongly looking back at, for a lack of a better term “sensible singing,” and not shouting or wailing or piping it, and a kind of shared singing because there was harmony and community. And I was really worried for a while there about myself because there was no drive there; I really didn’t want to explore the rock music or whatever came along, country or pop. It really troubled me, I just wasn’t drawn to that music and I wondered if I should be. But in the end it really helped me. In fact, when I met Rilling (Helmut Rilling, famed German choral conductor), he really expressed no interest in (popular music) and then I noticed, there was no apology for it either. And so I anchored, not against something, but more in favour of where I felt naturally inclined. I somehow learned along the way that I could just appreciate another style. I didn’t have to do it and try to be as good as the
person who came by it naturally, because you know the inadequacies that you feel.

We see in his attitudes toward popular music, another aspect of Henry’s preferred musical mode of being. His value system and an early connoisseurship are forming. Henry is able to make articulations between music and a style of living. The above narrative reinforces DeNora’s (2003) point regarding music’s influence on social character. However, a tension exists between a preferred musical way of being and its assumed social implications. In this space it becomes apparent what this particular type of music means to Henry, how it finds validation in an authority figure, and how in reflecting back, he is able to come to terms with his choices, invest in them, and learn from the internal struggle.

The reflection on one final experience allowed Henry to articulate his feelings toward his humble musical routes and acknowledge their meaning. Henry shared with us that in graduate school he was uncertain at first about fitting in, about revealing and confidently living his deep faith. Additionally, there was a feeling of educational inferiority, described as “always going back to pick up papers” because of the limited musical education available to him in his home province. In a larger venue filled with experts on the choral medium, Henry’s “sophisticated singing” shrinks down to a “little” experience and almost disappears from view. This is the moment of understanding, when he discovers just what his homegrown musical experiences have afforded him:

One of the big things about all of us is that we need at some point to look back and realize what we came with—what music you brought with your birth right, and what you have to give, because I grew up with the German chorales, singing them a cappella every Sunday. And when I got to grad school in the States, the organ students found out I could speak German. They wanted me to translate this awful academic German which went on for paragraphs, and I did some translating for them and they’d say, “How do you know this??”

And I’d say, “I grew up singing this.”
“You sang this??”
“Yes, in our little church services in a little church in the country.”
And that’s when I realized, maybe I didn’t get the fancy piano lessons,
maybe I didn’t get the cello lessons, I wasn’t a really great singer...
but I got something pretty significant.

**Henry’s Hymbol**

Symbols can be taken as “meaningful structures,” that is patterns representing abstract categories. Symbols in the brain are deeply in synch with the events of the world around them—“systematically in phase” with it, Hofstadter (2007, p. 201) contends. Hofstadter posits that if we look at the configurations of symbols—which he characterizes as magnetic and interacting, crashing into each other, transferring energy, and creating momentum—they reflect the history of outer-world events. Furthermore, they become symbolic through their *encoding* of such events. Narrative may be viewed in a similar fashion, as a gathering of tiny events (single occurrences) and larger events (patterns of occurrences), the latter of which have representational qualities (p. 46). Thus, our outer-world is internalized in a symbolic pattern allowing us to remember things that happened. In this manner, those “little occurrences” which create momentum and magnetically interact with our evolving sense of self, get “locked-in” over years and years and become part of us. Bruner (2000) acknowledges that narrative organizes our experiences. And Hofstadter reminds that what comprises our self is so well organized it can be summarized into a whole. Congregational singing, the words, melodies, and harmonies of these hymns evolved from little occurrences into larger events and became so intricately woven into the fabric of Henry’s musical and professional life that they have taken on new symbolic meaning. They are both at the neurological level and the symbolic level, a part of him. They exist much like “an echo chamber, a feedback loop, in which an idea reappeared after going, as it were, through various filters” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 139-140), and they have shown themselves to
be incredibly influential in the development of Henry’s musical self as expressed through his narrative. In this way the strongest symbol to grow out of Henry’s soul-soil is the hymn. The act of singing hymns, of passionate involvement in community, have become his hymnbol; a representation of his musical self. And this hymnbol has, in turn, come to help shape his professional practice:

Interesting what keeps coming up here, “What imprints us?” Because the strongest imprint in my life is this, right here” (he drops his hand heartily on the hymnals), and you can never imagine how strong that imprint really is where you heard your first music. Whether it’s pop or jazz, you hear that improvisation over and over again in various ways, and you follow tunes and motives and rhythms. And my imprint was all this hymn singing. So it was always corporate, always a group of people, and it was a powerful, spiritual meeting place. And it impressed me hugely.

In the forward to Andy Clark’s (2008) *Supersizing the Mind*, David Chalmers speaks about the thesis of the extended mind: when parts of the environment and our experiences in it are coupled to the brain in the right way, they become parts of the mind” (p. 1). Such a statement, although neurological in nature, shares a similarity of spirit with Bullough and Pinnegar’s (2004) assertions regarding the formation and maintenance of the self in relation to others, and the socio-musical views of DeNora. Viewed through such a lens, these pieces of music become a part of us; part of our strange loop, our synaptic self. They are relationships’ed into our being and as such have a great deal of influence in how we shape the relationships of our future. Such is Henry’s hymnbol.

**Who Lives Inside Henry Engbrecht?**

Numerous times Henry spoke of “what imprints us” in our focus group sessions. Imprints, it was clear to Henry, were formative experiences and influential personalities that had impacted early
thinking and contributed significantly to shaping our musical selves. To expand on this notion, I turn to Hofstadter (2007) who contends that “as children, as adolescents, and even as adults, we are all copycats” (p. 252). We copy catchy intonation patterns in each others’ speech, our ideas come from family, friends, and authority figures like teachers and mentors. Thus, the fabric of our selves is woven out of “borrowed bits” (p. 251) that we involuntarily “incorporate” into the repertoire of our selves. This includes all sorts of “behaviour-fragments of other people” (p. 250), particularly those we admire, or who make some type of distinct impact on our lives. We ourselves are the spinning weather vane of interaction that looks, as Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, inward to our hopes, dreams, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions, outward into our environment, and backward and forward to the past and into the future. And as we begin to spin in the winds of the forces in our lives, we continue to gather many experiences and encounters with others in our path, pulling them into our funnel which leads to a fusing with our selves, thereby imprinting us. As such we come to inhabit and be inhabited by other souls, other I’s. Interestingly for Hofstadter, “resonances” between souls are particularly revealed through similarity in musical tastes, by being on “the same musical wavelength” (p. 248).

Numerous personalities resonated with Henry to the point that they appeared and reappeared in his storytelling. Their catch-phrases and methods were incorporated into his own actions as much as Henry’s own “mio stupio” phrase—a way to acknowledge his own slip-up in rehearsal—has made its way into my rehearsal proceedings and will be passed down to my students. These figures and their symbols which are relationshipped into our being inspire us to “new forms of action” (Gergen, 2009, p. 5) and we come to share common perspectives. There are a number of dramatic figures and mentors in particular that have impacted the formation of Henry’s musical self.
One figure left an impressive imprint on Henry in his formative years. One of his earliest musical memories shared in our first personal interview reveals vague shades of an influential figure to come in its telling:

I remember as a child, wandering over to the open door of the church. It was a hot day and there was no concern for fire regulations; chairs were packed in and a very slim aisle was left in the middle. I was trying to catch an eyeful of what was going on inside, because the children had to run around and play outside as they will. I could just make out the headboard of one of the cellists that had come with him and was playing with the out of tune piano—but to have instruments other than the piano...wow!

The “him” was the same figure Henry had spoken of when we shared early influences in our first focus group session:

When I was sixteen I took a year at home. Isolated by bad roads, private school was the best option since you couldn’t travel. In order to afford it, one member of the family had to stay home while the other went. And in the year that I stayed home and my brother went, there was an itinerant conductor that came into our community and did a Sängerfest, a Songfest. His conducting wasn’t great, (he mimics a comical cut-off and we all giggle) but he was hugely inspirational. He was a clown, a great story teller, and he had a great sense of theatre, and he would pack a punch and make his spiritual application. And I found that hugely inspiring.

Tales of the inspirational conductor surfaced numerous times in Henry’s storytelling throughout various focus group discussions and in personal interviews with me. The imprint that the itinerant conductor, Kornelius Neufeld, had made coming to do the Sängerfests became an inspirational idée fixe in Henry’s narratives. He returned to the image of a vibrant and motivating conductor, who, although his choral skills were somewhat lacking, was able to create what had become, as we have seen from past narratives, the most prized element in the choral medium as Henry saw it: community.
I sang under him once more at age sixteen and I was just as wrapped with attention as I was with Robert Shaw eight years later in Minneapolis—funny, funny man. He’d have tears coming down his cheek...he was so uproarious. There was no vocal technique—we’d just get together and sing—but he created spirit in that group. We would sing and the magic would come. Man, unbelievable what those turning point experiences gave.

In charting one’s journey of professional learning from early influences onward, as Beattie (2007) suggests, researchers must look toward stories which show consistencies and continuities. In the above personal narratives, we see a story retold with minimal shifting in the telling, impressing upon the reader the significance of the presence of this figure in Henry’s life. However, Beattie also encourages seeking out tensions and inconsistencies in the narrative process to search out deeper meaning. The ability of ‘the man who brought the cellos’ was measured against the lack of motivation in other environments at the same time in Henry’s life. His high school years introduced characters that both inspired and drew frustration in the church youth choir and at school. The boy who “needed to be charged up” reappeared as Henry spoke of his church youth group:

There was a lot of weak choir leading in Manitoba when I was growing up because educational opportunities in music were few. In youth choir the guy didn’t have a clue and there was no discipline, no momentum to the rehearsal. He was intimidated by everyone else, a pale-skinned guy who didn’t fit in with the rest of the “farm boys.”

His high school classroom atmosphere and choral instructor shared similar characteristics:

He was the target for humour and had poor vision. It was a disruptive classroom and this guy didn’t have a clue either and he never knew what mischief was going on at the back of the room. It wasn’t a particularly challenging environment.
However, in revisiting these scenarios in our private interviews, Henry pondered the effect the classroom environment and realized that there was something in him that had actually been fuelled through this lack of challenge. The memories of these environments were carried into the beginnings of his professional practice:

It was those images that really motivated me perhaps, even after I started studying; the memory of that. And I got fired up at the little successes in my initial teaching. Certainly, there had been few models for me and no models in rehearsal techniques.

He did receive a small taste of the podium in high school. Upon graduation, there was a small choir that was put together and Henry had the opportunity to conduct.

I just waved my arms like this, no matter the time signature (he shows us a figure eight pattern with his full right arm and we all howl with laughter), but it did fire me up!

The Shoulder Tappers

Henry emphasized that “timely encounters with mentors were instrumental” with regard to the path he followed into choral conducting and music education. He spoke highly of George Wiebe, who was to become his mentor at Bible College, and the “talent” he had, as Henry described it, for “tapping people on the shoulder and saying ‘you should do this’.” Right at the point where Henry was debating what to do after high school, whether to go to university or to Bible College—only one of which would involve choral music as a significant part of his educational experience—he recalls George asking him, “where would your heart rather be?” This poignant statement swayed his decision and led him down a path that shaped his career and exposed him to others whose influence fed his interests and encouraged him to make an impact in his field.

Henry referred to these teachers as “the shoulder tappers.” Their psychology, as he describes it, can be likened to DeNora’s (2003) previously mentioned assertions that allocations of students
into different categories, here of potential life paths, may influence abilities and values outside of the classroom:

The shoulder tappers used a psychology they weren’t even aware of. You start hearing you’re good at something, that you’ve got potential, and you start acting like a capable person and you work at things, and you observe, and you learn by others’ examples… I’m sure it had a big effect on a lot of people. It certainly had an effect on me.

George Wiebe has been a mentor throughout Henry’s career and continues to be a presence in his life. This soul offered much to Henry in the form of guidance, support, and encouragement in his musical pursuits, and through modeling a way of being that resonated with Henry’s own personal value system. In the context of teacher narrative as critical inquiry, Jon Skretta (2000) speaks of the privilege of working with mentors. He explains, “they have granted me access to discussions and invited me to become a decision-maker in my own education… they have helped me develop a voice that shapes practice.” Skretta continues, “the most important thing mentors have done is to measure me against my own ideas, to question me rigorously, and in doing so to be standard-bearers, modeling different, varied versions of who I might wish to become” (p. 130). Such is Henry’s recognition of those who have impacted his development and affected his professional practice in ways they may not have realized. New experiences set against his prior knowledge and values illuminated ways of being that he both embraced and shunned, all of which now live in him.

A strong theme of modeling arose and recurred throughout Henry’s narratives involving mentors and influential figures during the research process. His personal belief in the power and necessity of positive modeling has shaped his professional practice in a most profound manner.

In our second personal interview, Henry spoke about the “stimulating” experience of performing the Beethoven Missa Solemnis in 1962 at a workshop conducted by Robert Shaw. He recalled
how the whole room waited in anticipation for this esteemed persona to take the stage. When he finally did, there was an aura about him and the strength of his personality quieted the room, "everything was absolutely still," Henry described. The audience of singers, students, and orchestra members waited for his first words, for the long address they expected would come teeming with words of wisdom and perhaps a story or two from the revered conductor. And then he spoke,

"Page one."

"That was it." Henry tells me. "Well, talk about modeling! That was the greatest lesson for me that I could ever have had."

"And you do that! You do that all the time!" I laughed in response, realizing my now diminished degrees of separation from the great Robert Shaw.

"I do that exactly! And that is a direct influence of Robert Shaw. And so ‘page one’ has been very important to me."

Henry took from that pivotal episode various lessons that he has incorporated into his professional practice to this day. It wasn’t just the rehearsal techniques of count-singing and rhythmic diction so often associated with Shaw and employed with great success in Henry’s rehearsal process, but his recognition of Shaw’s way of being which influenced him:

The message was: do the business of the music and people will fall in love with that, not with being liked, no need to use fear tactics or be overbearing. The other part of the modeling was the respect he showed toward the orchestra and the singers, and the respect for the voice. He had a unique approach to rehearsal...and I thought and thought and thought on that. That was modeling that I went back to time and time again in my mind whenever I felt that my own rehearsal hadn’t been effective.
Another timely workshop encounter with a big name in choral music, namely Helmut Rilling, reinforced Shaw’s musical and personal manner fifteen years later:

And Rilling in the seventies—the pacing—it was about doing the business of music, making the music come alive, and connecting people with that experience. That was the focus.

Once more, these experiences stood against the modeling of those who, in Henry’s estimation, “didn’t get it”—didn’t seem to understand the connection with music that was possible and didn’t seem to understand their influence on others from a social perspective:

At graduate school there was a guy who could really snub you, and his sarcasm was always at the surface. On the bus when we toured, it often wasn’t very fun. His demeanor was such that it dampened the mood. By that time I had learned what I didn’t want to be. I was already very conscious of that. I went to Teachers College and I had an experience with one professor who had such a condescending manner and another who directed the choir but didn’t really want to, and I knew—I’d had enough modeling—that I knew I did not want to be like that. And I simply accepted that experience as one to show me what it’s like when people don’t do joy.

When Henry and I met for his second personal interview I brought up something that I had been questioning regarding this theme after listening to the second focus group session. Within a discussion about modeling, Henry had made a statement to the effect that he wished he had made more of a point of sitting his students down and speaking to them about the importance of positive modeling. I needed to tell him that I found this ironic. He had modeled the importance of modeling for us in the sense that he had always lived it; lived what he wished us to become as educators. Henry traced much of this to the influence of another mentor of his during his Masters; Lloyd Pfautsch. He spoke of Pfautsch’s manner, of the ego that was always kept in check, and how important that modeling was to him as he began his career. Had he not received that kind of instruction, Henry told us, “I could have become a real jerk. That’s what I saw in a
lot of others in music, but there was none of that from him, he was gracious and supportive.” I was able to speak to the kind of classroom atmosphere I myself attempt to create, and how I’ve been able to connect and reflect in much the same manner as Henry with the new choral music encounters of my schooling and professional development experiences. During the research process, I had one minute incident which encouraged me to keep along my path of strong modeling from a reflexive stance while teaching at the post-secondary level. It occurred at the onset of choral techniques class as I sat down for a moment’s rest beside a student in the confining chairs with the built in lift-up desks as other students entered:

Matt (casually to me): I need a stand, I just can’t balance my binder and still write – these desks are so small.

Me: You know you guys can use the big tables and chairs, you just have to move them when you get to class. You don’t have to stay in a semi-circle. People did that last year so they could spread out and take notes.

Matt: Ya, but then it’s all classroom-like. (He gets up to grab a music stand, making an off-handed comment) This isn’t a class, it’s our choral community.

I was hit with a feeling of success and pride in my students and what they had created and in my own teaching and modeling. And so I just sat there and soaked it in while Matt went to get a stand. He returned to his squishy seat within our choral community, and I was still sitting there thinking to myself that I was going to rush to my office to write this down immediately after class (research journal, 2010).

I return to the ideas of Douglas Hofstadter (2007) and the seeming insignificance of mundane moments and analogy. Listening to the focus group sessions, I heard myself retell this story as an “it’s like what happened in my class last week with Matt” moment, triggered by others’ narratives related to yet another modeling discussion. And so, I realized that this little
analogy had the power to illuminate real situations that have “essentially the same central structure or conceptual core,” as the larger principles and themes that shape our professional practice, and thus, the extra meaning “is there to be read” (p. 150). A meaning was read that was “transmitted by analogy between events” (p. 154) and as a result, a strong connection, a strong relationship, was realized between the mentors and figures that have influenced each of us in that room and my own classroom experience as an educator. It was a special moment that was illuminated because I was engaged in self-study, and as a result was far more aware of my teaching environment and my interactions with others, particularly my students. It is a moment that I most otherwise would have laughed off. Instead, it was pulled into my own “line of inspiration” as Henry had termed his encounters with mentors and the effect they had on him.

During an informal chat over the phone to clarify some data, I asked Henry, “What’s your favourite piece of music?”

“The one I’m working on” he replied emphatically with a bit of a giggle.

I prodded a bit and he immediately began describing his more profound memories of conducting, rehearsing and performing. The first that came to mind was Bach’s Mass in B minor with the Baroque ensemble that he formed, Canzona.

I’ll never forget the first rehearsal; the sound and the feeling. The rhythm was absolutely tight. The excitement of singing the music shot right to the centre of you.

Henry went on to describe the feeling of the performance and how it was to work with such wonderful people. Then it was a discussion of Elijah and how special the chorus was and how supportive members from the orchestra were. Then it was another piece, and another, and there was one similarity in all the tales: it was always, always about the people; it was always about the relationships.
I’m Afraid

There will be moments when you find yourself in darkened valleys where your fears and uncertainties seem to overcome you. Have faith...you will find a passage out and you will climb to new vantage points, see new horizons that will nurture renewed strength within you (Karen Whelan, “Traveler on a Journey,” from Connelly & Clandinin, *Shaping a Professional Identity*, 1999, p. 21).

In focus groups, we rely on others’ sharing of memories to trigger those symbols lying dormant in our craniums, as the story of Matt’s choral community did for me. These stories awaken the inevitably somewhat distorted images “of one’s own deepest character traits, of one’s level in all sorts of blurry social hierarchies, of one’s greatest accomplishments and failures, of one’s fulfilled and unfulfilled yearning, and on and on” (Hofstadter, 2007, p. 185). Through recent actions and reflections, namely the recording project of German hymns, we see that Henry’s hymnbol was floating on the surface, readily exposed and enthusiastically relived. Other stories, however, lay deeper under the surface.

During the first focus group session Henry was incredibly interested in interviewing Sonya since he had not met her prior to the onset of the data collection period. He asked if she would like to interview him and she agreed. He listened intently to her stories and a student-teacher bond seemed to form almost immediately in their conversations. Sonya opened up to him regarding the trials of her student teaching experiences and her doubts entering the profession as a new choral conductor. Henry wanted to know about the first time she sang in a choir. He asked her “How did you get into conducting? Was it dramatic?” In particular, he recognized how her experiences shaped the teacher she had likely become.

Henry told the following story to Sonya after she shared a rather difficult tale of transformation with him. Her story had triggered a vivid memory of Henry’s, resuscitating a narrative that one might bury deep within the self, a narrative that Henry, rather than bury, has
transformed into a life lesson which lies at the core of his musical self; a story he continues to relive. This is evidenced when he had admits to relaying the story to a choir of university-aged singers fairly recently. It is in moments such as this that Davies and Gannon (2006) remind us that the work of collective biographies “makes visible, and therefore revisable, the discourses through which we make meanings and selves” (p. 7).

Here, the story is reactivated in Henry’s own words with interruptions from newspaper clippings. These snapshots of Henry’s career illustrate both the opinion of his home community as translated through journalists’ eyes, and his own opinions uttered in a different time and space than the secondary institution he attended, and in which the story occurs. The clippings were kept by his mother—that musical supporter with the lovely alto voice and master of the key of E flat—and lay hidden inside a linen closet at his cousin’s home for decades. They were finally passed on to him in 2007, and he in turn passed them on to me as possible artifacts of interest during one of our personal interviews. These texts, which interfere and intersect with Henry’s story of struggle at graduate school, are able in their interaction to disrupt the effects of the dominant discourse of the post-secondary institution, thus creating a alternative dialogic view (Bahktin, 1981) of Henry’s musical self at that time in his life. Already a professional in his community back home, Henry is faced with a major setback in his doctoral pursuits. However, he reveals himself as neither determined nor dominated by the effects of such a discourse, although initially the oppression seems insurmountable. The defeated call of Henry’s story and the, at times, oddly perspicacious response of the contents of these artifacts, has the effect of scattering thoughts and images into different linkages, allowing the reader to ask fresh questions, to make new meaning. This representation ruptures the implicit order of narrative into new alignments in a Deleuzian fashion and reveals the process of selving (Davies and Gannon, 2006), rather than simply revealing specific details of a musical self. Grosz (1995) suggested that texts
“only remain effective and alive if they have effects, produce realignments, shake things up” (as cited in Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 5). Elbaz-Luwisch strengthens this view by acknowledging how the self may function in different ways on an “imaginal landscape” when it exists in multiple “story-worlds” (p. 16). Henry’s through-story is presented in italics while the newspaper clippings are in different fonts representing a variety of publications.

One of the most devastating moments I had was in graduate school. I was taking an 800 level theory review, and the professor had been an ex-naval officer and he was tough, tough, tough. I asked him a question after class and he said to me (he takes a long pause)...

“Who let you in?”

Native son Henry Engbrecht is indeed a maestro in the field of music. His love of music and his years of study have brought him this honour. (Hometown Newspaper, 1981)

One of the most crushing moments I’ve ever had. I had to say to myself right there, “I’m afraid.”

Engbrecht intends to complete doctoral studies in conducting, but says, “I don’t need that label—the doctorate—for my own personal fulfillment.” (Winnipeg Free Press, 1982)

He said “How come the silence?” and I said, “I’m afraid.”

And then he goes into a big psychological discussion about how fear impacts your learning and can keep you from progressing and all that stuff—as mathematical as you can get.

What’s important is “to develop one’s own abilities and widen one’s horizons.” (Henry as quoted in the Winnipeg Free Press, 1982)

I was forty years old. I was Elroy’s age. But I didn’t have the training that Elroy had—that confidence building thing and a pocketful of excellent teaching behind me. And so I felt I was always running back a block to catch up, to pick up papers and bits and little pieces and to try and piece something together so that I could get through. And that time, it felt so brutal, I went home... and I cried.
The satisfaction that Prof. Engbrecht receives from choir directing he attributes in part to the capable training he received under “inspirational” conductors.
(University Bulletin feature article, 1979)

I couldn’t get past a C+ in his class. Ironically though, it was that class that enabled me to pass the theory comprehensive exam on the first try. But on the history comprehensive it didn’t go as well. I had A’s in everything else, but not in the history. They sat on it for two weeks and then they decided...they weren’t going to pass me.

I had a big decision to make since I was already that age. I wanted to take them again; I had come this far. But a good conducting friend here said, “Look, doing this and then a thesis, is it going to make you a better conductor? Is it going to make you a better musician? Is it going to make you a better teacher? These are the things you do.”

“Blending human voices into a great unit of sound, an agreement of sound, that is pleasurable to listen to, is communicative to an audience, and in that way can give great pleasure to an audience...is very, very satisfying.” (Henry quoted in the University Bulletin, 1979)

There had been so many sacrifices; family, time. That’s when I made the decision: it has cost enough.

Passionately in love with music, Henry Engbrecht is a genius when it comes to hard work (Heading, cover story, Mennonite Mirror 10th Anniversary Issue, 1981)

Just last week I told that story to the University Singers because I said ‘I want you to know that when you feel that you just can’t do it, another door opens. And don’t despair when you fail at first. Those are the kinds of life things that have helped me the most.’ It’s been said many times already here between the five of us: we teach much more than music and we teach through music. Music is a support and a healer and we do it as inspiration, not course content.

Since the story was told, I have listened to it many times. It has become a pseudo-memory for me. I recall it, as Hofstadter (2007) explains, “as if it had happened to me” (p. 256) with vivid images of what I believe this professor of Henry’s to look like, the moment of impact at the words “Who let you in?” and Henry’s face as he closes the door at home and surrenders to tears. It has become part of my emotional library, soon to become dormant until it is triggered
once more as analogy to create meaning for me later in my choral educator life, as needed. In this
sense I co-create meaning with Henry, entering his phenomenological field, looking, as Aston
(2001) suggests life history methodology may, to fuse horizons where “one’s viewpoint is
transcended” and the researcher is able to learn from another (p. 149).

I believe this tale should be taken as a “structural self-image” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p.
119) of Henry’s choral music educator self. The journey through doctoral studies and the
decision to exit had an enormous effect on Henry. That leg of his journey has greatly shaped his
understandings regarding his own life path, and his values and attitudes toward post-secondary
education. By his own admission, it transformed his attitude toward his career and caused him to
evaluate what was of true significance in his life. Thus, he was in position to weigh what he
should sacrifice in pursuit of academic goals and their honest contribution to his imagined future.
It was truly a life-marking event, which, when revisited, allowed Henry to interrogate the
discursive processes he was caught up in. The image of the doctoral student set against the
backdrop of a hometown musical hero, a maestro in the eyes of his community, has a sense of
heartrending irony about it. It is as if one self-pattern was set against another and two distinct,
and somewhat opposing realities were in motion at once: Henry the choral success story; Henry
the struggling student.

The advice so inspirationally put by Karen Whelan (1999) at the onset of this story finds
deeper meaning as she explains of her own struggles, “I recognize that it was this experience that
awakened me from my blind travels on a trail that was no longer my own” (p. 31). Henry
awakened from his own ‘blind travels’ and chose a path for himself that shaped the musical self
he had the foresight to understand he wished to become.
The fact that Henry shared such a story with undergraduate students, some ready to enter the student-teacher trials, some approaching their own journey into the realm of graduate school, and some just entering the undergraduate experience, is of particular note. In this respect, the story becomes a personal triumph; a story of great inner turmoil regarding reputation, goals for the future, hard work already invested, and the expectations of a community which finally finds in its retelling, a sense of resolution in that it now serves a greater purpose. In telling this story to Sonya, the narrative takes on additional properties of inspiration, hope, and comfort. While one may sense pain in the process, there is also the understanding that this part of Henry’s journey has become for him a tale of self-evolution, embraced and noted for its transformational properties. He created out of this story a life lesson that he sensed Sonya was in need of hearing and in the process created a relationship of trust and support among co-researchers.

**Uncovering the Sensational in the Seemingly Un-Sensational**

Just as in my initial self-study, I view the following final narrative as Henry’s “utopian moment” in collaborative self-study; the point where “the self is invited to be more than, or better than, itself” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004, p. 340). Such moments are the point where self-study research can offer a tale of transformation (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001). Such a tale inspires a renovation of the routine and presents the possibility of new beginnings in our continual journey of becoming. We need not board a luxury cruise ship to journey across the waters to Utopia, sometimes a simple rowboat will do:

I think back on a whole career of conducting and I wish I could do a lot of it again. I remember one vivid experience here at the university; a context where one of our good singing sopranos who was doing all right, doing opera, was in University Singers. She sat in the front row and she was falling asleep in rehearsal. Well, we all know what that’s about, you burn the candle at both
ends, you have too much of a social life, or, or, or... This had been going on for a while. I said “Can you see me afterwards for a bit? Just after rehearsal?”

“Sure,” she was positive, happy, you know... everything’s fine.

And we went to my office and put things down. “How are you?” and so forth. And so then I went into a short little bit, telling her I’ve noticed the fatigue and the lack of attention—and there’s talent there. “Probably you’re burning the candle at both ends because it’s becoming very evident and we’re in a crucial part of the term...” (he pauses to emphasize his carefully-chosen words), “How can I help?”

And after that conversation we had, things improved dramatically. And I thought, ‘Thank you God, you gave me a line to use.’ Because to say, “How can I help?” instead of “Darn you woman, you’re disturbing the momentum of my rehearsal and you’re a thorn in my eye when I look at you in my choir!” That very statement made her open up and say to herself, ‘You know, you’re right,’ and she turned things around. And I thought many times it wasn’t the sensational thing that I did because I missed that opportunity many times, and there were a lot of times I just didn’t know what to do or say, but it taught me a lot about myself: before you say that damning thing, find out what it feels like to be in those shoes, or at least offer to be an ear or a help.

This episode from Henry’s teaching career represents a moment of enlightenment, an evolution of a self on its journey through the professional knowledge landscape (Connelly & Clandinin, 1995). The story emerged during our second focus group session within the context of a discussion regarding significant mentors in both Derek and Sonya’s lives. Derek and Sonya’s stories triggered Henry’s memory as he recognized a quality within himself, made explicit in the manner in which he dealt with the situation of ‘the yawning singer.’

In listening to the data, I immediately connected the preceding story to Henry’s formidable tale of the militant professor. It stood out to me how Henry’s reflexivity had inspired his empathy, as Diamond (1999) suggests is possible. The struggle to readily resolve earlier conflicts in his career had found a new and unexpected tool in his interaction with the student: compassion. In this respect, Henry created a relationship which prized interaction and student agency; the opposite of the relationship revealed in the earlier story. This choice of creating a
supportive student-teacher relationship rather than acting out in a method which enforces a professor’s power over a student, a method Henry himself had experienced, reveals in its approach an attitude which values student empowerment. Not only does he deal compassionately with the situation, he gives the student agency, allowing her to deal with the issue herself, rather than telling her what to do and how to do it. In this manner she is given the opportunity to own the choice, something Henry had to create for himself. The acknowledgement of such a seemingly un-sensational act as having an impact on his values and attitudes toward his professional practice is telling. It shows us that an epiphanal moment need not be overly dramatic. These moments can surface in the most humble of stories.

**A Final Thought on Relationships**

The presentation of one final artifact reveals the essence of Henry’s musical self and the beliefs, values, and attitudes that he carries into his professional practice. This, however, is not an artifact of Henry’s; rather, it is one of my own. The following prayer was included in an issue of *Noteworthy*, the Manitoba Choral Association member’s newsletter, just before the beginning of a Christmas season. I don’t recall the year or issue, but it impressed me enough to cut it out and keep it on the magnet board in my office. I share it with students in the choral techniques class I teach, a class that Henry instructed for years, before they begin their first task of learning each and every cue from Handel’s “And the Glory of the Lord.” This is a drill that Henry took from his mentor, Lloyd Pfautsch during his Masters program; a drill that has become a right of passage in choral conducting at the University of Manitoba. The prayer is delivered from Henry to singers of every kind with the knowledge that many will participate in performances of the masterwork of Handel’s *Messiah* in some respect over the Christmas period. It strikes me that
each of the stanzas highlights the same musical relationships which occupied my thoughts upon attending the performance of Bach’s *Christmas Oratorio*. It reveals that these relationships are conscious to Henry as well, and he begs us recognize and celebrate them.

After Henry and I met to review this chapter together, he told me that this was one of the few points in his life where writing seemed to flow from him, that he didn’t struggle to put any of these words on to paper. Thus, the prayer sprung from roots deep within Henry’s soul-soil and flowered to reveal the essence of his musical self:

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**A Prayer Before Performing Messiah**

May the beauty of the lyrics  
and the radiance of the music  
lead you in your thoughts  
and inspire you to send your voice beyond the page.

May the rhythms drive you forward  
to the scenic climaxes  
of each musical segment of this masterpiece  
with strong anticipation of what is yet to come.

May your voice reach out and touch the soul  
of one who came to hear you sing.

May the joy and the pleasure of performing together  
make you grateful for the opportunity  
to sing this work of art  
in such strong company.

May your performance be full of feeling,  
fervent, fresh…and fun!
I admit that I was worried at the onset of this research whether my connection with the “researched,” personal as it was, might impede my judgment, hold me back from being critical, or constrain my reflections because I knew the majority of the participants intimately. I was, however, surprised and excited to hear the stories of each co-researcher, and was humbled by the degree of honesty and soul-searching displayed in their storytelling, with no prompting from me. Our stories were “so vastly different,” as Derek mentioned after our first focus group session, and yet there were so many connections to be made. This revealed to me just how many assumptions I carried regarding what I imagined the musical journey of others to be, and what their attitudes concerning many aspects of our discipline were. I realized then how much we had to learn from each other.

Additionally, I held assumptions regarding the ability of others to investigate both their own practices and upbringing to the degree that I had in my initial self-study (relayed in the prologue). Could they be discerning of their opinions and beliefs without an education which had bathed them in multiple critical philosophical discourses? I knew that throughout the research process I would need to stay acutely aware that the participants of this study were not, as in the practice of collective biography (Davies & Gannon, 2006) for example, familiar with such discourses. On the flip side, I began to worry whether my Masters in Music Education and subsequent doctoral work might encourage me to place myself in the position of “enlightened one”; I had witnessed such behaviour in other literature as well as at conferences; this was a place I didn’t want to go. My hope was to view my experiences “as a field site,” as Reinharz (1979) had, and myself as “data” (p. 48-49). Still, I found that regardless of the language used,
we are all able to uncover and examine multiple aspects of our musical selves and make connections to our practice.

After I had emailed Henry his chapter for an initial member-checking session, I ran into him in the parking lot at the Faculty of Music. He said to me, “thank you, I’ve made so many discoveries about myself.” And I thought, ‘yes, so have I’ and they continued to surface the more I reviewed the data. In collaborative self-study, as was reflected through our focus group sessions, co-researcher’s personal narratives intersected and collided, meaning was made for us especially when one’s narrative triggered another’s memories. Numerous times throughout the preceding chapter, I acknowledged a relation between Henry’s narratives and my professional practice. I reflect on Henry’s early stories and question a few things as I set them against my own formative experiences. Although we were greatly influenced by our formative musical experiences, they were, as is to be expected, incredibly different. There were not many early musical experiences available to me. I recall loving to sing and hoping each day at school in grades two and three that it would be a “singing day”—as these popped up from time to time—but there were no formal music classes at all. I brought in my artifacts of The Partridge Family (“a family that sings together? How awesome is that?”), The Cowsills, ABBA, and Simon and Garfunkel. These constituted much of my early musical exposure. I had played them over and over again on a little blue record player my parents had given me until I broke it. Then I went to my parent’s room and broke theirs. So I would listen, and sing, and imagine, creating my own radio shows and recording my voice on a little cassette player. Those were the days.

As a child growing up in a small town, my mother, believing proficiency in an instrument was a necessary life skill, marched me down the street for lessons with a high school student. There we plodded through the old Leila Fletcher books many pianists are familiar with. When I flip through the pages of these books which I found hidden in the piano bench of the old Lesage
still in my parents’ home, I see the tiny round stickers of smiling animals and musical caricatures
with googly eyes that signaled I had properly played through a piece and could move on to the
next. Alternatively, a red penciled check-mark meant that I had tried many times (half-assed) and
my teacher had finally given up and considered the piece “passable” so that we could move on.
But I just didn’t really enjoy piano and rarely practiced. My mother had also spotted a love of
music in me, as had my primary classroom teacher (revealed in earlier stories in the prologue of
this thesis). Still, I remained uninspired by my time with the young teacher who seemed to think
music was getting the notes right and moving on another piece, with the continued goal
of…getting the notes right. This caught up with me later.

Moving to the big city I studied with a lady who was in her eighties. The instruction
wasn’t poor, but I had been turned off piano and now, to this day, I feel like less of a musician,
somehow behind the game, although I understand others would beg to differ. My piano recitals
and exams were laborious and horridly intimidating. I never developed any real technique and
thus I was left behind in terms of musical skill once I hit my bachelor degree program in music.
Without a challenge and the development of solid skills early on in my instruction, the feeling of
playing “catch-up” still haunts me. I apologize regularly in class and wish I could play anything
up to speed like Elroy, whose narrative is presented in chapter seven. Looking at our stories and
the achievements in spite of these feelings of inadequacy, I wonder now: is it my perceived lack
of skills that is the problem, or my assumption that others held some advantage over me?
Certainly there are many others whose piano skills are beneath my own. Perhaps it is that these
are the characteristics of a consummate performer rather than a valued educator. Were my other
talents—for example a social nature, strong communication skills, emotional sensitivity toward
others, attention to detail, a natural musicality—valued to the same degree by my peers and
educators at the university level? They were by Henry, and yet I didn’t quite get over my
insecurities. I stated earlier that I never battled the educator versus performer dualism, upon review, perhaps I am slightly misguided in this notion. How early is the “performer” attitude drilled into us? This was one of the themes that arose in our third focus group session. While we all valued the characteristics of a strong educator, there were also some strong feelings of needing a certain degree of musical—that is technical—prowess. This attitude seemed to be connected to our abilities, as well as our inadequacies or perceived inadequacies regarding the quality of our previous musical experiences; our “particular vantage point(s), in terms of a particular autobiography” as Maxine Greene (1978) surmised (as cited in Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 25). So, rather than being concerned with nurturing the inner musician and being acknowledged as a performer within our teaching identity (Bernard, 2005; Scott-Kassner & Kassner, 2001), we need to embrace and acknowledge our music education rather than our musical training to truly appreciate “what kind of interaction music teaching might be” (Bowman, 2002, p. 64).

Ironically, I brought my old canvas piano book-bag with the image of Beethoven adorning the front in deep burgundy as an artifact to the first focus group session. I also brought pieces of music I had played in festival, the piece I had won first place with, the carol books I challenged myself with, and the Clementi and Kuhlau that I prided myself on being able to get through with no mistakes. Thus, it appears that these lessons are a significant part of me regardless of my attitude toward them, and the experiences that grew out of them are embedded in the understanding I carry of my musical self.
“To Learn and Serve”

There was one thing that influenced me most as I learned from Henry’s narratives. I noticed that as much as I tried to engage Henry in speaking about his personal opinions on the music he has made, his own attitude toward rehearsal, and the experience of rehearsing and performing, he always came back to the others who were involved. Every description of these experiences involved the singers and “the wonderful singing that created the performance”; “the commitment from the singers really made the difference.” Acknowledged in his stories of the history of choral music in Manitoba, were the contributions of others and how they were such “pioneers of choral music.” It was only when I zoomed in and asked him about his own listening that he was able to articulate his personal feelings on musical tastes. Performances and the rehearsal process were always seen as community, always a connection between himself, the singers and the instrumentalists, with the goal of communicating with the audience. He articulated his views succinctly and offered a possible origin:

The biggest element, and assuming that you’re always learning, is the people. I got that from my private school experience because people were important, a conversion to Christ was important, and to do that you had to get personal and be personal and be caring, and that flowed over into other things.

In our first personal interview, I recall catching a glimpse of myself in Henry’s glasses and I jotted down that little moment to reflect on later. Like Henry, I have a strong sense of morality that guides my life and subsequently, my professional practice, and, like Henry, I have also been influenced by shoulder tappers with bold personalities, people who called me out and challenged me to challenge myself. These were people who didn’t let my self-doubt get the best of me, made me question myself “in the right way,” if that makes sense, and, as Skretta (2000)
urges mentors to do, pushed me to reconsider what was important. Our discussions in the second focus group session led me to the tale of ‘trying to quit.’

Cath: I tried to quit choral teaching and then certain “forces” intervened. (I pointed to Henry and giggled). Do you even remember that? When we adjudicated in Kenora I told you over coffee that I wanted to stop choral for a while and do the acting thing, and you said—in your supportive and caring way mind you—“I hope you fail” (we all laughed heartily). You said “I hope you go to auditions and nobody ever hires you.” You wanted me to stay with the conducting thing. And when I moved back to the city from Morden I started getting all these offers to conduct and adjudicate and do workshops for teachers—it was just spiraling—and I remember feeling overwhelmed and not quite old enough or experienced enough to be working at that level, but I saw it as inadequacy rather than talent and the result of hard work. Then I got a call from Ann Lugsdin at the university because the youth choir for the Preparatory Division needed a new conductor. She said, “Henry Engbrecht said you were the one” and she didn’t let up, she kept “encouraging” me—so, like basically nagging and nagging—so I took that. Then before I knew it I was doing the younger choir too, and I had sworn up and down I’d never work with elementary age singers.

But you know how it is when a conductor leaves a choir: all the singers follow. So I had to recruit a whole new choir and half the choir was my own former students driving in all the way from Morden every week. And I was doing this, and trying to do little theatre things at the same time, and go for auditions. But the theatre people always wanted something different, “dye your hair, lose weight, gain weight, you’re not tall enough,” whatever it was. The theatre profession always wanted me to be someone else and the choral community always wanted me. Anyway, we (the choir) finished our first concert at the university and Mr. Petkau, who is a very quiet man who taught chemistry at the high school in Morden, was there since his daughter was in the choir. And you know, he had said “hi” to me in the halls and was always at every concert, but truthfully we’d never really had a conversation even, but then suddenly he came back stage—“Catherine I’d like to speak to you.” He was a very serious personality and he looked right at me and said, “I know you have some other interests, but I want to tell you that you have a gift. Don’t stop teaching. You need to keep doing this and I hope you stay with it.”

Henry (interjecting as he will): Wake up, wake up.
Cath: And that’s when I really thought, “Ya, maybe you need to take a look at this decision.” So I kept doing all these choirs and taking private students as the requests came in, and acting here and there. But with the acting it’s all about you; it has to be all about you, it’s a very selfish profession. And with teaching, it has to be all about the students. So do I choose me, or do I choose to commit to the students? And so I chose to make it about the students. That was the real decision, not acting versus choral. It was more like, who do I commit to?

Elroy: And that’s reflected in your teaching right now. You carried it over from your high school teaching.

Cath: And it really wasn’t the music, it was the relationships.

Derek: And that’s the most important thing, ultimately.

Sonya: Ya, you gotta commit.

Cath: And you have to stay mindful about that when you’re tapped out and exhausted, and find a way to recharge and do it without expectations of a thank you. That doesn’t always come right away with teenagers or students in their early twenties because it’s all about them at that age, but that has to be okay. And I’m glad the decision to continue in choral was presented to me in a more of a stark manner than just a bunch of nagging that I gave into. I needed to feel that the decision was mine.

Numerous questions surfaced for me as a result of re-visiting this time in my life. Can we be mentors for those who need our help to see through their perceived inadequacies and find success? Can we as music educators keep the focus on our students? Can we make it about the relationships rather than ourselves? I am mindful of Henry’s motto, “to learn and serve,” and as I progress in my career, I see how that can be difficult at times. We all acknowledged this in our final focus group session together, but I find comfort in the acknowledgement of the continual creative and re-creative process of this research for, as Mary Beattie (2007) reminded, “the becoming is always a work in progress, and the narrative is always a temporal one that will change in the light of new experiences and new understandings” (p. 3). Henry’s narratives have inspired me to be mindful of my roots and what I have to offer. Moreover, they have inspired me
to a specific way of being with my students. I think on the tale where Henry asked “how can I help?” and wonder if I can think of my students first and allow this to guide our interactions. I think on the narrative of his doctoral hardships and how he shared this story with the choir members this past year; can I find the humility to admit my hardships to my students in order to empower them and let them know they are not alone in their journeys of becoming? Henry’s narratives highlight an essential quality of all self-study which “points toward a specific ontology, which includes a commitment to a quest for understanding and to a way of being with and for children, colleagues, and our students” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004, p. 340); the focus is always on relationships.
Sonya,

I make my students go to choral concerts as part of their course requirements for choir. Some decided to attend the Provincial Honour Choirs concert. This is what one of them wrote about the adult choir performance (straight up, no edits):

“One song in particular was an African piece entitled Tshotsholoza about a train of hope driving through Africa it was very moving. The song begun in a solo by a African women who really carried the African feel of the song to a height that everyone else in the choir was eager to follow along at. I watched her the whole song and she sang with such deep pride and happiness. At the end of the song she cried for she really felt moved herself in the song leaving tears of joy in the aftermath.”

My student has gone through the foster care system and he’s about to graduate. And he’s doing well and is on his way to doing fine in life. Thanks for giving him another positive image to go forward.

Philip

(Email message to Sonya from colleague in school division, February, 2010)
When I got to the church I looked around the small, humble building and saw the members of the modest congregation trickle slowly in and greet one another. I plopped myself down in the second last pew thinking I’d be out of sight there and no one would pay much attention to the stranger that was attending their service that day. I would just fade into the background.

No such luck.

I was greeted by every person that walked by me and all reached out and shook my hand. Some embraced me. Fully embraced me. And they called me “sister.” People I didn’t know embraced me and called me “sister.”

The service began and a gospel piece was played on the piano by Sonya. Members of the congregation were invited by the Pastor to greet one another, as often occurs at the onset of a service. I’ve been to many. I’ve been to many, many different church services to watch students perform, or sing, or lead a section in the choir. But this time I was embraced and called “sister.” There were no quick turns for short, polite handshakes. Rather, all the bodies in the building left their seats and began to circulate around the room conversing with one another with no sense of urgency, only fellowship. And what’s more is they’d already greeted each other upon arriving. So there they were, talking again, comforting one woman who appeared to be struggling a bit, asking each other with genuine interest how their week had been. Embracing one another. Embracing me.

Most of the congregation appeared to be of Jamaican descent like Sonya, and there were some families with young children, and many older women in Sunday-best hats. But there were a few white church members as well, and, it struck me, a number
of special needs individuals. A woman pushing a wheelchair with a young man arrived a bit late, stopped at the end of my pew and was immediately approached by others to say ‘hello,’ after which she turned to me and offered “Welcome, God bless you.”

The service finally started with more music. It was at once individual and collective, cohesive yet uncontrolled, soulful and celebratory, personal and beautifully unpolished. It was as Sonya described it to me in an email:

It has four-part harmonies with a lot of counterpart. The tenors or sopranos are usually running a melody line, and the altos offer a rich melodic harmony and text that supports the main message. The basses give up a strong foundation. Sometimes it’s rhythmic, sometimes there’s anchoring chords, but it’s always impressive and low. The music is always encouraging and inspirational, if you will. There’s a lot of focus on the power of God to help us overcome troubling or sad situations. The music itself is ALWAYS exciting; something exciting is always happening.

And I began to cry.

I don’t know why, but I couldn’t stop the tears. I’ve just never quite experienced such a feeling of community in that way before. The sense of community in this little church I’d never been to, never even heard of, actually moved me to tears. I remember thinking it wouldn’t be so bad if these crazy people would stop hugging me. But now that I was sniffling, there was more of it. What was going on? What exactly was it that got to the core of me? What incited such an emotional reaction?

I believe it was the genuine show of love without question or resistance. The commitment to community in such an outright and bold manner was profound. It was a commitment to being in the world with those around you to the point of inviting all that surround you to be part of a spiritual family. To be brother. To be sister. It is
commitment that I had not experienced in quite the same manner in other venues. It was fearless. It got involved. It touched my body. It embraced me. Fully embraced me.

Later, after a rousing sermon delivered with verve and humour, the congregation joined in the singing of gospel songs lead by Sonya and two others on microphones at the front of the church. Hands found their way to the air and voices rose with abandon. It was free and it was full. Somehow, without music in front of me to follow, only text projected on the wall at the front of the church, consistently lagging a few frames behind, I found myself singing the melodies as if I had always known and sung them. The repetition of the choruses pulled me along in its happy entrainment. And darnit if the tears didn’t return.

I guess I just felt a part of something. And it was unexpected. And it was moving. And I learned a lot about Sonya that Sunday morning.

(Compiled from notes from participant observation session, February, 2009)

Who is Sonya? How Do I Relate to Her as Researcher?

Before the research journey began I did not know Sonya very well. I had some brief choral committee contact with her and had seen her here and there at various choral events. She had quite a presence. She was always funny, confident, and easy going, from my perspective, and I noticed how people wanted to be around her. I could also see she was becoming increasingly involved in the Manitoba choral community. I had the occasion to see and hear her choirs at Choralfest, our annual non-competitive choral festival in Manitoba. I was struck then by the work she was doing in a demographic that had traditionally produced very little in the arts. Musically, no one had heard from the school she was teaching at in years; the high school had
been silent for some time. But here was an energetic, committed group of young singers of various races and socio-economic status performing challenging repertoire with such confidence and musicality. Sonya had everyone talking, and she had them talking about how obvious the bond with her students was; it left a pronounced impression.

Through an act of serendipity I came to strongly consider approaching Sonya for my research. I read an assignment from a student of mine that mentioned her choir. Out of the six choirs that my student had observed, she was particularly drawn to Sonya’s group:

*This conductor loved her kids and her kids loved her. She was so relaxed and clearly having fun. She conducted without music and was absolutely connected to the music. This was my favorite group to listen to because they went for it, expressively it was all there and they were having so much fun. Perhaps it was at the sacrifice of some details, but the overall musicality and engagement of this group was exemplary.*

(Student observation log assignment, 2008)

This strengthened my curiosity as to what Sonya’s musical journey had been. I had a strong sneaking suspicion that Sonya was the kind of educator who could engage collaboratively with others, stand her ground, and that she had, as we all do, wonderful stories to tell. Sonya has been teaching for almost eight years now. Her first teaching position was a term position for six months after which she spent three years at a grade seven to twelve school position. She is now finishing her fourth year at another high school where she teaches both choir and band. Sonya’s narrative elucidates the emotional dimensions of becoming a teacher and recognizes, as Beattie (2007) suggests professional narratives can, “personal strengths and unique features; of belief in the self, one’s own voice, and ways of being in the world” (p. 22).
Sonya and Her “Family”

Now in her early thirties, Sonya grew up in Winnipeg to Jamaican parents. As far back as she can remember, she has sung in church. Many times in her earlier years this singing was in duet with her younger brother, “cause that’s just what you did, you sang for the glory of God, that’s just what everybody did.” Her father, also a teacher and great lover of music, played “everything he picked up.” Upon seeing her drawn to the piano, fooling around on it at church, her father, like Henry’s mother, fed the interest and the four year old began piano lessons. Sonya was the only sibling to take formal lessons as one child enrolled in music instruction was all the family could afford. But her brother, like his father, became a self-taught musician on the electric bass, keyboards, and drums. The family often sang together as a unit and accompanied themselves with her father on guitar, her brother on drums, and she on piano. Duets with her brother, however, became a regular feature on the church music scene. Sonya delighted in telling us this story, which was the first she shared with us during the first focus group session. She giggled throughout:

In my earliest musical memory, my brother and I are standing on the little stage of the church. It was very small, just one step up and it had this really ugly red carpet, very early eighties carpet I remember. We had to sing this song, it was some kind of special program and the kids had already done something separately with costumes. We’d already been with all the kids so we were all giddy, and then ‘Sonya and Chris are going to sing for everyone….again’ (she chuckles)….and Dad’s accompanying on guitar and we started singing…and in the middle of the song we got the giggles, and then we started really laughing (Sonya laughs herself remembering the moment) and my mom was so livid because we were supposed to be singing for the glory of God! I remember I was wearing my pink dress and I looked over at Chris—he was the bad one (she kids to us)—“Okay Chris, we have to sing,” and we started singing again but Chris went “hee, hee, hee,” and all was lost.

Sonya’s church life was full of music making from an early age and she loved to sing. Making music with her family was an integral part of her life growing up. In the school
atmosphere, however, an early experience stood in contrast to the ongoing musical experiences in her spiritual environment. During her elementary years, an unexpected twist led Sonya out of the choral classroom and signaled the beginning of a need for her to perform different musical identities in different spaces.

Sonya told this story to me twice within different contexts during the data collection period. A shorter version was relayed in the first focus group session in response to Elroy sharing his positive elementary school experiences. That version focused on the anger toward a teacher that “didn’t get it” with regard to what choral singing and music making “should be” as understood by Sonya’s grade six self. The emotional content of the story was stark and easily understood. It was illuminating in the sense that the experience resurfaced for her in another context as an example of “what not to do,” and what kind of atmosphere and morals should exist within the classroom, that is, “how teaching should be.” It is an early illustration of what values Sonya deeply held in regard to the role of teacher and, as we shall see, what kind of influence such values had on the teacher she decided to become. Making this narrative explicit allowed Sonya to trace a path from her early experiences to the development of her own attitudes and beliefs regarding inclusion in the choral classroom. She was able to reflect on how, as Dolloff (1999) drawing on Knowles (1992) suggests, teachers in our stories become the foundation for our early images of self-as-teacher. This experience affected her attitudes toward music making in the school for years to come.

The second telling of this particular narrative arose within the context of family music making in the church during our first personal interview session. Feelings toward the teacher and the “inward view” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) that reveals one’s moral disposition are still apparent mind you, but in it’s second telling presented below, the story takes on deeper meaning when Sonya is able to connect it to ways of being with a loved one:
I really liked to sing but I decided I was never going to sing again. The teacher turned to Chris and because his voice changed she told him “out ya go.” He could be a trouble maker now and again, but she used this as an excuse to just get rid of him. And this was choir. It was supposed to be for everyone to sing, and he was my brother. So I decided “forget it, if I can’t do it with my brother, I’m not doing it at all.” And that’s when I think I realized that a lot of my feelings of music making were connected to my family.

Kicking her brother out of choir was taken personally by Sonya as a comment which suggested, as she explained it, “who you are isn’t good enough.” If Prescesky (1997) is correct in asserting that perceptions of selves are rooted in childhood memories and models of practice, this story becomes especially pivotal. It goes to the core of Sonya’s understanding of who she is. Church life suggests she is valued and the atmosphere encourages great participation, while school life suggests that music making is not for everyone. Borders are created and as a result, multiple views of a musical self emerge and adhere to different environments.

The narrative also exposes Sonya’s conceptions of musical relationships. The most important relationship at that time in her life was family: “our family was so connected and connected musically.” I refer back Borthwick & Davis’ (2002) concept of the “family script” discussed in relation to Henry’s experiences, noting how the family “as a social unit, supports musical learning of a child” (Clarke & Cook, 2004, p. 64). Music is valued through being with others and is an integral part of spiritual life. And the way that music is expressed is most whole-hearted, free, and with great commitment in body and spirit. It’s loud and proud; literally. Had I not visited Sonya’s church and seen first hand the larger sense of family embedded in her culture, had I not seen her father on guitar and her mother singing with her hands raised in the air toward the heavens, lifting her voice with her “brothers and sisters” in the congregation, I might not have picked up on how profoundly the experience of exclusion of a student from music, let alone her brother, affected Sonya. The experience sheds light on how deeply her music making
was felt to be a family endeavor and how her *sonic self* (Cumming, 2000), her musically constructed soul, had been influenced at such an early age.

Because “family” in Sonya’s culture is something larger than blood relatives, because family includes those in one’s community, those who one interacts with in life, the suggestion that one should be excluded from any atmosphere in turn suggests one should be excluded from a family. This reinforced the borders being drawn between multiple ways of experiencing music. Subsequently, as a result of this one act—most likely forgotten and of no perceived consequence to the teacher—Sonya was robbed of a confident musical self in elementary school, and later junior high school, related to singing. It would be years before she rejoined choir and found her way from there to choral music education. Furthermore, the theme of family and how it was viewed by Sonya was to become a through line in both her feelings of alienation, and her journey to acceptance in multiple musical cultures as she entered the teaching arena.

Sonya ended the second telling of the story with a lament for the missed opportunity for what music making could have been in the classroom, and with what I feel is a moving statement that draws attention to the consequences of our actions as teachers. We see this narrative account transform into something more poignant as the “veil of the story” (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2005) is cut away and we are left with a sense of the impact of this teacher on Sonya’s early musical self:

> It’s funny, that’s the only memory I have of her and I know that I had fun in that class. I remember playing the big metallophone.
> But that’s all I remember of her.

The emotional journey revealed in the telling of this story exposes the formation of Sonya’s early attitudes as previously mentioned, and holds greater significance in that it was to play a formidable role in shaping Sonya’s musical identity during the following years of her life.
Because they “really cared”…

Because she was “never going to sing again,” Sonya “ended up” in band class in grade seven. The teacher, whom she still is in contact with, was an inspiration to her: “I really soaked up stuff from her, but that’s cause she really cared about us.” This theme of caring resurfaced time and again in relation to what Sonya valued in musical instruction and, as Brewer (2009) suggested can occur as a result of strong models, became attached to Sonya’s view of effective teaching. She measured her continued individual piano instruction against the same ideals.

I had a lot of different piano teachers; it was like a revolving door. One early one was really great, she really cared. But she left. If they didn’t care, I didn’t put in the effort. If they didn’t care enough to challenge me, I became disinterested.

Progressing through private studies, Sonya recalls finding a musical identity at the piano which was tied into romantic notions of becoming a musician, and the imaginative views we often have of ourselves which can reveal our deep desires. Attachment to specific repertoire elucidated these feelings. Bartok’s *Bear Dance* was a true favourite, she shared: “I felt rebellious playing it. I would just whack those dissonances!” Sonya admits being drawn in general to twentieth century music found in the “List C” pieces from the Royal Conservatory repertoire books so many of us music educators are familiar with. The more modern music from this list stood out against the predictable, classical forms of the other lists, and fed her imagination as a young player as she progressed. These feelings in turn contributed to the construction of her identity as a musician, and in the “unreality” of her musical fantasies we see her wishes and ambitions (Fine, 1983) for the future surface:

List C was always all over the piano and I felt like a ‘real pianist.’ So I remember when no one was around I’d do *Bear Dance*, and I’d lean in like a ‘real pianist’ and just ‘give er’!
The skills gleaned from Sonya’s piano instruction were also tied into her involvement at church where she started playing on a regular basis for the congregation as she grew older and began high school. She described feeling comfortable seated at the keyboard and found it challenging to figure out chord structures to the gospel tunes; something even her current private piano instructors weren’t able to do. Feelings of pride related to personal musical accomplishments were beginning to emerge for Sonya. She was able to play out her fantasies in a public arena with success and encouragement from both family and church community as her sonic self discovered a voice in sound (Cumming, 2000).

Additionally, multiple musical environments in Sonya’s life were beginning to interact. The tensions between voices that both invited and denied a sense of belonging sought temporary reconciliation and found such a resolution in band class with ‘the caring teacher.’ Sonya’s piano skills began to feed a musical identity in this class which in turn raised her self-confidence:

I was bullied in junior high, but in band I had a place to go. I could shine because I was the only one who was taking piano lessons and was at the level I was at, and it was the one thing I had confidence at. No one could bully me because I could back up what I was doing. I may not have known other stuff…but I knew my notes. I really felt like I was a part of something.

This represents a critical stage in the formation of Sonya’s musical self. This self, however, comes across as a fragmented rather than cohesive entity of any sort. That is to say, facets of Sonya’s musical self can be easily labeled and described in numerous ways: she has a personal musical self revealed in her relationship with music and the way it feels to enact this music; she has a social musical self in that a social environment creates an identity, a role, for her to fill in band class as “the one who can do music”; she has a community and cultural aspect to her self in that in her church life she is able to act freely as the one “seated comfortably at the piano”; finally, she has an imagined musical self which exists as a projection of what kind of
musical self she might possibly become as she leans in and “gives ‘er” in private moments. It appears then, that boundaries are forming around these fragments as she acts out roles in different venues. From a sociological viewpoint then, she is forming multiple musical *identities*.

Jane Danielewicz (2001) speaks to the importance of educational theorists focusing on “interactions at the edges, the borders of things, because that’s where identities come into being” (p. 113). These borders, however, must first be seen to be created in order to be crossed. At an early age, Sonya’s musical self existed in what one might term “an early phase of construction.” She had multiple, interacting aspects of a musical self; she was a piano student, a participant in music at her church, and a music maker in concert with her family. In these environments her musical self was nurtured. Music making in the school, however, was halted, and as such, boundaries were drawn which caused her to compartmentalize this self. Promisingly, as she journeyed through junior high, more interaction between these multiple musical identities began occurring. A sense of “being a part of something” in the school atmosphere was encouraging; however, Sonya was not yet able to cross borders between multiple musical identities freely which would allow her to feel a true part of the musical community in her school life.

**Sonya on the Step**

Transformation is about change, especially change in form. It is about changing the appearance and form of a life told as surely as it is about revealing the heart and substance of that life. (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 116)

Like Cole & Knowles (2001) I accept the premise that all memory is selective, “a reconstruction or perhaps a creation of mind, and therefore, a fiction” (p. 119). Thus, the important or pivotal stories we tell reflect how we see ourselves in their reconstruction and retellings. If Cole & Knowles are correct in asserting that one of our tasks as researchers “is to understand the
thinking of meaning making—the conceptual framework, as it were—that induced a participant’s analysis of experience and the selection of stories told to us” (p. 119), then the possibilities for meaning making are furthered when those stories are presented back to us for reinterpretation. Cole and Knowles suggest that participants engage in a “first level of analysis” (p. 119) in the act of sifting through their life histories and exposing elements of their identities through narrative. I wondered about the possibilities of Sonya engaging in a deeper level of analysis and meaning making in reading the story as interpreted through another, namely myself. What would her thoughts on the tale reveal? What would it feel like to look in on an account of her life as told by her and retold by me? What new spaces of understanding could open up? How could she articulate these spaces?

When Sonya first spoke of the experience of joining choir in high school during the first focus group session, the story struck all of us as almost odd. In fact, it was the first thing I revisited in our first personal interview just to ask for more insight on her feelings looking back at that time of transition. The Sonya we knew was so energetic, such a driving force in front of others, so passionate, so involved. Yet her story set at the onset of her high school years perplexed us because we couldn’t quite believe the self she exposed in the story was a self she once lived out.

The following narrative is told from the point of view of a narrator “looking in” on an experience, watching the behaviour, and imagining Sonya’s grade nine self at a crossroads in her musical life. It involves two other characters as well as Sonya, who is referred to in the third person; her BFF Denise, and the choral teacher, Mr. Duncanson. It also incorporates comments that were made by other co-researchers who, upon hearing Sonya tell the narrative, projected their understandings and assumptions into the way they understood how the teacher in the situation dealt with Sonya. Taking a cue from Cole and Knowles (2001), I shifted the form of the
story, thus changing its appearance. I then turned it back to the initial storyteller, Sonya, for interpretation. In fact, I read it to her in the hope that the principles of audio feedback, so important to the singer in the development of their own voice, would apply to one hearing their own personal narrative outside the body. Further, I looked to Bruner’s (2002) ideas that in writing narrative one makes room for not only “what is, but for what might be or might have been” (p. 51), and in the process one vivifies reality. What can be gleaned from this transforming of Sonya’s reality? What insights does it provide Sonya with?

The Girl on the Steps

The two girls were best friends; inseparable. Where one went, the other went. That’s just what best friends do. Denise\(^4\) joined the musical. Denise could sing and dance, and so Denise auditioned and made it into the chorus. And the chorus had to rehearse. So she would tag along to the choir rehearsals to watch Denise rehearse for the musical. And when Denise ended up going to the regular choir classes, she followed.

A set of stairs led down to the choir room. Denise would walk down the stairs to take her seat in the choir. But it was there that she would stop. She would just sit on the steps. Every day she would sit there on the steps and watch Denise sing. She had become withdrawn, introverted. She stayed away from anything that would give her showcase—she didn't want that. So for her whole grade nine year she sat on the steps that led down to the choir room and watched the others sing. She would sing on the stairs, but she would

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\(^{4}\) A pseudonym is used here.
never walk over to join the group. She just watched and waited for Denise’s time in choir class to finish.

One day Mr. Duncanson looked at her and made a subtle suggestion, “You look like you wanna sing. You should join choir next year.” And that was it. That was all he said. It was a smart move, like tempting the mouse with cheese, and he watched the girl on the steps and he waited. And she sat on the steps and she waited. They both waited for her to find what ever it was that she needed to take the next step, off the steps.

She came to choir faithfully. He watched. She sang quietly to herself on the steps. And he watched. And on the weekend she went to church. She sang with her brother. Her grandma sang, her grandpa sang, her parents sang, everyone just sang. They sang for the glory of God. So every Sunday she sang. And every choir class she sat. She sat on the steps. And she watched the others sing.

And she watched the others having fun. Denise was having so much fun. Denise was making friends and joking around, and the teacher was really funny, and the music was really good, and she thought to herself, ‘I can sing. I sing at church.’ But still she stayed on the steps, imaging what it would be like to be with Denise in the choir singing, and making friends, and having fun.

He just watched her. He watched her sitting alone on the steps and he thought to himself, ‘She’ll come around. Just wait.’ And finally, in grade ten, she walked into choir. And she sat amongst the others in the chairs.

And she sang. And she loved it.
Half way through the reading, it was Sonya’s turn for tears. Neither of us expected such a strong reaction. This emotional reaction immediately answered the question of what it would feel like to look in on an account of her life from an objective viewpoint:

Sorry, I just wanna cry, just seeing this girl…in grade nine…it’s so sad. And it’s so not cool with me, I mean what is this (she holds up the manuscript I have given her to follow)? I’m not letting my own children go through this. I can’t believe I couldn’t see my way out of this.

But the space was not easy to articulate:

I’m teary because it’s just so… That’s just wow. I feel like reading it now… I mean you leave it for so long and then you come back to it and see all these things. I’m thinking ‘I could have been lost,’ because I can’t imagine my life not being what it is now, and not doing what I’m doing now. But I almost lost it for one instance, it was just one event… and that’s all it took for that to be snatched from me for so long…and I’m just blown away…I’m blown away that I could do it (music) everywhere else but I just couldn’t make that connection there.

Bruner’s (2002) ideas surrounding narrative come into view. Sonya sees what is: “I can’t imagine my life not being what it is now and not doing what I’m doing now.” And she sees what might have been: “But I almost lost it for one instance, it was just one event.” Sonya comforts us, however, with what might be:

This poor girl, my goodness…. (she laughs) she’s okay now. She’s gonna be okay.

Faced with an account of a pivotal life story, Sonya’s analysis of her experience shifts to a higher level of meaning making. She is able to recognize multiple ways of knowing and to further articulate her appreciation for the teacher who stood by her until she sorted things out. She expressed to me that the understanding and patience of Mr. Duncanson was just as much a turning point as quitting choir in elementary. He “got it.”
Sonya also expressed what the collaborative self-study process had given her in relation to her professional practice; how revisiting this story and its accompanying feelings of doubt was allowing her to be more mindful in her relationship with students:

I had a girl join choir this year and after the first two weeks she came to me and said “I’m gonna quit.”

“No.” I said. And I’ve never told a student that, I always let them make their own decision about it. She was stressed and overloaded and just an anxious butter ball. So I said to her “I think this is something you want to do, and I don’t think it makes any sense for you to cut out what you want to do in order to do better in everything else because you’re just going to get frustrated with what you don’t like. So you need to keep something positive in your life, and I will not sign off on you.” And so after a lot of encouragement from me she decided to stay. And she had a friend who quit, but she stayed with it. And this girl, she has grown like you wouldn’t believe...into a leader. She didn’t want to perform on stage because she was too anxious and I said, “Nope, you need to,” and she came running up to me after and said,

“Ms. Williams, I did it! And it felt....okay!!” (we laughed) And now she’s one of the gang, and she’s really involved. It wasn’t the exact same thing with me, but this time I saw it. It was the ‘run away from what scares you because of whatever has happened in the past.’ And now she’s exactly where she needs to be.

Family as Fare to Cross the Border

Sonya’s musical life began to change dramatically after “getting off the steps,” as it were. Her involvement in the school choir program increased by leaps and bounds. She joined the chamber ensemble and the jazz group, and spoke to us of the incredible time she had; it was a whole new world. As more interaction with school and church environments became a comfortable thing, former borders began to dissolve:

In high school I started singing at church, and when I was sixteen my pastor asked me to take over the leadership of the worship band and my dad was my mentor/trainer. I was able to bring that back to school and what I got with my teacher I brought to church. That’s when my two lives started to connect.
The biggest influence was Mr. Duncanson. He had waited with a patience that showed belief in the girl who sat on the steps in grade nine, and it continued throughout her high school experience.

That man cared so much. It wasn’t always out in the open or in your face. It was through sarcasm and sometimes under the radar, but you knew it was there. And if he saw growth he’d encourage it but say, ‘don’t get full of yourself.’

By grade eleven, Sonya realized that she “liked singing a lot” and was attracted to the challenge of it. The challenge of singing had overtaken the musical challenge of piano and it spurred her on to greater commitment in the choral arena. But more than the challenge, it was the sense of belonging that drew her; the interaction with others and the one thing that had been missing up to this point from Sonya’s school music experiences:

It was the family that he created in the choir… and there were these two girls that came to choir, and my best friend and I befriended them and they had a whole other group of friends, and because of our connection in choir we became friends—it was like this whole new world we had never experienced. And it was choir that had started it. And we were a really diverse group of people—if it weren’t for choir it never would have happened. And there we a lot of similarities we never would have realized. And for once I felt I finally fit in somewhere—I mean in school everyone knew who I was, I was the funny girl, but I didn’t feel like I fit until I got into choir. Then I had a set of friends and I had more confidence and I was able to make friends outside choir…

Sonya began to claim a broader musical identity and moved from the band experience of “feeling a part of something” to a choral experience of “finally fitting in.” The social aspect of music making was at the forefront of her musical experiences, and similar in manner to which she experienced it within her cultural and spiritual community. She had collected the fare to cross the border: inclusion in a family. Interaction with school and church life created a
connection between disparate musical identities and movement toward a larger, more complex sense of musical self began.

**Tension in the Space Between**

Interestingly, Sonya spoke of her high school experiences and the decision to enter university in two different manners within two different contexts during the research process. In the first focus group session, as we shared our initial journeys to choral music education, Sonya’s personal narrative surrounding her decision to pursue post-secondary education revealed that she did not actually entertain the possibility of becoming a choral music educator until she realized that her goals of becoming a doctor or psychiatrist were doomed—she couldn’t stand the sight of blood. Her plan changed to “teacher” since she felt that was “the only thing she was good at.” Music was a plan, but a default plan. She would instead major in English. Although she found encouragement from Mr. Duncanson, Sonya still felt she “wasn’t good enough” as a singer or pianist, and so she didn’t even audition for the music program at the provincial university. Instead she chose a route with no audition required and, as such, no chance of failure. This narrative revealed that she doubted her ability to be successful in music. However, once she began the program, she realized how much she loved singing, and “absolutely loved” the music program. She switched majors and began to embrace the career possibilities that the pursuit of choral music had to offer.

I mentioned to Sonya, “It seems you have a pattern of ‘I don’t know…I love it!’”

“Ya, I doubt myself a lot,” she answered. She explained to us that this feeling stemmed from the perception that she entered the choral music community through the “back roads” as she called it; that she was not raised in an environment where “formal” music making occurred.
This was her attitude despite years of formal training on the piano. She recalled Derek discussing his feelings when he first entered the music profession and drew a connection to herself:

I can relate to his feeling of not knowing what you’re doing. I relate to his saying “I’m not a conductor” because I didn’t grow up in the same musical culture as what’s prevalent in Manitoba from my perspective, and so I’ve always struggled with feeling inadequate with what I have and what I bring to the table. And so when I hear Derek talk I see myself in that.

Though the cultural environment in which Sonya was raised was a nurturing one—an environment that afforded opportunities for leadership and regular performance—she assumed that this environment, which was full of “less formal” gospel music-making, was somehow “less than” that experienced by others. Therefore, she assumed that her experiences with music would therefore be less valued than those of others.

There was another side to the journey though. In her personal interviews with Henry at the end of the first focus group session, she recognized that her experiences in high school and the respect she had mentioned for her mentor, Mr. Duncanson, had also empowered her. There were hints at that time that choral music was a career she could really be successful at, not just do because she “couldn’t do anything else.” The space between these two narratives reveal different sides of the decision to pursue studies in music education, and once again illuminate Sonya’s multiple ways of knowing the same situation.

Sonya recalled how her ideas of leadership began to take shape in the choral classroom in grade twelve after she realized a doctor’s life was not for her. Mr. Duncanson began with the investment of little bits of responsibility. He would request that she jump to the piano when he needed to go to the office for something. When there was a substitute, it was expected that she could step in and help. There was even a bit of conducting that fired her up much in the same
manner as Henry had experienced in his high school with the graduate choir; the same circle
eight-type pattern earned success in both situations! And so, Mr. Duncanson, the man who had
waited so patiently for the young girl to move off the steps, quietly fed the leadership abilities he
could see were lying under the surface. And it had a great effect:

That really empowered me, but he did it so subtly so I would never be socially alienated for standing out too much. I didn’t know I could be in charge, I was just too unsure of myself. And as soon as I was given that permission to be in charge, I took off in grade twelve. People actually encouraged me—they were so supportive. I felt like ‘I can really do this!’

I think that’s when I began to think, maybe I can do this. I can be a choral teacher. And when I went to him and told him, he sat me down and told me what he felt I had to offer. So that’s when I decided to do it. But I still felt I needed to play it safe.

The tension between Sonya’s sense of empowerment and the nagging feelings of doubt reveal the dueling views of a musical self; a Sonya teetering on the edge of the next step towards choral music education. It was at this was the point in their discussions during the research process that Henry decided to share with Sonya what he had come to understand about his own upbringing; his cultural experiences had much more to offer than he had first realized as the “scared farm boy from up north” when he entered his studies in the States. The story of his experience at graduate school is re-presented here in order to facilitate an understanding of context in Henry and Sonya’s discussions:

One of the big things about all of us is that we need at some point to look back and realize what we came with—what music you brought with your birth right and what you have to give. Because I grew up with the German chorales, singing them a cappella, and when I got to grad school in the States the organ students found out I could speak German. They wanted me to translate this awful academic German which went on for paragraphs, and I did some translating for them and they’d say,

“How do you know this??”

And I’d say, “I grew up singing this.”
“You sang this??”
“Yes, in our little church services in a little church in the country.”
And that’s when I realized, maybe I didn’t get the fancy piano lessons, maybe I
didn’t get the cello lessons, I wasn’t a really great singer. But I got something
pretty significant. (He leaned in and looked directly at Sonya),
What did you get?

Sonya paused for a moment before answering him, “I don’t think I know yet. I guess I’m
still trying to figure that out.” And at that point Henry expressed something else Sonya perhaps
had not realized she also had to offer:

This seems deeply imprinted in your persona; your struggles to feel
adequate. How do you go about spotting this in your students? I would think
you are pretty sensitive to the student that’s sitting alone on the step.

“Hmmm,” Sonya replied. And that coming year, such sensitivity arose with “the girl who
wanted to quit.” With the first “no” spoken to a student upon such a request, Sonya brought to
the classroom what she had to offer from those difficult experiences in the past.

The Epiphany

Individuals have profound experiences of many kinds—events that turn lives around or,
less dramatically, mark the passage of the years and the tone, tenor, and influence of a
life. These are events and circumstances to which we return when reconstructing the past
and making sense of our lives. These are epiphanies.

(Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 120)

Numerous tales of Sonya’s were turning point moments in her journey toward a career as a
choral music educator. Like the elementary experience where she decided to leave her choral life
behind, and the fortuitous move from the steps back into the choir, Sonya has faced obstacles in
her journey toward her professional practice. Differing experiences have set the “tone” and
“tenor” of her musical life. Bruner (2002) offers that “our brain has as many connections among its neurons as there are stars in the Milky Way; it lives and grows by being in dilemmas” (p. 51). Sonya’s greatest dilemma was still to come. Working through this dilemma has had a profound effect on her teaching career, the way she interacts with her students, and her journey of coming to understand who she is, and who she can be. It reveals a shift in both her self confidence and her ability to connect with students, and exposes a bridging of her personal self and her pre-professional self. It is a story of struggle that once again shocked all of us as we listened and incited little interjections from more than one mouth like, “Really? You?” Our assumptions about Sonya were once again challenged. For me, in listening “for a story rather than to a story” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 120), I could see what it was that Sonya was “trying to figure out” and just how individual her experiences with music, and coming to teach music, were.

Sonya told this story toward the end of the first focus group session after initial introductions had taken place, and after her personal interview session with Henry. The story she told stood out to me at the time because of the great complexity it displayed in its interacting—its colliding—environments. The theme of negotiating the feeling of “not fitting in” surfaces once more as Sonya headed into her final transition into professional practice: the student teaching practicum. The doubt that often plagues the beginning teacher is central to the narrative in a profound manner; it involves understandings surrounding Sonya’s race, and her perceived inability to connect with others.

Our journeys through life involve travel on a landscape composed of many spaces and places. This is a story which further reveals Sonya’s feeling of travelling on “the back roads.” Using this landscape metaphor as Clandinin & Connelly (1999) suggest, makes visible the borders that divided Sonya’s prior knowledge and blossoming professional knowledge. The borders which divide and create “spaces that demarcate one place from another” (p. 10), and in
the process separate school from church and student teaching from university life, begin to
dissolve as Sonya realizes how to bring her seemingly multiple musical realities into coexistence.
With a focus on building relationships, Sonya is able to reconcile the ways of being she had in
her cultural and spiritual life with who she was becoming as a choral teacher and as a singer in
university. And the travels lead to a most touching destination.

In an effort to allow the reader to relive the telling, I have woven the messages found on
the artifact that inspired Sonya’s story throughout the storytelling. This was the visual we looked
over as Sonya told us how the artifact came to her and what meaning it held for her. She spoke of
it once more in a personal interview over coffee at a later date and explained to me how it
continues to be a part of her life, touching her with its fantastic triggering-power, and
transporting her back to a time of transition. Viewing the artifact as Sonya told her narrative gave
us, as listeners, a unique perspective in that it allowed us to experience themes in Sonya’s life as
they both overlapped and diverged (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 6). The presentation of this
artifact in such a manner can be viewed as an aid to understanding new ways in which the
breadth of professional knowledge—living at the intersection of our relationships both past and
present—exposes what we all have to “bring to the table,” as Henry had put it, even if it takes
much reflection to understand that it is “pretty significant.”

The Tale of Princess Chocolate

The homemade card has been around the block. It is a formidable artifact; a large piece of
decorated manila poster paper folded in half. On the cover, a cutout of two female Anime figures
holding flowers within a heart finds itself sticky-glued opposite a black printout of a warped
duck-type video game figure sticking his tongue out in jest. The cutesy love of high school girls
and the taunting revelation of hidden admiration of high school boys have become humorously
visible. An old stain of hot chocolate splash adds character to the entirety of the front cover and the worn-torn edges show signs of use, of revisiting at times where inspiration was once more needed. And at the top, in the centre, glued on with care, its edges curling under the wear of years passed, a computer printed statement in purple pattern with a most honest and heartfelt statement reads “To a one of a kind student teacher.”

I almost quit the faculty of education because of one really, really bad student teaching experience. The two cooperating teachers, one in English and one in music, sat me down and told me that I was not, um (she pauses finding the words), I was not engaging with the students. They told me I kept to myself, I didn’t involve myself with the students, I wasn’t doing anything in the classroom and if I kept this up… I would fail.

Inside the covers of the card was an incredible amount of love and appreciation for a student teacher who had obviously touched their hearts.

My evaluation was less than stellar. This was when everything was out of a five ranking and I’d get mainly three’s, one or two fours, but a lot of three’s and some two’s…and I was just totally let down by this.

Our eyes are dry, but our hearts will cry for you because we will miss you. Luv ya, Gurl!

I went to a church service that night; the night after I picked up the evaluation. My brother had gone with me, to pick it up, he drove me, and I said to him, ‘I’m gonna quit. Don’t tell mom and dad yet, but I’m not gonna get the education degree, I’m just gonna do music. I probably can’t perform because I don’t think I’m quite good enough, but I gotta do something.”

Thanks for your great teaching. Good luck Ms. Princess Chocolate Williams.

And so we went to this church service and this speaker came out, and he had come from up from the States. He saw my brother and he said, “I feel we need to pray for you,” and my brother said,

“Okay.”
The speaker asked, “Do you have family here?”

My brother said “yes.” And so my parents and I went up because he wanted us to be there for support. And I don’t know who this guy is and he’s never met me and I’ve never met him. And so I’m up there with my brother—my brother and I were always really close—and I’m standing beside my brother….

*I will miss you. From Dork.*

I’m just about to hug my brother,

*Well this is farewell but that ain’t farewell in my heart.*

*I will never forget you.*

*I’ll miss you so much...*  

*P.S. Thank you for comfort.*

and the guy looks at me and he goes…….”You’re not supposed to quit. You’re supposed to stay exactly where you are. That’s where you’re supposed to be.”

*Princess Chocolate, Yeah, I’ll miss u!!*  

*Your one of da best student teachers!!*

And I said to myself, ‘HOLY CRAP! And I was just hopin’ ta God that my parents didn’t know what he was talkin’ about! (We all laugh heartily)

*Hey Ms. Williams you rule! C-ya*

So after that I thought, ‘K’ay, fine, well I gotta stick with this, cuz God said so (she laughs loudly as she speaks and then thinks a bit)... But I don’t know, I don’t know...’

*Mrs. Williams, Hey! Aww! U R leaving us? No!!*  

*Make sure you come back to see us! We won’t forget you! Love ya!*

So I stuck with it and I took six years to complete my degrees. In my fifth year I took my certification and I’m in this school doing student teaching and...well...I just loved it. It really felt right for the first time.
I’ll miss you.

And at the end of it, these kids took time out and made this card. And they put so much effort into it. And everybody signed it, the bad kids, the good kids, everybody. They took time out and made this card, and I was so floored by it because I was this close to not doing it. And then this was, “Hey, you’re doing a good thing here.”

Well even though it was only a few weeks you spent with us
I know we all got to love you and now we will miss you so much!
I hope nothing but the best for you in da future and member gurl,
“You have the power!” Much Luv.

They would make little references to the small things we would talk about and they actually put all the little things that we talked about on here, the little catch phrases and personal things, the little jokes, they’re all in here.

You’ll be missed. See you soon hopefully. You’re the greatest.

And I told them that when I went to university, (she paused with a big sigh, thinking back on her university experience) it was such an “interesting” experience, because there were only three black students. And the other white students in the school, they were gonna “save me!” – and I was already saved. So it was just a lot of learning I guess. I felt I had to educate some people on how to interact with black people, cause it was just weird, they would say really awkward things, it was just… they just…didn’t know how to talk to me. It was SO WEIRD, and I couldn’t… I couldn’t wrap my mind around it. And my dad said, ‘it’s okay Sonya, some people just don’t get it, they just don’t know.’ So my happy medium then was, since they always wanted to talk about how I’m black, I would tell them then that they needed to refer to me as Princess Chocolate (we all have a great laugh). And I was okay with that. And they did! That was the funny thing—they did it!

To Princess Chocolate, Keep on truckin’. Big Mac.

So I told this to my high school students when I was certifying, because here I was in the north end, this tough part of town—so I’ve got Asian kids, I got African kids, I’ve got Aboriginal kids, I’ve got all kinds of kids and you can tell them that stuff and they don’t bat an eye. And they remembered that; they
remembered what it was like for me. You can see here, “To Princess Chocolate” on the card.

They were such great kids.

Princess Chocolate, a.k.a. Ms. Williams, you are like one of the coolest student teachers or whatever it was that you were. And personally I’ll miss you. Well I dunno what else to put. Later, Miss You.

That was seven years ago, and this year two of those girls came to visit me at my current school. They found me. They found where I was teaching and they came to see me. And that’s just…(she sighs deeply not knowing what to say next, it is a long pause)...So I keep this close with me. Whenever I’m having a bad teaching day, I take this out and remember those great kids.

Thank God I stayed with it.

Sonya did stay with it. In fact, when her father, who was also a teacher, suggested changing career goals because retiring teachers were few and far between, Sonya refused. Her commitment to a teaching career in music had begun to take hold. She was beginning to realize her potential as an educator and what exactly it was that she had to bring to the table.

**Entering the Profession: Shaping up to be a “Fine Music Teacher”**

Sonya’s professional practice began with a term position where she stepped into someone else’s shoes for a short amount of time. It was a difficult environment for one to find themselves as a new teacher, but Sonya was still able to build relationships and begin to develop the confidence to be herself. In our second personal interview together, she handed me an artifact; a gold brushed journal with raised sixteenth notes on the cover. On the inside cover, glued on, was a typed message from a student, signed in pen at the bottom. I have faithfully reproduced the message below. It illustrates the understanding of a student reflecting back on his experiences...
with Sonya, and, in turn, gives us a glimpse of the music educator she was becoming at the onset of her career:

Dear Ms. Williams,

Sometimes it’s hard for someone to tell another someone what an impact they’ve had on them. I’m a pretty tough case here. I just want to say thank you for all you’ve done for my friends and I these past 5 months. I think you are shaping up to be a fine teacher, regardless of the fact that you may think you’ve made no difference in the music program here. I mean you can’t play an instrument first time you go at it. Same thing. You brought a personality and attitude that I have never seen before to our lil’ music program and for that you will definitely not be forgotten. So yeah. Sorry for bein’ an ass once in a while. I guess we’ll just say I was testing your coping skills. *Wink* I knew I was going to get you something but I didn’t know what. So I settled on something classy and something funny. That just about sums me up huh? HAHA!

Keep in touch…and call me when we’re legally allowed to date. (Juss kidding!)

Sonya entered her first full time job at a school where she was to make a great difference both musically and on a broader scale within the community. In the three years she was at this
school, she was able to build a program of note which sparked interest in the choral community. She accomplished this not just through musical skill, but in developing her knowledge of the importance of community, the importance of pushing students to succeed, and as a result of her former journeys on the road to professional practice.

People were saying things like “You’ve done such good work,” and I thought, “Who, me?” And when people said to me, “Nothing’s happened in twenty-five years and you’re bringing it back,” I knew I was doing something right. The kids were so excited about singing and we just fed each other. I’d go for it and they’d go for it. What a great time.

The experience of building a successful program at that school was exciting to Sonya. She relished telling us of her experiences with a choir that was “so musical.” She journeyed through those initial trials of “over-thinking everything” as most beginning teachers do, but in working with choirs every day, she was able to gain confidence and ownership over her program. Unfortunately, Sonya had to leave the program due to unexpected political difficulties. This was a trying time:

The kids were devastated. And my plans were gone. I had all these plans for the next three and five and ten years. All gone.

One of the artifacts that Sonya passed on to me was a farewell speech a close colleague had written for her departure from the school. I took this as an opportunity to draw on who Sonya was “perceived to be” as a teacher and a personality by others in her choral music education environment at this school. I sifted through the speech and pulled out elements that reveal the impact that Sonya had on her colleague, and which I feel reveal a rich description of the person who was going to be missed the following September. The text exposes an educator who displays great confidence, and immense caring for students. Yet the personal, private Sonya
still lingers, revealing the balance struck in a music educator self which exists in a perpetual state of becoming:

Fun
Fabulous colleague
Playful
Boisterous
Funny
Somewhat sarcastic
She will laugh
Play
Dance
With our kids,
But none of them
Hell
None of us
Would want to cross her.
She glows inwardly when the kids succeed
Sonya IS a teacher at heart
Infectious laugh
Great physical energy
Bounding down the hall at break neck speeds!
Trying to teach me to be cool
With the punchy thing,
And the bottom shaky thing.
But
The not-so-public self
Also
Sensitive
Shy
Self-reflective
In possession of a strong
Sense of justice.

This was not the only artifact that revealed how others viewed Sonya’s time at the school.

An assignment from an English teacher created an opportunity for students to communicate their feelings regarding the impact Sonya had made on their junior high and high school experiences.

Painted handprints with student messages flooded in revealing just how deep the connection
between Sonya and her students was. These are messages from three of the handprints, represented in different fonts:

*My English teacher was all like “yo write a letter to someone who supported you during High school” and I’m all like “Duh, Caramel Apple!” So here is a big pen filled paper of THANKS yo. Thanks for helping me find a love for music and for teaching me lots. Thanks for talking to me when I needed it, being understanding and really (sniffle, wipes tear from eye) caring.*

*After school special begins playing…. (ha, ha)*

*I just think that you’re wonderful and you are so committed to your work and I wish I dedicated myself as much as I could have. I hope you are proud of me and what I have done because I learned from the best. You are the bacon on my chocolate!!*  

*You better cheer for me at grad because without you telling me I could have done better I would have dropped out in grade 7.*

*I want to thank you, for everything you’ve given me, believing in me, seeing the real person in me. Thanks for the lessons that you taught - taking care of me when it wasn’t your job. I want to thank you for the valuable time you spent to straighten me when my life was bent. Thank you for everything, there’s no way to repay you, all I can do is go ahead and say thank you...*  

*With great understanding regarding how difficult it is to leave a program one has built from nothing and nurtured to such success, Elroy asked Sonya how things were going at her new school and how the transition was. “It was….hard. I hadn’t let go of my experiences at the other school yet,” she replied. Sonya spoke of the struggles surrounding a group of students who, in such a demographic, had so many issues that at times her job seemed almost impossible. She spoke of beginning the year with a full choir and then losing kids to this and that to the point of having eight students show up to a performance. She realized there was no sense of being able to really commit to something. There was no sense of community. But her determination to deal*
with the situation in a specific manner revealed the insight of a true educator who brings their own kind of special understanding to the situation, and their own soul-uniqueness (Hofstadter, 2007) to the issue:

I kept thinking, how am I going to address this? I can get mad or try to stick a fire under them. But then it came to me, I’m gonna try something different. I’m gonna try love.
We’ll get there.

Sonya’s Soul-Uniqueness

It was just a throw away comment Sonya made, almost inaudible due to a mouth full of the taco pizza we had ordered, but luckily I caught it: “I’ve learned a lot in this process.” Eagerly I asked her to explain more:

It was through this process, especially the last time we met as a group, that I realized many things. I’d been trying to recreate what I’d had at one school, and it’s because I’m going through this process of trying to understand what motivates me, why I’m doing what I’m doing, that I realize, ‘ya, I’ve got this drive and determination, it’s just a matter of refocusing it.’ I need to focus it where it needs to be focused and realize when it’s time to change the course. Being a music teacher doesn’t always look the same even though I’m the same. Every place is different.

The understandings gleaned from such reflection highlights the relationship between what McCarthy (2007) terms “what we do and who we are becoming” (p. 3). As a result of her participation in this research journey, Sonya has been able to meaningfully reframe her practice. This, in turn, has allowed her to act with purpose in her professional practice:

Now I’m finding ways to feel good about what I will do and what the kids do even though it may not be their best performance. I keep trying to focus on what the kids are getting out of it. What happens in the classroom is what matters.
Thus, through the act of interpreting her lived experiences, Sonya is able to experience what Van Manen (1990) terms the “lingering effects” of inquiry (p. 163 as cited in Barrett & Stauffer, 2009, p. 23). She is able to bring new levels of awareness into her professional practice. She is able to make changes and shift priorities. Furthermore, in re-telling and re-living her stories of practice and coming to understand the ways she conceptualizes her musical self, Sonya has come to recognize her ability to negotiate, or perhaps more accurately integrate, her seemingly diverse and multiple musical identities. Thus, she is able to focus on the complexity inherent in her musical self, rather than divergent or competing aspects of identity. This allows Sonya to teach from an empathic standpoint stemming from her own unique understandings of her personal experience. Her professional practice displays the values, beliefs, and attitudes she has come to form through her interactions with and within multiple environments, and with people of influence. The principles of caring and the importance of “family” are always at the fore. These principles are reflected in the way she views her goals as a choral music educator:

The kids I have right now have little confidence and are pretty shy. I want to give them opportunities to feel fantastic about what they’re doing, feel good about themselves, and use music as the way to do that in the hopes that that will build something bigger for them. So where as it used to be “I do this concert or workshop to do this concert or workshop,” it’s now “I do this concert because it’s a good learning experience for the kids.” And I always ask them, I make sure they want to do it and feel good about it.

She is able to reflect on aspects of her musical self and make a decision what to bring to the classroom and what to leave behind:

If we go to any festival, I always tell the kids, “This isn’t a competition. We’re not going here to compete, we’re just going to do our best; we are our own competition.” That’s good for me because I can be competitive and it’s always been an underlying theme for me of “I need to show people that I’m better than people think I am.” So I don’t look at that side of things anymore. I keep it out.
Identity-oriented self-study research includes retrospective examinations of personal life history (Louie et al., 2003) where emphasis is placed on developing awareness of one’s current self and one’s development as an instructor. Without a spirit of reflexivity guiding our own musical teaching, the processes of socialization we have experienced, and continue to model, will become the main influence upon our own students’ learning and future professional practice (Woodford, 2002). Such reflection’s influence is two fold: it can encourage us to critically understand our effect on students and therefore curb personal behaviour which may not be conducive to student success, and it can encourage us to act in ways which empower our students much in the same way we have experienced in our past. Douglas Hofstadter (2007) offers:

Consider, for instance, the shattering experience of constantly feeling inferior to other people. Some people know this intimately, and some don’t know it at all. A person with huge reserves of self-confidence will simply never be able to feel how it is to be paralyzed by the lack of confidence—they “just don’t get it.” It is these sorts of aspects, these innermost aspects of a soul (as opposed to such relatively objective and transferable items as countries visited, novels read, cuisines mastered, historical facts known, and so forth) that make for soul- uniqueness (p. 235).

Sonya’s soul-uniqueness has had a profound impact on her teaching and the manner in which she relates to students. These deep feelings—Hofstadter uses self-confidence as one example—have shaped her professional practice in ways that only she could have created. It was her unique level of commitment, displayed in her refusal to allow her student to quit choir this year, and so evident to Philip’s student from the email written after attending the Provincial Honour Choir final concert:

She sang with such deep pride and happiness. At the end of the song she cried for she really felt moved herself in the song leaving tears of joy in the aftermath.
A Final Thought on Family

I discovered this post online while searching for a video or picture of Sonya’s choirs that might inspire me in writing. On a Facebook page there was a description written by a former student who also posted a video of the choir. He was speaking of his former experiences with Sonya when she taught him in high school three years ago. It hearkens back to comments made by Sonya about the creation of family in the narratives of her own high school environment, and reflects, in particular, the feelings she held as a teenager regarding her choral director Mr. Duncanson:

I would do anything for him because he cared. And that’s what I took away from high school the most. And that’s how I run my classroom.

The entry reveals the contributions of Sonya’s soul-uniqueness and the resultant environment she was able to create in the choir room. Here it is (straight up, no edits):

The conductor was great of course, I mean it was Ms. Williams. Never in my life had I met a conductor who connected so well with her students. The bond between us was so well that we were all basically a family. Never feeling embarrassed to express who were are with each other, and always looking out for each other. Of course, this was shown in our motivation to sing and work as well. All of us would always help each other out, and talk with each other whenever we see each other in our everyday lives.

I will always remember that one day when I was in Gr. 8. Ms. Williams was conducting a rehearsal as usual, but we weren’t as good as we used to be due to lack of practice. Because of our poor showing, she left the room out of frustration, leaving us behind without a conductor. The water was boiling in all our hearts at the time, and it wasn’t until one of the altos stood up and
gave us a really motivational speech telling us that we can do better than what we just did, that we should show Ms. Williams how much hard work she’s done for us by working just as hard. It was such a magical moment that brought everyone together, and what do you know? We were considered as one of the best choirs in the division. We were so good that we were even invited to participate in Ottawa Musicfest, but don’t have the money to do so. Ms. Williams was proud of us, and we were proud of her and of ourselves for doing so well.

It was a special bond, it was the magic that drove me to stick with the Senior Choir through those years.

As I was finishing this chapter I went to my office to print it for editing. On my desk was the observation log assignment that had initially drawn me to Sonya. As I reflected on the chapter, I realized the school commented on in the assignment was of course the school in which Sonya was currently teaching. Furthermore, the year of the assignment would place it at a time when things seemed to Sonya, “really…hard” and students had dropped out of the choir, leaving her frustrated at the lack of commitment. I read it again and noted the comments about the choir standing in a semi-circle, an easy task my student suggested, due to the “small number of singers.” And yet it didn’t matter because:

This conductor loved her kids and her kids loved her. She was so relaxed and clearly having fun. She conducted without music and was absolutely connected to the music. This was my favorite group to listen to because they went for it, expressively it was all there and they were having so much fun. Perhaps it was at the sacrifice of some details, but the overall musicality and engagement of this group was exemplary (Student observation log assignment 2008).
And so, unbeknownst to her, Sonya was having an effect on others outside her professional practice, inspiring a student teacher who had the occasion to witness her making music with her “family.”
CHAPTER SIX POSTLUDE

There was one question that continually surfaced for me during Sonya’s narratives, and after we met to go over her chapter, it surfaced for Sonya herself in reference to her story on the stairs and the impact of the teacher who excluded her brother: “Have I done this to any students? Now that I’ve really looked at this story and how it made me feel and affected me for so long, I keep going over my years of teaching, asking if I might have done this and not even known it. That terrifies me.” I felt the same way, and I believe these feelings were behind Henry’s thoughts when he spoke of his own practice, wishing “he could do a lot of it again.”

In my reflections I recalled an instance where I had a wake up call instigated by a student in a very meaningful way. It was a moment where my heart sank and I had an awful feeling in the pit of my stomach as I realized my impact on students’ lives, and more profoundly, my ignorance concerning them. It was during my second year of teaching and I had just finished auditions for an elite women’s chorus. I began an informal version of the choir my very first year with the knowledge that elite groups draw students in. We had taken cool pictures and done neat repertoire and it was a small, tight social group. To start things off I hadn’t auditioned anyone so that the interest could develop, but the second year I named the group Vox and decided that we could go to Musicfest Canada if we worked hard enough. I had put the cheese out in front of the mice and could see I was going to get the commitment that was needed. Then I auditioned and took only sixteen voices. There were two girls who had been in the group the year before, but they just weren’t up to snuff in my eyes, they had pitch problems and their tone quality was lacking. They were both good friends of girls in the group though and when I posted the results
of the audition this did not cross my mind; all I saw was the possibility of a shiny choir. A few
days later there was a letter in my staffroom mailbox. The letter read:

Dear Miss Robbins,

I just wanted to write to you and tell you that I’m okay with not getting into Vox this year.
I know you only have so many spots and you took the people you felt were the best for the
choir and had the best voices. I hope you have a really good year and I’m happy I still have
regular choir to sing in because I really love choir and I’ll try out again next year.

Like a dagger through the heart. What had I done?! I had waved a trip in front of two girls who
had worked hard the year before and had purposefully left them out the next with absolutely no
regard for the way that might impact them personally; I had excluded them from the family I had
created for them the year before. I recall feeling badly—horribly even—but I justified my actions
with the need to have a quality group, and so I left it for that year. I remember, in fact, telling
myself it was too late to change anything, but maybe that was my excuse to not have to alter my
choir. I was too young and immature to put the right thing first. That has never left me. So the
next year I auditioned for Vox and an additional new “elite” mixed-voice chamber choir. I
insisted that those who wanted to audition for Vox audition for both so they would get
something. Then, I let everyone who auditioned for the Chamber Choir in, no matter what.
Lesson learned. I hope.

After I told a short version of this story in our third focus group session, Derek
interrogated my concerns with the idea that you need to find a challenge in your work, “you need
something for your own soul and an advanced chamber group is a way to do that.” Certainly his
experiences in the elite choral atmosphere of his early twenties—the narratives of which are to
come in chapter eight—encouraged such a view. But he also spoke of his firm belief that choir
be accessible to all, and that one needs to work to make that as challenging an environment as
possible. It’s great advice, but from a personal standpoint, the jury is still out for me as to
whether perceived accessibility is enough. I wonder how elite groups are really managed, especially in the public school system and in light of the drive of advocacy behind music education and the promises such a stance professes. I wonder, can we as choral conductors truly remain mindful of our ego and put students’ needs first? Where is the balance struck between our personal need for challenge and excitement in our own career, and the feelings and desires of those who sing? In Sonya’s narratives we see she is moving toward positive change in her practice and she acknowledges that her attitude toward performance is changing to a “focus on the students.” I have learned from this greatly and it is encouraging to witness the evaluation of a practice throughout the process of a collaborative self-study.

To the above point, after we met to discuss her chapter, Sonya spoke of her dilemma with a student teacher and the great anxieties that she felt were holding this student back. Sonya saw such potential and talent in this student; a great teacher in the making. However, Sonya told me that she was finding that she needed to speak with the student on a regular basis to ensure that “yes this is a good lesson plan,” “yes, you can do this.” This need for constant reassurance was beginning to frustrate Sonya and she felt that having to do so much coddling was negatively impacting the goings-on in her classroom. I reminded her of the stories we had just reviewed: how long it took her to get off the steps; the support she received from Mr. Duncanson; her difficult first experience student teaching. Then I reminded her of her almost crippling self-doubt, and the immense talent she had that she just couldn’t believe in without strong encouragement from others. “Ya, I think I need to go home now and really think about this one and how I’ll approach it.” We were both learning from her narratives, and it made me think of how much encouragement (and nagging) I had needed to move forward in my own career. I question how we can empower students to think past the anxieties that grow out of our discipline. How can we surrender to empathy and really work with students who sometimes feel
as if they are performing their teaching rather than enacting it? How do we turn the assumption of judgment and difficult past experiences into affirmation? Recognizing our musical experiences as valid is a good place to begin, but do cooperating teachers understand how to do this? Can self-study expand its borders to include their practices? Can we ensure that student identities never become invisible?

**Figuring out What We’re Really Teaching**

Another aspect of Sonya’s narratives affected me. When speaking of “coming down the backroads,” and how much of her feelings of inadequacy stemmed from her perception that her gospel routes “didn’t count as formal music,” I recalled my descriptions of being raised on popular music. In listening to the first focus group session—it is an odd thing to hear yourself as both participant and researcher at the same time—I heard how I retracted or qualified my statement about my love of ABBA and Simon and Garfunkel to fit in with the rest of the group. I was the only one who was influenced by popular music at a young age; it had been the main vehicle of my exposure to music. When Henry and Derek spoke of not being particularly attracted to this genre, and Elroy spoke of his formal training and the focus on classical music to the point of seeking out recordings of that nature at the library, I shifted my storytelling to include the first time I heard Mendelssohn’s violin concerto and how exciting I found it. I bowed to the “this is the kind of music that’s valid” ideology that is still firmly pervasive in our discipline (especially if you teach at a university, it’s just a given, right?). I heard myself justify my days filled with repeated listenings of Simon and Garfunkel and my beloved ABBA; “well there’s actually a full orchestra,” “those aren’t just lyrics, it’s really very poetic,” “their singing is never pushed and ABBA sings great harmony and they had great tone.” And on it went. But
what I hadn’t realized during the focus group session, I now heard loud and clear from the recordings: I was disconnected from the actual conversations and the intentions of my fellow co-researchers because I was focused on what I assumed they thought of my musical tastes, rather than the fact that they were simply sharing their narratives. Yikes.

In listening and re-listening, I heard that the comments weren’t put downs, but frank expressions in answer to what our early recordings and tastes were. I had jumped to the conclusion of the music that had influenced me as being “less than” so quickly I could hear Lucy Green shaking her head. This led me to wonder how much I was missing as a researcher in my dual role as both participant and researcher in the focus group sessions. There were a few other instances where I could hear that I had been more focused on one role over the other and had missed opportunities for clarification. That is when the design of the research process saved me: I could approach the topics again in our personal interviews for clarification. I could also question myself. Perhaps then, I could really find my voice. To do that, in this particular instance, I needed to question the roots of my own issues of perceived musical inferiority and find a way to celebrate and recognize their equal standing and validity. I laughed to myself that if I were back in high school I’d be hiding the fact that I liked the Mendelssohn! Talk about being caught up in the governing ideologies of a discipline. Can we let go of those old personal judgments when they rear their ugly heads in our practice, no matter what level of education and experience we are at? This line of reflection had driven home how important it is to explore our processes of socialization. Without such an exploration, how can we recognize our students socialized preferences and bend to meet their needs? How would we ever figure out, as Cole & Knowles (2000) implore, what we’re really teaching?

5 Lucy Green, author of How Popular Musicians Learn (2001)
“Again!” he speaks. His voice is energetic—at times almost impatient—if only in protest of the limits the passing of time places upon his goals. His movements are sweeping—at times even grandiose—if only to convey the emotional content he feels is necessary for the music to truly sing. His gaze is intense—if only to beg a similar emotional understanding of the text from the singers seated on the risers before him.

Sunlight reflects off the January snow lying on the frozen ground outside. It provides a backdrop of serenity visible through the floor-to-ceiling windows that light the rehearsal space; its cold such a contrast with the energy buzzing on this side of the glass. His focus never turns to it. His focus remains on the music. His focus is on teaching. “I just looked that up today!” he tells them excitedly, sharing what he is still learning about the piece they are singing; an effective approach in its subtle humility.

“I feel we are slowing down a bit…” he expresses, searching for words perhaps to inspire the choristers to take charge of their own singing. He adds firmly, “so if you can find those spots to drive the rhythm ahead, please take it.”

‘That is good pedagogy,’ I think to myself. Good pedagogy builds community and motivates individuals within a group to find personal success within that community. But today, he will need a bit more. “It’s still not happening,” he tells them. The driving tempo and personality of the piece is out of reach. Without any negativity or displays of
impatience, he urges them to “find the contrast”; “find the legato over the staccato undertones and really revel in it.” To this end, he invites the singers to move off their chairs on the risers and form a circle in the middle of the room. Once there, they begin to sing the piece again and look freely to each other, moving to the tactus, leaning into the syllabic emphasis of this word and that word. It is terribly exciting to watch and stands in bold contrast to Patricia O’Toole’s (1994) poststructural visions of the conductor controlling individual bodies within the circle. The purpose of this format rather, is clearly about individual bodies connecting with others in the circle. And the group embraces it.

He is authoritative, but no authoritarian. He invites involvement, and waits while some of the altos chat about musical decisions in one section of the piece. Then he moves on—a master of momentum—switching pieces and firing ahead. He continues to allow musical problem solving without condescension. He gives guidance and pertinent information when necessary in the hope that the singers are able to understand style, text, and musical texture. There is such a sense of leadership within the group. There is such a sense of leadership emanating from him. At the same time, he is such a performer; firm in voice, committed in body. I wonder to myself how that will translate to the concert venue.

* * * * *

Suddenly, the lights in the church go out and I sense a nervous anticipation in the murmurs of the audience that surrounds me. From somewhere off in the balcony—perhaps the stairwell?—somehow seemingly miles off in the distance, a short melodic statement rings out and disappears, then another, this time a bit closer. The sound is
strangely inviting. It calls out from high before it descends as if soaring down a mountain slope through the valley; today the balcony of the church to hardwood floors. The sound has a guttural quality, somehow grounded in the body. Yet it is also edgy, piercing, and perplexingly eerie, like the snarl of witches flying overhead, swooping down with their diving melodies to grab at the hairs on our backs, now standing on end. These are the sounds of the kulning—the cow call of the Swedish farm maiden. We have been transported to another land, exposed to the traditions of a culture at once ancient and modern. Increasingly, from all parts of the sanctuary, the silhouettes of singers come into view. Their faces are illuminated by the soft candlelight of the lanterns they carry. The calls continue to fly out over the heads of the auditors as if caught upon the winds breezing over pastures in northern fields. Slowly the low drone of the cattle stirs from high in the mountains and descends back to the maidens signaling a return to the farm. The effect is remarkable.

But now, overtones emerge from the texture of cow bells; the stirring of the cattle, the calls of the maidens. With a boom, a large framed drum begins a pulsating rhythm coupled with a low bass driving the energy intensely into his hand-held microphone. The lights of the performance space begin their ascent and reveal a choir surrounding the audience in its entirety. The singers stand tall, faces engaged, and the dynamic quality of their stance creates a presence that causes the audience to sit up in their seats, keenly aware they are now part of the performance. Slowly progressing chords projected in a nasal tone reach out from all directions exciting our ears. Sonic flashes jump from here and there like flickering northern lights in the Swedish night sky. They glisten in the harmonies of the womens’ softly shaped oo’s…spark forth, and then fade away in the manipulation of the vowel circles on the auditory landscape.
Finally, we are brought home to rest through the comfort of the soothing melodic lines of an Icelandic lullaby. And thus, calmly, quietly, serenely ends our Nordic night scene adventure. Elroy and his choir have accomplished what they set out to do: capture our imaginations through sound.

**Who is Elroy? How Do I Relate to Him as Researcher?**

Elroy and I met in our first year of an integrated bachelor of music/bachelor of education program. I recall sitting beside him in the compulsory English class we both weren’t particularly keen on. His laugh was loud and boisterous. He seemed always upbeat and straightforward; two distinct qualities that drew me to him. And he knew his music. There was a confidence about him that translated to his performances in both piano and voice, and to his way of being in our conducting techniques classes; energetic, direct, secure.

Currently, Elroy teaches at the University of Manitoba where he directs three ensembles, teaches graduate level courses in choral conducting, and is a student-teacher advisor. He began his teaching career in the town of Steinbach, east of Winnipeg. Our teaching paths followed a similar direction. We both started our careers outside the city in rural areas where we built successful programs from the ground up. We would meet here at there, particularly at Choralfest, the province’s annual non-competitive workshop festival, and were aware of each other’s progress. Elroy taught high school band and choir for five years in Steinbach, and then moved back to Winnipeg, where he was born, to teach for another four years in a choral program he developed for grades seven through twelve in a private Christian high school.

We both began to develop an increased community profile and mature as conductors, guest conducting regional choirs and giving workshops. I recall the phone call I received from
Elroy telling me he was interested in forming a young adult community choir. I was working with that age group already and we discussed how two groups of this type could co-exist, drawing from the same choral pool, so to speak. There was a respect there for the larger choral community that impressed me. And so he formed the successful community choir *Prairie Voices*, comprised of eighteen to twenty-five year olds. This choir had a mandate for performing new and world music, specifically showcasing works by Canadian and Manitoban composers. They were known for their energy, their stage presence, and for Elroy’s programming of exciting, new, fresh repertoire.

After establishing this choir Elroy began his graduate training in Manitoba and completed a Masters of Music in Choral Conducting before heading to the states to begin doctoral studies in Illinois. He was then hired as Professor of Choral Studies at the University of Manitoba, a position formerly held by Henry.

**Digging in the Soul-soil of Elroy**

Elroy was born in Winnipeg and like Henry, he claims a Mennonite ancestry. His narrative, however, differs from Henry:

My family thought the main Mennonite church was too worldly—too much importance placed on music... art on their walls—so education was frowned upon, musical instruments were unheard of, and both sets of my grandparents were of this ilk.

His grandparents’ generation lived in small farming communities outside the city. Then they moved one step further away from “the real world” as Elroy tells us, to the Interlake region north of the city of Winnipeg, cleared rocks, and “farmed like crazy and called the community
Mennville. Mennville is where my roots are.” And so Elroy came from a background where his father was the first to go out and get an education. He became a public school teacher.

Elroy expressed that in their culture there was very little music other than a cappella hymn singing in the church. In this respect, the church atmosphere wasn’t a huge influence on him musically, but there was one important moment that stood out:

I do remember figuring out how to sing harmony by looking at the notes in the hymnal. I remember it clearly. It was at church and I noticed that the starting note for my alto line was the same as the last note of the melody line, so “Oh, I could get my note from them!” That was a big moment because then I started to see how the other lines related. So I figured out how to read harmonies in the hymnal that way all by myself.

Rather than musical gatherings, there were lots of sports on Sunday afternoons. One family would be a baseball team and challenge another family to a game. There was community, but this community had a different flavour than Henry’s; there were no performances of poetry or duets performed in the calf clubs. The seeds of Elroy’s musical beginnings were sown in a soul-soil fertilized with a different nutritional composition, as it were. Music seemed almost to sneak its way into his family. There were a few records floating around the home, perhaps ten in total Elroy guessed, which included many homemade records by various Mennonite families. There were two more formal recordings of quality which included a Winnipeg Mennonite Children’s Choir Anniversary Christmas album. Elroy serenaded us with a favourite—“Kling Glöckchen, klingelingeling. Kling Glöckchen kling”—delivered in a sweet, high voice much like the German boy soprano-Wunderkind Heintje, the star of the family’s other treasured recording, who was remembered best as “a big blond floating head supported by a red turtleneck on a pale green record cover.” A quick googling on my part revealed this was a common theme among Heintje recordings.
Reflecting throughout our storytelling, Elroy came to understand that the singing that occurred at family gatherings was influential:

At our family Christmas gathering we sing four part hymns with the whole family. Nobody’s trained but the men just sing full out. It’s only now that I realize, ‘oh that’s where I got my tenor voice from.’ I have these “farmer uncles” who crank out tenor to high C! Sometimes they’re harmonizing the alto line up even higher and don’t realize it. So it’s now I realize that must have influenced me, hearing that.

Family gatherings were not the only place Elroy was influenced vocally. He was fortunate to receive excellent education in his elementary years from a very well-respected music teacher in the city:

I realize I must have received good training from her throughout elementary school because although I sang in church, it wasn’t quality singing. She would pull me and my friend out to sing descant because we were keen, or at least she tells me we were!

I was chatting with her at Choralfest with all of this (research process) floating in my head, and I realized that my earliest musical memory is from kindergarten. We’d sit on a tile floor, I remember, and sing together... and she’d sit there with us, singing. I asked her, “Do you remember the tile floor?”

She said “No.”

I said, “Do you remember you wore brown velour?” (we all laugh)...

Additionally, his elementary school had a string program where, by grade four, students were introduced to a string instrument; Elroy chose the cello and thrived.

Music in the home, however, became more prominent with the introduction of piano into his life; an introduction generations in the making. His mother’s youngest aunt had a piano in the basement and Elroy recalls that she took a few lessons from “somewhere.” His grandpa was a pastor, however, and so its home was in the basement where it couldn’t be seen. Elroy’s mother actually took lessons briefly as an adult in college. She could play some gospel-style tunes “with
a vamping left hand” for the children on the “big ‘ol klunker of a piano” that dwelled in the family home. His father had done some required musical training as part of his certificate in education, and had once himself been a Vorsänger in his youth group. As a child, Elroy was always at the piano—fooling around constantly he told us—and once again the talent was spotted by parents and nurtured. In grade two, through a family connection, Elroy was “allowed” to take piano lessons with Mrs. Reimer. This figure was to provide his soul-soil with many nutrients that became essential to his musical growth.

As inconsequential as it may seem to decide to have a child engage in music lessons, Elroy impressed upon us that this was quite a big deal within his family and the decision to engage in formal lessons moved against the cultural grain:

You have to realize this is first generation out of Mennville living in the city and first generation music lessons. My mom was already pushing the envelope by taking lessons at college. So they signed me up with her because she was a good Christian woman and likely to be a positive influence. And I could walk to the lessons a few streets over!

It was to be a fortuitous connection which led to a life filled with music and ignited a confidence in musical ability that has carried well into his professional practice. Later on, Elroy would “beg,” as he characterized it, to take cello and then voice lessons, creating a life overflowing with musical involvement. There is a unique kind of “family script” (Borthwick & Davis, 2002)—a concept introduced in chapter five—which extends beyond musical development. Expectations for musical development are not at the fore. Rather, the support of a child’s individual interests is paramount as values and expectations surrounding involvement of music are non-existent within the family. Attitudes and beliefs regarding quality music making were born of another source.
Mrs. Reimer’s Soul-Shard

As discussed in chapter five, Henry spoke numerous times of “what imprints us” in our focus group sessions. Imprints, it was clear to Henry, were formative experiences and influential personalities that had impacted early thinking and contributed significantly to shaping our musical selves. Such prominent influential figures which are relationshiped into our being, as described in chapter six, inspire us to “new forms of action” (Gergen, 2009, p. 5) and we come to share common perspectives. Although his lessons with Mrs. Reimer are long behind him, the effect of these lessons and the imprint of Mrs. Reimer live on in his musical values, his ideas involving musical tastes, his musical work ethic, and many attitudes central to who he feels he is as a choral music educator.

During the first focus group, Elroy told us he was not particularly sentimental in nature, not one to keep tokens of his accomplishments. As a result, he felt he had very little to show when it came to sharing artifacts. What he did have, however, was a few artifacts that really did matter to him; his old piano books. “These represent the incredible instruction I got from Esther Reimer,” he told us. Her influence had a powerful effect on Elroy’s musical development from grade two through his high school years, and their serendipitous union was fully appreciated as he explained to us:

I think it’s providence that I ended up with her. I just happened to end up with the best teacher in Winnipeg at the time. The kind of discipline that came with studying with her was really unbelievable. But I didn’t actually know she was the best teacher, I just knew that you learned a pile of repertoire, and like all her students, you placed first or second at the festival. All of her students did incredibly at the festival. And you weren’t even allowed to apply for the RCM exams unless you could play every piece in the book up to her standards with all

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6 A pseudonym is used here.
the technique up to speed and ready to go. You could only apply then...and then you *perfected* your pieces. I mean just look at this...

He opened to a Bach fugue and lay out the Royal Conservatory book for us to view on the table. Immediately, all of us present at the focus group session began to laugh heartily—there was barely a white spot of paper shining through the teachers’ markings. It was clear that pencil had been used for the first layer of “gentle suggestions”; then came the colour. Both pencil crayon and marker highlighted the “must dos” and a sea of circles, bold lines, check-marks, and exes of every kind almost completely obliterated Johann Sebastian’s notes on the printed page. Between the staves, slurs and accents, coupled with boldly printed dynamics, conversed with firm requests for “less” and “more.” Scattered throughout the music were yet more pleas in the form of “don’t clip!” and “watch speed” which shared the page with appeals for character like “brighter l.h.,” “phrasing!” and “lilt!!” And, at the top of the page was written one simple word which encompassed the result of Elroy’s fugal pursuits, one word which encapsulated his struggles to attain such a level of detail, one word which reflected his incredible degree of achievement: “good.” He explained:

If you had a “good” written on the page that meant the piece was *A-MAZING* (we indulged in another laugh). We had to learn every piece in the book up to concert level. So this book shows how she would mark *every little* musical detail. People ask, “Can you think for yourself?” Ya, I can think for myself. Ya, I can shape *anything*...

Furthermore, it was her expectations for him on a wider scale—set far too low in his estimation—which fuelled him on to greater and greater accomplishments. He recalled one lesson in particular that instilled a sense of determination within him to impress her. He conveyed the tale to us with humorous exasperation:
She thought I would make—this is how she labeled me, I don’t think she knew she did—“a good church musician.” That was her goal, she told me! Oh, I was offended! I was *hugely* offended. I was very angry when I went home from that lesson because I thought, ‘What?!? She’s written me off!’

Elroy shared how he thrived in the music festival atmosphere and enjoyed much success. He attributed this in part to aspects of his own personality, which he identified as competitive and “enjoying the spotlight,” as well as to the excellent preparation he received from Mrs. Reimer. Additionally, it was the manner in which Mrs. Reimer dealt with successes that made an impression on him. After his first ever festival class, Elroy brought home the winning adjudication. In contrast to my first festival experience—described in the introduction of this thesis—and the attention and assumptions that it brought, Elroy recalled the no-nonsense attitude regarding “winning” that he was met with:

She seemed almost as surprised as I was. And if she wasn’t, she didn’t let on. She would downplay the winning. She would poo-poo that and go right to the adjudication and look at the comments and say, “we talked about that, what happened there?” (he laughs). I got compliments from her but they were rare—it was just her character. In fact at my doctoral recital of the Rautaavaara, she came. She and her husband came and afterward they both wrote me a formal letter each about how pleased they were with it. But there were no cheap congratulations from her. I saw her out raking her leaves and I stopped by and told her, “My doctoral committee is pretty impressed with the recording of the concert.”

And she answered, “Well I should think that they would be.”

And I just felt like, ‘I’ve arrived! My seventy–something year old piano teacher said it was good!’

Mrs. Reimer’s no-nonsense attitude left a mark on Elroy, and shaped his ideas regarding work ethic and musical preparation. At times in his storytelling she came across as somewhat of a stern task-master rather than a bubbly, encouraging persona. However, tales of her personality were interpreted by others in our group, who held a keen pedagogical eye, in a positive light. Henry and Derek both acknowledged that there seemed to be enough support and enough
personal integrity in her relations with students that she knew how to show respect for the student, but she also understood the delicate balance between having confidence and losing it. While Sonya and I both lamented not receiving such instruction, I was particularly interested in Elroy’s understanding surrounding what this kind of instruction had afforded him in the everyday life of his professional practice.

Catherine: I don’t want to put words into your mouth here, but when it comes down to your musical self, those are skills, right? A skill set. But what does that do for you as someone who gets up in front of others and teaches and conducts?

Henry interjected: Confidence.

Elroy: My word exactly...because I’m not debating my basic musical skills at that point in front of a choir. Like when I went into my first graduate conducting class in Illinois, I then realized my advantage: even though I don’t have all the academic knowledge, (to Henry) even though I didn’t grow up in your church tradition or (to Derek) your musical tradition, and there’s so much music I don’t know, put any of those scores in front of me and I can read them at first sight better than most others in my class even after they’ve prepared them. So that’s a distinct advantage—there’s a confidence in me that comes from that.

I recall the rehearsals I ventured to throughout the research process. The more of Elroy’s stories I heard, the more I understood what drove him in rehearsal and where many of the roots of his behaviours lay. Certainly Mrs. Reimer’s way of being with music was a significant influence. His rehearsal methods and personal approaches toward his choirs echo many of her mannerisms. Elroy intimated his personal belief that the kind of respect students are shown, on both an individual and a collective level, has a great bearing on their development as choristers, or perhaps future conductors and educators. Much of this sense of respect on his part stems not from any indulgence in sentimentality, but through a clear sense of focus which seeks to challenge, instill responsibility, and develop a strong work ethic that encourages the continual pursuit of personal and collective betterment. Elroy’s personal understanding is that great
rewards are born from such an approach. He also credits his time with Henry as greatly influential in this respect.

I reflect on Elroy’s piano books and ponder their significance as artifacts. I recall him communicating to us how much piano was a part of his life with daily practicing (far more than I ever committed to it) and the support he received from his mother:

I enjoyed practicing piano. I really did. My mother would sit with us. Right up to almost grade piano six, I think. She’d sit in the rocking chair beside us and if we were starting to work by memory she’d have the book open on her lap. She’d say “Hey, count out loud—dynamics, she says she wants dynamics!” Every time we’d practice she would sit and knit; every single time.

It is truly incredible the memories that are stored in an inanimate object. One could easily overlook such a fact and look upon the books of music as simple bounded pieces of paper with printed notes on them, accompanied by the scribbles of a picky teacher. They are much more. Douglas Hofstadter (2007), employing a Chopin étude for piano as an example, describes the printed piece of music “affording all of us some partial access to Chopin’s interiority—to the experience of living in the head, or rather the soul, of Frederic Chopin” (p. 10). He describes how the notes on sheets of paper, these simple black markings, represent the scattered remnants of Chopin’s soul:

Each of those strange geometries of notes has a unique power to bring back to life, inside our brains, some tiny fragment of the internal experiences of another human being—his sufferings, his joys, his deepest passions and tensions—and we thereby know, at least in part, what it was like to be that human being, and many people feel intense love for him. (p. 10)

In this sense, copies of souls become, to a certain extent, transferable. Patterns of another become activated inside our living brains and survive in us. Such activation makes little
fragments of a soul “dance again, but in the medium of brains other than (our) own” (p. 10). This leaves behind what Hofstadter terms soul-shards. And so, like the imprints of those influential figures in Henry’s life and the heartfelt notes to Sonya from former students, the scores from Elroy’s life represent a very strong connection to one who has imprinted his life significantly. This adds a dramatic dimension to life history-oriented self-study, allowing Elroy to articulate a connection between his early musical influences and musical way of life, and his current understandings surrounding his musical self. This artifact from Elroy’s past not only rekindled memories of lessons where he felt challenged, moments of frustrations, festival and exam successes, and his mother’s encouragement from the rocking chair, it also allowed access to the fragments of another he knew intimately; Mrs. Reimer. Her values and attitudes are carried forward through the markings on the page and have immense triggering effects when Elroy revisits them:

I’ve been looking for one to frame. I’ve been thinking I should put one up on my wall since I really feel strongly that its because of those skills there (he points to the page)—I mean, I’ve been able to rely on those skills for everything musically...I can transpose on sight, I know how a full score works because she taught so thoroughly. And the way she had about her affected me, kept pushing me forward. I mean look at this! (he laughs pointing once more at the page) You never get there, you just keep improving. This had a huge effect on how I look at making music.

**Interpreting our Libretto**

Often we look to musical experiences in our attempts to understand the ways we teach music. Certainly, in this research, the focus tends toward musical experiences in the lives of choral music educators in an attempt to understand how our “musical” selves have come to be formed. This approach could be viewed as focusing on our personal “libretto”; the text of our extended musical script. Naturally, although it is greatly interconnected with our way of being, this is only one aspect of our lives, and there are many influences which extend beyond our libretto.
Becoming consciously aware of who we are depends on our ability to interpret and articulate the experiences which both comprise and influence our libretto as we go through life.

Over a lunch meeting to check some details of his narratives after the second focus group session, Elroy expressed to me, “I’m having a hard time pinning my development down.” The first session of story sharing with others had him thinking and he was trying to find a through line in his musical narratives. As a result, he was beginning to realize the complexity of his musical life—there was so much more involved at second glance. He understood more and more that certain aspects of his family life had played a significant role in his development as a music educator, and that these aspects were inextricably linked to who he was as an educator and as a choral conductor. His musical self was “a lot bigger than his musical experiences” and his father, in particular, had been a shaper of his prior knowledge:

There’s so much more about being a conductor that just the musical skills. We see so many brainiac musicians who struggle when it comes to conducting. But my dad was a Pastor and I’d see him interact with people and I’d see him on the podium. I would also hear his stories about being a grade six teacher. He had a classroom full of animals of every kind—birds, snakes, gerbils, and hamsters—and you could earn an opportunity to take care of an animal. He taught them (the students) how to be responsible and he’d motivate them. The most difficult kids in the school division all came to him and he’d get them going.

Elroy also remembered his experiences at summer camp as a young boy and later as a counselor. He recalled how he’d learned from his father in this setting:

We’d go to camp every summer and he’d be the speaker, and so I understood the business of how to engage a group of people. When he was losing them he’d bring in a story or he’d point and say, “You need to pay attention”; he was that kind of take charge teacher.

Our sense of self grows out of the context of experience (Beattie, 2007; Cole & Knowles, 2000). Reflecting on our narratives from the first focus group session, Elroy began to explore his
musical life within a broader family context and realized the impact of his father in particular. These understandings grew and strengthened throughout the research process and he was able to make many connections to behaviours in his professional practice. Confident social interaction, instilling a sense of responsibility, motivating others, engaging an audience, and taking charge; all these qualities of character had an incredible influence in the manner in which Elroy came to behave in front of an ensemble. He articulated this correlation regarding his abilities to connect with others, “I can build a relationship with them in thirty seconds.” His own camp experiences as a counselor fed his confidence in forming relationships with others and fostered strong leadership qualities under his father’s guidance. Long rainy days with lots of kids under his care during his teenage years taught him how to keep kids interested and “pumped” with regard to whatever task he was doing. Learning to keep people focused and having “tools in your arsenal” to help them stay motivated, were skills instrumental to his development as a conductor and educator, although they were extra-musical in nature:

I’ve thought about that recently and realized those aren’t the musical things, but those are the other components that have allowed me to be successful in, say workshop situations, where I’ve gone all over the place and been able to just go with it...things that perhaps I wouldn’t have otherwise felt I could do. And watching my dad and hearing his stories were a big part of that too. He worked in some very, very tough schools—tough, tough schools—and he told us lots of stories. I grew up hearing that...

Thus, we see how Elroy’s libretto and family script interact to inform his music education sensibilities. His father’s influences and his “musical upbringing,” so to speak, with Mrs. Reimer, provided foundational tools for future success. Exploring and interpreting the narratives surrounding these two figures enabled him to articulate a more complex picture of his music educator self.
Leaving the Musician-ship to sail the Leader-ship

Before the first focus group session, Elroy met with his father and asked if he had any stories about his early musical experiences. There were a few that stood out. His father recalled one instance that seemed to be a turning point. He related to Elroy the moment where he realized that his son’s passion for music had become quite serious, and had overtaken other possible pastimes which were assumed to be existent. The sports games played by his family on Sunday afternoons were of no interest to Elroy. Similarly, he had no interest in following the typical father-son leisure activities experienced by many of his uncles and cousins. And so, upon surprising his first born with Winnipeg Jets hockey tickets, Elroy’s father was met with a reaction he had not expected:

My dad told me that I just looked at him really sincerely and said “Just save your money dad. I really don’t wanna go to a Jets game with you.” He said he had a really hard time with that. So he got me symphony tickets and I was just psyched—and so I went to the symphony with my dad, and to this day he remembers that.

As expressed earlier in this chapter, there is a “family script,” that is, “a set of beliefs and behaviours that regulate social roles played by those in a family” (Clarke & Cook, 2004, p. 64), at work here. Its characterization, however, differs from previous participants.’ Expectations for musical development were never a great concern in Elroy’s family and, as such, there existed no external factors that influenced him strongly in a musical direction or played a role in his decision to pursue music. Elroy acknowledged, almost in passing, that there were quite possibly “good musical genes” in the family, but that there was no way of knowing since formal music making had not been a family tradition. So Elroy didn’t see himself as an inheritor of a parent’s musical ability:
Well, musically there may be good genes, good musical genes, but we don’t really know because nobody was trained in any way for generations—there’s no professional musicians there... but there’s good genes for leadership, and my father was a teacher.

Elroy’s father had grown up with cultural influences which prized different aspects of family life. But, as evidenced in his decision to trade in Jet’s tickets for a trip to the symphony, the support of his son became his main concern, and a “family script” of leadership rather than musicianship surfaces. In fact, throughout Elroy’s childhood, his father railed against larger cultural expectations—and at a more localized level, familial expectations—that music not be so much a part of his son’s life:

My dad is a big thinker. It was a pretty big deal that I went into music. My dad had brothers and brother-in-laws approach him and say “you’re doing a disservice to your son in allowing him to do so much music study. He won’t know how to care for a family.” There was the idea that this is just not what a man does, he’s a farmer or a carpenter... maybe a teacher. And my dad stood against this for years.

Barakett and Cleghorn (2008) described culture as “referring to the ways of perceiving, thinking, believing, and behaving that characterize the members of a particular social group” (p. 3). The dominant values of Elroy’s culture, most keenly felt by his father, suggested specific courses of action and expectations for Elroy’s life. However, support of a child’s individual interests was paramount in the manner in which Elroy’s father dealt with this cultural pressure. His father continued to support Elroy’s musical ventures as they took hold more and more strongly and Elroy continually looked for ways to challenge himself. And his musical interests took hold with a vengeance. Elroy discovered that records could be taken out at the public library and began to listen like crazy. He asked to take voice lessons as well as cello and piano. Although his school music programs didn’t intrigue quite as much as solo playing, they
continued to provide musical sustenance and fuelled a developing sonic self that was drawn to the showiness of a certain instrument in band class…the timpani:

I loved it—it was the loudest instrument at the back (we all laugh)! I was hooked! And I could play all the percussion instruments like glockenspiel because I played piano and I could easily tune the timpani because I played cello.

He also signed up for choir which began in grade twelve. He was one of only four guys, although he spent most of his time at the piano serving as accompanist. He recalls rehearsing their rendition of the popular Roberton piece *All in the April Evening* and performing Broadway tunes with the choristers providing their own ukulele accompaniment (give yourself a moment to visualize *that* one). In short, Elroy wanted to be involved in all things musical. And he wanted to lead. However, there was always a concern on Elroy’s father’s part for what others may think of his son’s pursuits, and so the tensions of having a son who was so interested in music were dealt with in somewhat of a cautionary manner:

I started playing piano in church. I wasn’t allowed to play though until I could play *every* hymn in the book, and there were some pretty poor other pianists. But my father didn’t want it to be ‘the hotshot Pastor’s kid goin’ up all the time’; it was for protection. He did the same in grade ten. I started up a church band but my dad wouldn’t let me have a baton because he thought it would make me look like it was a “better than thou” kind of thing, so I just waved my hands around (he laughs). I wouldn’t have known what to do with a baton anyway, but it didn’t matter because he wasn’t going to let me have one.

And so Elroy’s father was clever in working a balance between his son’s growing abilities and strong musical interests, and the confines of a culture which, as Henry put it in reference to his own dreams of leadership, “frowned upon one drawing attention to oneself.” His father modeled support and standing up for one’s personal beliefs within a structure filled with social pressures. It may have been social protection, but this behaviour had a very specific effect on Elroy; it drove him to develop a strong, disciplined, and self-assured approach to musical
tasks. Moreover, it further challenged him to succeed: he did what ever it took to be able to lead, and this snowballed into greater success. In fact, he recalls actually wanting to be pushed. Perhaps this is what instilled such a competitive drive in him, and he was able to channel it:

We had a musical director at church who was an amateur musician. He arranged pieces of music and tried to get people to come out, but he just couldn’t get them motivated and it wasn’t working out. But I got people to come out. There was a guy who hadn’t played clarinet in twelve years, but they came out for me. And the church gave me money and I went down to St. John’s music and got some band scores and tried to figure out what would work—what kind of Christmas arrangements we could manage. So here I am in high school figuring out band scores; I was totally self-taught.

Consequently, a libretto where musical skills converged with a family script of leadership created a self-motivated passion which manifested itself in more opportunities at a young age:

My dad remembered that in grade eleven it was the regional conference of our churches. I was already on the music committee at our church when I was in high school—I was learning the minute taking and everything!—so they put me in charge and asked if I would conduct the band or ensemble. The ensemble was made of people from all four churches and I took everyone no matter their level of playing—and there was every level of player (laughs heartily)!—but I didn’t really consider myself a conductor...just a leader.

With the recognition of how his family life shaped his own musical pursuits, I asked Elroy about his attitude to music lessons within his own immediate family today. I was curious as to how the personal beliefs acquired through his cultural and familial background impact his feelings regarding music in his own children’s future. Does he make the study of music a part of his children’s lives? He answered that he believes music is an essential life skill: “It’s important for quality of life.” To this end, Elroy’s own four children are involved in music lessons of all kinds. “It’s also part of family life,” he added, signaling the beginning of a new family script which reflects his own values regarding music, and the passing of such values to his children, thus continually enhancing the evolving libretto of his own life.
Echoes of a Libretto Lived in “List C”

As previously stated, our musical selves are formed in and around music and our musical experiences. It stands to reason then, that specific kinds of music play a role in the development of this self. In previous chapters, connections of this nature were exposed. Henry’s love of hymns could perhaps be connected with the ways he finds delight in structured Baroque forms, while Sonya’s gospel routes are mirrored in her sense of emotional commitment and the freedom of expression in her musical embodiment. Sonya also found a love for the List C pieces from the Royal Conservatory of Music piano books. They allowed her an imaginative, rebellious side when she “whacked those dissonances!” Elroy experienced similar feelings. He admits being keenly drawn to repertoire with “angular rhythms and dissonance,” and anything “new” and “outside the box.” This preference becomes transparent when held against his current tastes for the “new and unique” in his repertoire choices. He expressed that he loves being the first at innovative rehearsal and workshop techniques, and new ways of presentation in concert; a protean self (Lifton, 1993) in action (see chapter three). And he loves being the first on the podium with new repertoire as evidenced in the opening story of the Nordic musical performance. However, until he became involved in the process of collaborative self-study, he hadn’t realized how far back these attractions to the inventive and modern went:

Early on, my teacher gave me list C pieces and that’s what I lived for—never the more classical list A and B stuff—the dramatic ones. So always...all along I’ve had a bend towards that, and I don’t think I realized that until I started journaling and saw the pieces that stood out to me...

In first year university he recalled a trip to the symphony:

I remember the first time I heard Penderecki’s cello concerto. I didn’t know whether to cry or scream after hearing it. I was emotionally gripped by the performer. I’m genuinely excited by the sound of “new” music in the ear, I just love the intensity.
I wondered about the music Elroy gravitated to. I saw it as brave and bold, placing him in a position to consistently challenge himself musically. Like the loud timpani at the back of the band room, it set him apart. DeNora (2000) speaks of music providing a template for identifying identity. Through this lens, Elroy could be identified as almost a rebel—perhaps I am inspired here by his tales of his father—or at least an avant-garde music maker, an identity which, in its adoption, allows him to enact a self that is always forging ahead, exploring new territory, and dealing with the conflicting ideologies exposed in his cultural upbringing. In his enactment with such repertoire, he never remains developmentally static; he is continually driven to achieve, to be a leader. In fact, he recognized such a quality in himself, “I think I like being that person that would go up there and do that stuff and play that piece. I think I found some identity in that.”

Similar to DeNora, Naomi Cumming (2000) speaks of “discovering a voice in sound” (p. 3) and realizing emotion and personality as a quality of sound. For Cumming, the relationship with one’s instrument can include “the idea of projecting a ‘voice’ that is one’s own and also of standing apart to listen to the sound as the ‘voice of another’” (p. 5). In this sense, the performance process and one’s musical training become a means of self-formation. Cumming’s instrument was the violin. For Elroy it was piano, cello, timpani, his own voice, and now in his professional practice, his body and being as a conductor. Cumming’s informal theory of personal character and its expression in sound creates a lens through which to connect the core elements explored above in the formation of Elroy’s musical self to his professional practice. Elroy’s engagement with avant-garde music reveals his “personal style,” characterized by Cumming as “the outward face of identity” invoking Mead, Peirce, and Meyer:

…it is the perceptible result of an individual’s patterned choices within a social domain, those characteristic manners of forming sound or gesture that distinguish him or her from the “crowd” (p. 10).
Pondering such a theory added new dimensions to observations of Elroy at the onset of this chapter. Observing Elroy in his choral rehearsals with his university ensembles, I was able to view him not only being with singers, but being with sound; conveying his personal style as expressed in his choices of gesture, language, and music. Symbiotically, the “inward” self revolves around questions of “what it is to be me” (p. 11). This self involves our belief system, our inhibitions, our desires, the music we feel we can make, and the music we feel we cannot. Reflecting on the tales told by Elroy and the nature of his family script illuminates an inward voice that, through engagement in a specific kind of music, allowed him to develop his own patterns of choice—and understand the beliefs that govern them—thereby opening a world that was previously closed to him. Thus, as Cumming cleverly suggests, he develops a unique sense of self awareness through his choices in music and musical enactment, and enters “imaginatively into new worlds” (p. 11); a useful model for thinking on the musical self.

**Life: The Grand Rehearsal**

Elroy’s “patterned choices” reveal a distinct through-line. Hofstadter (2007) speaks of the phenomenon of recursion; the ability to combine simple elements into more complex ones that, in turn, serve as elements in further combinations. For example, if you think of a choir, you can think of a larger choir, then a choir with great outfits, and then a choir with great outfits that tours, etc. Surveying Elroy’s musical life and subsequent career reveals somewhat of a recursive development in that, in light of new experiences and opportunities, Elroy began to envision larger and larger possibilities for himself. The recursive process was set off by what Elroy termed “ah ha” moments as well as moments where he was pushed to his limits, but overcame apprehension, doubt, and nerves to engage in challenges and accomplish that which previously had seemed out of reach. This determination gave him the determination to strive for more and,
as he explained to Derek in their personal interview session, excited the possibility for additional adventures: “then you think to yourself, ‘Okay, now what can I do? I want to do more!’” And all this began with one experience in his undergraduate degree. An experience without which he never would have ventured down the choral path:

I was going to be a high school band teacher—that was pretty much set until I was in (University) Singers. I had done some conducting of a choral nature at Bible College, but it didn’t really stick. Choral hadn’t even entered my mind. But then we sang Stravinsky’s “Les Noces” and I was hooked.

The personality that was attracted to angular lines, disjunct rhythms, and exciting dissonances was captured by the possibilities of the choral world through the rehearsing and performance of the exciting and incredibly challenging piece. I myself recall going to the concert and looking down from the balcony to see the soloists—all professors—on four pianos, counting like crazy, their heads nodding up and down, their mouths visibly tracking the beats through the changing metres. I saw the concentration and the energy emanating from Henry and the choir. Right then I wished I had been a part of it. Elroy was, and it made an imprint on him. He spoke to us with passionately about the excitement which had inspired right from the first rehearsal.

Writing about the formation of Elroy’s musical self, I was reminded of a fridge magnet I was once given featuring a quote by Maria Callas: *treat everything like a rehearsal*. I reflected on the idea of rehearsals; a fluid space where the music is under construction, much like a self. It is a space where, as in the concert arena spoken of in chapter five, myriad relationships are consistently negotiated, socially, musically, and culturally; a space that relies on the aforementioned elements of inspiration, the overcoming of apprehension, and perseverance through obstacles in an effort to make progress. Contemplating Liz Garnett’s (2009) contention that for choral conductors, rehearsals are “the primary setting where meanings and values are
negotiated and maintained” (p. 33), I began to put into focus the intersecting dimensions of Elroy’s musical multiverse wherein I envisioned these elements as an interplay of themes in a grander “rehearsal process”: his life. I saw flashes of his conducting movements in rehearsal and concert, his arms swaying with great momentum, his body leaning into phrases as he called out over the music to the singers with words of encouragement, as well as firm requests for “more” and “less,” the kinds of musical requests imparted by Mrs. Reimer—those shapers of both music and man. These images wove in and out of the personal narratives that flowed through a musical life lived, elucidating the inward and outward identities of his “sonic self” (Cumming, 2000).

As described in chapter three, Joseph LeDoux (2002) suggests our synapses—those spaces of connection in our brains—represent a totality of who we are. Our musical selves, in turn, represent a totality of who we are across multiple disciplines. Elroy’s musical self is held together by thoughts, motivations and emotions, interaction and communication. Subsequently, this musical self is revealed as the interaction—the binding of gaps—between these distinct elements. In this sense, his sonic self becomes more than an inward and outward view of identity, it becomes a synaptic sonic self: a musical self that, like a rehearsal space filled with possibilities for connections, has come into being as a result of forming intricate networks among its parts.

Contemplating the elements of Elroy’s musical self and the rehearsal process as a space of possibilities, I began to draw connections between his ways of being in rehearsal—those moments I had viewed—and his personal narratives, in effect “closing the gaps” of his synaptic sonic self. His “patterned choices” (Cumming, 2000) morphed into “patterns of interconnectivity” (LeDoux, 2002) illuminating the space between and further articulating the polyphonic nature of Elroy’s libretto. Once again, I strive to open the text up “to be read as modes of effectivity and action” thereby scattering thoughts and images into “different linkages
and alignments” (Grosz, 1995, as cited in Davies and Gannon, 2006, p. 5). This is accomplished by weaving a variety Elroy’s personal narratives—those “ah ha” moments as well as times of apprehension, doubt, and inspiration—with quotes from his rehearsal process, thereby revealing a complex, multi-dimensional journey of becoming. The narratives begin with his final student-teaching practicum and travel throughout his professional practice, further illuminating Elroy’s outward and inward musical identities. His quotes from rehearsal are represented in a separate italicized font highlighting the temporal and environmental contrasts between different voices (Barone, 2001).

My final practicum was completely messed up and the teacher I was with didn’t even know I was coming. When I got there, he wasn’t happy about it. I was full of ideas and I knew a lot about music and I think he was intimidated, and it didn’t go well at all. I wasn’t welcomed or accepted by the staff and I worked it out to be there as little as possible. I would have quit that program completely if I wasn’t six weeks away from finishing.

*Find the legato over the staccato undertones...*

I finished student teaching on a Friday in the middle of February and I started at the high school on the Monday. That’s the way to start: cold turkey! I had to teach Geography as well as choir and band. They were pretty chaotic music classes that I walked into, so that was fun. It was very, very...*interesting* (he laughs at the understatement) doing all that!

*Push through that phrase—don’t let the momentum stop...*

I got my dream job and knew there was potential there to develop something even though it was tough at the start. And I worked my way out of the band stuff to do as much choral as possible.

*I feel we are slowing down a bit, so if you can find those spots to drive the rhythm ahead, please take it...*
There was one break that I got early on in my high school teaching and that was to do a one day workshop for the Eastern Manitoba Choral Association where you have them for a day and do the performance in the evening. I was asked to do the junior choir and I had never, ever done anything like that—I spent hours and hours picking my music. Finally, I chose repertoire I thought would work and I wanted it memorized and as solid as it could be. And you know... those kids blew the rest of the concert out of the water. That’s when I thought ‘Ah ha, I’ve found something I can really do,” because I hadn’t found my “ah ha” moment in my own high school choir—there were many frustrations there, lots of building, they struggled to sing unison and I didn’t know anything about choosing repertoire. But for the workshop, I managed to pick the three or four pieces that really worked. And then I learned something about my style of rehearsing and my ability to do that kind of thing. After that I was invited to do the Central Manitoba Youth Choir, and it took off from there and I got a lot of other opportunities. And so because someone gave me a break—before I had proven myself—someone gave me a break, gave me a gig, I really learned what I could do. And now I keep that in mind too. Who is out there right now? who needs to be thrown an opportunity to see what happens? Because someone gave me a chance.

It’s still not happening...it needs more commitment...

So a big turning point for me—I was now a high school choral teacher and not too fired up about it—was seeing Kokapelli (a choir from Edmonton). They came on tour to Steinbach and Scott (Leithead) was dressed like a headbanger. His jeans were pinned up and he’s got piercings everywhere—cause he was young, right?—and here he is with this choir. And they sang (he sings) “Fair Phyllis I saw sitting all alone,” and I saw the copulation happening! It was so overt, they were so committed that it was coming alive on stage (we all laugh). But still stylistically, it was so bang on. And then they walked from the back of the church where the choir stands, and on cue they all marched down and stood really close to us, perfectly in time with the next piece. Then they did Bridge over Troubled Water—the gospel arrangement—and just wailed! And they were all dressed in black, white, and silver, and they could pick their own outfits. So every, single person there was an individual and yet a part of the whole. And it was just like, “Oh! This is what choral performance can be.” And I was never the same in how I picked music with my high school choir after that—it was like a total ‘180’.”

Don’t let that intensity slide, keep leaning into it.

Elroy: I did a concert of an R. Murray Schaffer piece outside and it was the first time I had to hire a professional ensemble. I was still teaching high school and it was nerve-wracking to be in front of people who knew as much or more about choral singing as I did. But in the end that just sharpens your inner game.
Henry: And it really fires the cylinders doesn’t it?
Elroy: And you realize you can do it!

*You need to find the character of the style, it’s very dance-like, so move your body if you need to...*

I was always itching to get into the next thing. I toured with them (his high school group); they had never toured. They were awarded triple gold at Musicfest Canada, and I even took them overseas to England. But I felt like I needed more, so I tried moving from Steinbach to Winnipeg and then I realized, no, what I really want to do is move into higher performance and higher education. I knew I needed to start up a community group and move on—I knew after that year that I was done teaching high school and started maneuvering to be able to do a Masters.

*Don’t feel you can’t really take charge—really bite into the diction...*

The first time I got up in front of the doctoral class they didn’t know how to come in for me and that was shocking. I had to do something slow and classical and they couldn’t come in. I thought, ‘Oh my goodness, they have no idea how to read my opening gesture...no idea.’ And I’d done my Masters and the singers had no problems, and with Prairie Voices they knew exactly what I wanted. But I was also so nervous, I was so intimidated by that situation, not an enjoyable scenario at all doing that.

*I want it to grab the audience...*

It’s just being free enough to be yourself on the podium and really commit to your gesture and know that things will happen and that you can *make* them happen. I’m a performer—well also an educator—but the thing was the performance, and I make a lot of great educating happen in that process. I know how to be myself in front of that group. I think people have to teach from their passion so they can actually communicate things.

**The Essential Element**

Like both Henry and Sonya, Elroy’s interaction with students is based on mutual respect.

Specifically, he looks to creativity and imagination to infuse his rehearsal process with life and
energy, and as a result has developed his own methods which are very much an idiosyncratic expression of who he is; his soul-uniqueness revealed. He consistently invites movement of the body into the course of his rehearsals so that singers may experience the process of singing more wholly. His rehearsal methods, like his musical self, are in constant evolution; he transforms the course of action of his rehearsals as much as possible, as he has his life. His personal journey and his “personal style” as Cumming’s (2000) defines it, is mirrored in the atmosphere he creates in his daily musical life, rather than having singers remain seated or standing in one fixed formation, he requests that they be in constant flux with regard to their singing arrangement. To this end, he invites them to move around the rehearsal space to land in various configurations facing one other in small circles or differing groupings, allowing their sonic landscapes to shift and their individual communication with one another to grow. Furthermore, his rehearsal methods reflect his fascination with repertoire which looks to stir things up, and beckons experimentation and an exploration of new territory. All these aspects of his musical life are vital to the understanding of who Elroy is. But at the end of the day, there remains a focus on community and meaningful music making, highlighting, as McCarthy (2007) suggests narrative inquiry can, the relationship between what Elroy does, who he has become, and who he is still becoming, especially in relation to others.

Elroy is most willing to admit that even at the level of professor he is still developing as a teacher and a teacher of conductors. During the third focus group session, he acknowledged that “in order to have a good choir you have to be a good educator.” Such a statement opened up a group discussion that allowed us as choral music educators to acknowledge and explore the connections between our perceptions of our own abilities; our strengths and our perceived weaknesses. This encouraged us to seek out moments that reflected how our focus on teaching turned to what we felt really drove our professional practice. These aspects aligned with
Beattie’s (2007) hopes for the creation of professional narratives and professional identities which emphasize “commitment, compassion, and the capacity for true collaboration with students in their learning” (p. 3). As a group of music educators, we collectively realized this had much to do with the illusive “it” in teaching choral music. It was revealed that to know how to “build a relationship with them in thirty seconds”—a strength previously mentioned by Elroy—was not enough. Teachers of music must know how to, as Beattie (2007) articulates “create relationships and learning environments in which students feel they are valued members who are responsible for maintaining those relationships and environments” (p. 3). This declaration drives home the most essential element of Elroy’s synaptic sonic self, an element that colours other aspects of his musical being. This final element was exposed most heartily in one particular recent incident in Elroy and his choir’s life:

A two-week tour of Sweden got off to a near-disastrous start for the 32 members of a University of Manitoba choir. The Swedish magazine, Aftonbladet, reported that about five minutes after leaving an airport north of Stockholm on the weekend, the driver of the choir’s tour bus suffered a heart attack while driving down the highway.

"The bus crashed into the railing on the left side of the roadway," the magazine quoted choir director Dr. Elroy Friesen as saying. "At first we thought maybe the driver had only taken his eyes off the road for a while. Then we saw how he fell down over the wheel."

The magazine said the bus swerved over to the other side around, hitting the guardrail on that side, before Friesen was able to grab the steering wheel and bring the vehicle to a stop. He called an emergency operator and said the bus driver was unconscious and not breathing, but he didn’t know their exact location. By that time, several of the choir members had managed to carry the bus driver outside and put him on the ground, where they began cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Another bus pulled up behind them, and that driver was able to explain to the operator where they were, the
magazine said. About five minutes later, an ambulance arrived and rushed the stricken driver to the hospital, where he was listed in critical condition.

"I'm surprised that no one was injured and that we did not collide with other cars," Friesen is quoted as saying.

The magazine said the shaken-up members of the choir were later able to resume their tour, and were scheduled to spend the next two days in Umea.

(Excerpt from Winnipeg Free Press article, May, 2011)

During the final writing stages of this dissertation, the above incident made national newspaper and television headlines in Sweden, complete with an animated dramatic reenactment of the event. Elroy was interviewed by the television media and was asked how the students were coping. Looking back over Elroy’s narratives, the answer he gave the interviewer encapsulated, for me, the sensibilities of his upbringing, the impact of his mentors, and reflected the influence of the musical self that he brings to his professional practice:

It was a terrible situation that happened to the driver. Some people have lost grandparents maybe, to heart attacks. To see it happen in front of them is difficult, but they’re very... we’re a community. So we get to sing together, we get to tour together, we're not by ourselves, and when we need to talk, we can talk.

Thus we are able to capture the essential qualities of Elroy’s complex synaptic sonic self.
Elroy’s confidence and musical prowess are held in high regard by his peers and students. The persona of “being that person that would go up there and do that stuff and play that piece” as Elroy described it, captivated us all and, at some point during the research process, each one of us contrasted our own achievements with Elroy’s training and musical successes. This gave credence to the questions raised in the postlude of chapter six surrounding our assumptions of “less than” music and musical experiences. Thus, two aspects of his storytelling made a particular impression: the revelation that he went against the grain of familial expectations to pursue music; and his emergent understandings of the non-musical experiences that shaped his educator self. Elroy was first in our discussions to set things off in a direction which Welch (2009) characterizes as “fostering a knowledge in music and not just about music” (p. 59, emphasis in original), involving formal and informal aspects which are both individual and social (p. 59). This broadened our discussions of what it is to be “musically educated” (Bowman, 2002; Welch, 2009) and encouraged exploration of the diverse relationships that had shaped us.

Because of the respect of Elroy’s musical talents and the very successful way he relates to singers in rehearsal, his stories of becoming which show moments of struggle held the power to really draw me in. I especially found resonance with his tales of taking risks and finding its rewards. This fuelled a reflection of the “hmmm, maybe I can do it” factor in my own life; a factor which, regardless of my own personal success, and in relation to Sonya’s sentiments, seems to be ever present. Elroy spoke not only of placing himself in situations where he felt in over his head, but embracing them. These included the first time he recruited and conducted a professional choir who “knew as much or more about choral singing” as he did, and the
intimidating situation of going back to school and conducting in front of his doctoral class for the first time. For me, this second narrative in particular struck a chord, and I relayed the story his narratives had triggered. It was a personal narrative about taking a choral conducting class with Agnes Grossmann who was filling in for a sabbatical at the University of Toronto when I was completing my Master of Music Education degree. The course was cross-listed for undergraduate and graduate students and so it was a mixed-bag of abilities. I assumed myself to be at the top of the heap, being fairly well-regarded in my home province. After the initial class, Agnes noticed that I conducted with my left hand and approached me. Then she told me that I would need to switch to the right hand. What?!? I respected her as conductor and master educator, and although I disagreed with the declaration and had many arguments ready to go, that was that, I would pick up a baton and switch hands. She gave me three weeks to prepare Schubert’s *Mass in G*. Holy crap:

So the first time I went up there I was terrified—definitely focused on psychological salvation as opposed to any musical success. The *Kyrie* is in three and there I was thinking to myself—after fifteen years of conducting, very successfully too—’down, out, up, down, out, up’ (I mimicked my movements and we all had a chuckle). Then Agnes asked me to begin on a specific bar, and the entrance began on beat two. For the life of me, I could not figure out how to throw the cue! I just couldn’t! And I teach this stuff! My brain wouldn’t cooperate with me, and here in the front row were some very dear undergrad girls and all three of them were looking at me with their eyebrows raised in that “it goes like this” manner, throwing the cue over and over and whispering things like “bounce one down,” and “like this, do this” and being very sweet about it. And then, after I finally got it, they were smiling at me encouragingly, like “good job, you did it!” I thought, ‘Oh my God, I look like a fool,’ and I wanted right then and there to go and print off my resume for everyone in the room to save face and win back some authority. I mean, there’s Lydia Adams at the back of the room and this is her first impression of me. AAAHHHH. And Agnes wouldn’t allow me to tell
them what was up because she didn’t want me to be apologetic, and I soooo wanted to make excuses. But after it was done she came up and put her arm around me and said in her wonderful Viennese accent, “this is the first time with ze right hand, yes?” and everyone let out a sort of gasp, slash “oh that’s what it is” sound. And the girls in the front row had a sort of “poor you” look on their faces.

But I kept at it, and Agnes gave us crazy stuff—Stravinsky and Orff—and met with me regularly, and kept at me for the perfection of every little detail, and you know, I did it; over three months I became completely ambidextrous with regard to my conducting. And that was the most humbling experience I've ever encountered. And it allowed me a rare opportunity to go back in time and understand where my students are at when they're just starting out and I'm too busy being ignorant and wondering why they can't get it, or why they can't hear something; it's because there's so much going on in their heads. I'm so much more understanding now as a conducting instructor. But what a tough thing to have to do: sacrifice myself on the altar of dignity for the sake of education. Now I recognize that it was worth it. And Agnes was incredible—that commitment to meeting with me—she did that with all of us, and she knew how to be supportive and yet really push me.

Making this narrative explicit helped me to realize a journey toward greater empathy with my students musical and music educational development. It also woke me up to another consideration: as I become more and more skilled and my experiences compound to produce what I believe to be a wiser educator, there is another side to the journey in that I become less understanding of what those formative learning experiences were like, that is, what it was really like to go through them. Thus, for me, this experience, and the recounting of the experience to my students at the onset of the conducting courses I teach (a practice of humility I have incorporated into my teaching much the same as Henry), aids me in being mindful of their processes of development; I become a more responsive and responsible educator. Wayne Bowman (2009) suggested a good philosopher is one who “shows me new ways of approaching, perceiving, experiencing, and understanding: who helps me achieve and refine my own
Can collaborative self-study help us to become our own philosophers, capable of challenging our own understandings and refining our wisdom? How can we ensure that we don’t lose sight of our earlier trials and tribulations in light of our growing knowledge and understandings?

Learning as a Researcher

During the research process, Elroy helped me to challenge my own understandings. Listening to his way of engaging in conversation during personal interviews as well as the focus group sessions was significant. Often in our conversations he brought up the “other side” of things with a “true, but what about,” or a “yes, but you’re forgetting about,” with a few “aren’t there other ways of looking at that?” thrown in for good measure. These actions had the effect of gently questioning a belief, or finding the positive aspect of voiced personal-doubt; an affirmative method of examination. This way of being impressed me and went to the heart of the kind of inquiry the process of collaborative self-study seeks to emulate. Such a natural method of supportive interrogation leads to all kinds of new narratives and new knowledge. One of Elroy’s statements involved his understanding of what we ought to do when we observe good things happening in others’ rehearsals or hear about what others’ do in pursuit of success with their own choirs: immediately incorporate these things into our own teaching. He stated that “that’s what a good educator does” after I insinuated in our third focus group session that some specific ideas of mine were being borrowed and incorporated by others without specific credit to me, and I wasn’t sure how I felt about that. His “offering the other side” method allowed me to interrogate the selfishness of my statement.
One of my concerns going into this research was whether the fact that Elroy and I were two educators from the same faculty would interfere or prejudice the research process. Certainly this was a real possibility, especially when qualitative music educators have to be concerned with being called out on “over-rapport” (Roberts, 1994-95). I am happy to report that my concerns were unfounded. What happened instead was a more collaborative and communicative effort on both our parts to connect the rehearsal atmosphere of his choirs and the classes which I teach; classes that involve many of his choir members. I began meeting and conversing with his graduate students, and we both heard tales from our students that we were relating and attempting to apply what we were learning from each other to both environments; it improved our entire program. This was an unexpected and quite immediate benefit. What can collaborative self-study contribute to a faculty of music educators? Can such a process encourage cross-class and cross-program communication?
CHAPTER EIGHT

DEREK

Such a long journey with many twists and turns.

(Derek Morphy, personal journal, opening line, 2009)

It’s 11:01 in the evening and I simply cannot write any more about my theoretical framework. I decide to switch gears and rummage through the large plastic bin which holds the various treasures representing so many special moments in the musical lives of my co-researchers. At the bottom of the bin sits a small cassette tape. Written on the bind in pencil in all caps is RYDAL and on the hard plastic cover I’ve placed a yellow sticky note with the label “Derek 1955.”

I wonder if that old small GE cassette player is still in my kitchen closet. I fish around in my miscellaneous electronics basket and sure enough, there it is. After plugging the modest machine into a power source, I insert the tape and press play. A moment or two passes, and then a scratchy sound, with what could best be described as a “bit of buzz” in the background, sneaks its way through the cushioned head phones and into my ears. A piano, which seems eerily far off in the distance, begins to play an introduction. I recognize the popular Handelian piece at once and wait in anticipation for the entry of Derek’s voice. And then….it can’t be…the crystal clear sound of a boy soprano emerges from the scratches, “Where e’er you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade. Trees where you sit shall crown into a shade…Trees where you sit shall crown into a shade.”
I simply can’t believe my ears! Is this really the adolescent version of the now rich, deep, refined, distinct voice of Derek Morphy, Manitoba’s “go-to” low bass? The attention to phrasing is pronounced, the tuning is impeccable, and the diction—oh, the diction! The incredibly crisp articulation throughout the piece and the British accent which infuses the text encourages a chuckle as it is still a hallmark of Derek’s singing. I listen on... The lower notes of his range have a rich, round quality to them, perhaps signifying the singer to come as the tone is seemingly already settled. To hear the unchanged voice of the now low bass is such an effervescent surprise that I am truly transported back in time; an ineffable experience for a researcher. I begin to imagine the impressive stature and distinguished historical presence of the grand old buildings on Derek’s school campus in North Wales standing firm, unspoiled by the changes that passing decades impose. I try to visualize the hall Derek stands in as he sings, its length and height enhancing the tone of his voice, sending echoes out into the corridors. I try to imagine the fourteen year old boy singing for his “Musical Master,” the former Cambridge Choral Scholar Derek was fortunate enough to study with at boarding school. I picture the fourteen year old boy in my mind’s eye, completely unaware of where his life will take him and the incredible experiences to come; the twists and turns. He has no idea.

In our focus group sessions and interviews throughout the research process, numerous recordings were brought in as artifacts and we spoke of our many memories surrounding these times in our musical pasts. We did not, however, listen to them together during our sessions. That experience rather, was left for me during late-night writing sessions. In listening and recalling the stories—the transcriptions of which I have now excitedly gathered up to review—I am reminded of the inadequacies of
representing a life history spoken of by Ardra Cole (2001): a description no matter how “thick” cannot do justice. Yet it does add a most exciting and curious auditory dimension to the narrative nature of my research, teasing out subtle nuances in Derek’s storytelling through moments sonically captured and subsequently frozen in time.

The tape continues, and after a valiant effort of another of Handel’s well known pieces—“I Know That My Redeemer Liveth”—“Where E’er You Walk” surfaces once more. It is different this time. I hear coughing and shuffling in the background suggesting an audience is present. Then the organ enters and a much more mature voice emerges from the texture of the fidgeting watchers-on. There is a slightly different quality to the voice at the onset. Is there a change approaching? There is a bit of quaking, the breath seems short, possibly hampered by a quickly beating heart. I think back to my own story of singing “Crackers” at the festival and the many more solo performances that followed, and wish I could offer a hand to shoulder to help calm the nerves of the teenager performing in front of others; an ordeal remembered all too well by so many musicians. Still, the rendition is of superior quality, suggestive of much knowledgeable training coupled with an innate talent.

Through this acoustic journey all of Derek’s early musical stories become more vividly imaginable. The experience of listening to the cassette breaks the surface of the imagination and carries itself upon sonic waves to the ear through the shaping of phrases and the detail given to the clarity of text. And so, one can picture the solo lessons, with their focus on the crispness of English diction, and the regular morning chapel sessions where Derek sang in the choir from the age of eight—an honour normally delayed until the age of ten or eleven—allowing him to realize that maybe he “had some ability there” since his “pals” told him that he sang well. Consequently, the
understanding of what it is to be steeped in the distinct English classical singing tradition becomes clearer to me now. Derek not only grew up in a family surrounded by music, he studied music at a high level very early on in his life. Consequently, the practices, principles, and values of the tradition are embedded in his musical self. Although he is now a Manitoban, he carries the values and attitudes of this distinct culture forward into his current professional understandings.

Traveling back in time, courtesy of an old cassette tape in an old cassette player, the inanimate object speaks and reveals through a strange phenomenon an earlier version of Derek’s musical self, his own soul-shard (Hofstadter, 2007); fragments of an earlier version of his soul transferable through their copying, imbued with tremendous triggering power. Like the soul shards of previous chapters—Mrs. Reimer’s markings in Elroy’s piano books, Henry’s beloved hymns, Sonya’s notes from students—both Derek and I are able to journey back, rediscover, and investigate lost moments of influence as revealed through many “snapshots in time” (Beattie, 2007) and the understandings attributed to these memories. And through such an investigation—mirabile dictu—meaning emerges.

Who Is Derek? How Do I Relate to Him as a Researcher?

Now “retired” from the public school system, Derek is recognized as a pioneer in the choral community in Manitoba, particularly in the Western part of the province in the city of Brandon, where he lived and taught for eighteen years. The irony is that he didn’t study to be a music teacher, he is actually a history teacher by trade. His journey to prominence in the Manitoba choral community is an interesting one; full of “twists and turns” to be sure. It follows a path
filled with professional solo and choral singing, the same path that saw him “drift into choral conducting” as he described it, after encountering unexpected success in starting up an extra-curricular choir at the high school he was teaching at. This success saw his choir twice receive the Mathieson trophy for choral excellence at the national level, and led to his appointment as Supervisor of Music in Brandon for a number of years.

After moving to Winnipeg, Derek taught for an additional seventeen years, rounding out a public school teaching career spanning thirty-seven years, two countries, and three cities. Derek reminded, however, “you don’t retire from music making.” This is evidenced in his current musical activities. He remains the conductor of Renaissance Voices, a semi-professional ensemble he formed which originally carried the mandate of early music performance, but has morphed over the years to explore a wide variety of repertoire (still highlighting English selections new and old; Derek’s specialty). Many of the ensemble’s members are long time community choral singers and quite a few are music teachers themselves. Derek also continues to adjudicate, workshop, serve on various committees, and conduct his church choir. Additionally, he is frequently called upon to step in and conduct and teach during sabbaticals and the like, and has been a faculty advisor of student teachers at the University of Manitoba for years, attesting to his respect in the choral community.

I recall the first time I officially met Derek Morphy. I had seen him at the Winnipeg Music Festival when I was in high school. His choirs were outstanding—impeccable—and I recall thinking “I’m gonna have a choir like that someday.” When I finally did have my own choir, I watched him adjudicate at Musicfest Canada when my women’s ensemble Vox performed early on in my career. He sat in front of me, but I didn’t speak to him, instead I sat there, knowing who he was, and finding that enough. Our paths crossed once more, this time as professionals at Tempo, Manitoba’s music education conference. We found ourselves sitting
beside each other taking in a presentation on tuning. He turned to me and, in his low, resonant speaking voice coloured with a distinct British accent, commented on my ability to sight-read. After this he let me know that if I ever moved into the city from the town I was teaching at during that time, that there may likely be a spot for me in his choir, Renaissance Voices. I was floored—honoured by the possibility of an invitation. That was to be my audition into the choir, and indeed I contacted him upon moving back to Winnipeg and was invited to join. I sang under his direction for a number of years.

Then came a time where we shared a different stage as professionals. We were both invited to guest conduct the Western Manitoba Youth Choir. It was a regional choir conference—one of four in Manitoba—which had actually been established by Derek and another respected conductor from Brandon to encourage both a choral experience for rural singers at the high school level, and a building of community through the arts. It was my first gig of that magnitude—two weekends of rehearsals and a five day tour—and I was quite nervous about working with such an experienced and well-known conductor twice my age with experiences behind him that I could only imagine. Derek was incredibly supportive and encouraging throughout the entire performance tour and rehearsal process, and we had quite a lot of fun together with chats over Stout and various cheeses his wife “didn’t normally allow him to have” at the ends of our rehearsal-filled days. But it was his remark at the end of the tour upon saying our farewells that impressed me; “Well Cath, I’ve learned a lot from you throughout this experience.” I was floored, honoured by a comment that acknowledged my developing skills as a choral educator. But the comment carried greater significance; it was a call to be humble for a young conductor who was on the verge of cockiness. I understood that it wasn’t the fact that I was in the company of such a respected educator that should be the focus, rather the importance of engaging in life long learning was the message; an exchange of pride for humility.
**From Soil to Sea: Derek’s Evolution of Self**

Just as the fertile soul-soil that, upon excavation, unearthed the musical roots of the previous co-researchers, flashbacks revealing key elements in Derek’s earliest years revealed the formation of his musical self. But his roots lay far from Manitoba’s soil…

Derek was born in a nursing home in 1941 on the seafront town of Morecambe in North Lancashire, England. In his tales, he painted the county as a picturesque area where you “look out across the bay and see the hills of the Lake District.” Hours spent watching classic British television mini-series on PBS most heartily confirm this for me. Born during the Second World War—in fact his earliest memory, though not musical, is of German bombers flying over his house—“things were pretty simple,” he told us. His home, quite small by Canadian standards, housed a small grand piano that took up a third of the family’s living room. The first tale of his musical prowess, a family story passed on by his mother, showed that his musical interests surfaced quite early on:

I’m told that when I was being baptized, in typical manner I was yelling my head off coming into the church, and my mother was frantic to quiet me. Then the organ started and I immediately stopped crying. She told me I perked up, which may have indicated something in my future.

Though Derek’s parents were not musicians by trade—his father owned a small garment business—his folks were very musical, and as such there was a lot of music making in the home gathered around the piano. Derek also remembered singing much in the car during little trips; images I too fondly remember of my childhood. Similar to Henry’s descriptions of growing up in the forties and fifties, mothers were most often at home with the children, and so Derek passed much of the time engaging in “delightful little tunes” with his sister and mother at the piano:

We did a lot of singing in the home and the two songs I remember were by H. Fraser-Simon to A. A. Milne’s words on Christopher Robin (he
sings a line for us), “Christopher Robin is saying his prayers.” The other one I remember that I really liked, was called “Buckingham Palace.” It had this sort of drum theme running throughout (he sings once more for us), “Brrrr-ump-bump, brrrr-ump-bump...They’re changing the guard at Buckingham Palace... Brrrr-ump-bump, brrrr-ump-bump...Christopher Robin went down with Alice... Brrrr-ump-bump, brrrr-ump-bump...Alice is marrying one of the guards...” I forget the rest of the words but we used to love to sing these beautiful little songs, my sister and I.

It is interesting to note that all co-researchers’ formative tales exposed not only memories of early song favourites, but a fascination with harmonies, and the discovery of the joys of singing with others; an initial excitement of the choral kind. During the first focus group session, Elroy was keen to know what Sonya’s and Henry’s first memories of harmony-making were. After my own tale of learning to sing harmony to my parents’ Simon and Garfunkel records in a desperate attempt to be able to sing in the right octave, a memory of Derek’s surfaced to contribute to our blend:

You’ve just triggered a memory now...I was seven and I had two older cousins—both girls—and we were at my grandmother’s that day and for some reason we were singing. I started singing the tune and they started singing harmony—they must’ve been three or four years older than me—and that’s the first time I remember furiously trying to make my ear adjust to having an harmonic experience, and it was quite interesting and very hard for me at that time. I’d totally forgotten about that until you began talking about it...

Music making in the home was complimented by a musically encouraging atmosphere at church with its beloved traditions:

Our church was fairly rich musically and one of the things I loved most was going carol singing every Christmas. You’d go around singing and the young folk would do it in harmony.
Derek spoke numerous times of the encouragement he received from his family, particularly from his mother, regarding music-making. He relayed that if one came from a musical family, making your own music together was “just something you did” in the days before television and the many external influences that compete with today’s artistic engagements. Not surprisingly, a “family script” (Borthwick & Davidson, 2002; Cleaver, 2009) once again emerges from Derek’s personal narratives whereby parents and extended family play a role in shaping one’s musical directions. He spoke of this influence in the first focus group session:

I come from a very musical family. Both my mom and dad were solo singers—Messiah solos, stuff in church—and three of my grandparents were choral singers. My mother’s voice had an uncanny similarity of sound to my daughter. My dad was a bass, my grandfather on my mom’s side was a bass, so I guess genetically it sort of worked out rather well for me (we all laugh). In fact, I remember now—I wasn’t impressed at the time—my grandfather used to sing very low notes hoping that I would be impressed. What triggers this is that I do it for my grandchildren and they’re not impressed at all!

In the above humorous account, it is curious to note that a deeper element of the “family script” emerges. From a sociological standpoint, investment in the development of musicianship can be viewed as a musical family identity (Cleaver, 2009) which is passed on through the act of music-making and values and beliefs attached to it. In Derek’s narratives, there is also a sense that musicianship is passed down the generations—both Derek and Elroy described their vocal classification and innate musical ability as “genetic”—which exposes a biological conceptualization of the phenomenon. Henry, on the other hand, described his understandings in a cultural light during his interview with Sonya, speaking of the transference of musicianship as a “birthright” in chapter five. The co-researchers’ multiple understandings concerning one’s musical lineage encourage consideration of Anderson’s (1997) concept of “the human being,” as
described in chapter three. Anderson prefers the concept of “the human being” over “the self,” a concept he views as limited in its discursive construction. He defines the human being as “all you are—biological and psychological, conscious and unconscious” (p. xv), and contends that such a conceptualization results in a deeper sense of becoming. Drawing upon Anderson’s insights allows us in turn to expand our understanding regarding the development of the musical self, infusing the idea of “the family script” with a broader consideration of the transference of a musical legacy. Consequently, we may look to our evolutionary heritage—described by Csikzentmihalyi (1993) as the genetic and cultural forces that have brought us to where we are today, both biological and social—in order to recognize the complexity of a musical self coloured both by genes and memes (Csikzentmihalyi, 1993), as illustrated in chapter three. This delivers a more robust sense of Derek’s perceptions surrounding his family script.

A Master of Music and His “Music Masters”

As is typical for many children in Britain, Derek left home at the tender age of eight for boarding school and was fortunate enough to continue to thrive in a prosperous musical environment which shaped his early attitude toward the act of singing:

I went away to school when I was eight and things went very well there musically. I had a very good “Music Master,” as they were called, and did a lot of singing both in choral situations and solo work. It was normal for all boys to sing with energy and enthusiasm—absolutely no stigma attached to singing...

At school, as in the home, music was simply “a way of life” expressed through daily choral-filled chapel attendance, as well as music festival participation. Additionally, early beliefs
characterizing participation in music as a “natural activity” alongside other interests, such as sports, surfaced numerous times in Derek’s narratives.

After a positive initial boarding school experience, Derek entered Senior School in North Wales at age thirteen. The institution boasted a firm concentration on religion and sports, culminating in what Derek humorously termed “a muscular Christianity.” Music had a very strong tradition at this school as well, and there was no great divide between sports and the arts; this was a “peculiar dichotomy” he was to encounter later in life after journeying to Canada. One influence in particular made an impact: his Music Master at Senior School, Percy Heywood.

Derek told of Percy’s effect on his personal musical development. Listening once more to the old recordings of his early performances, the personal attention Derek received is marked. His tales of their relationship are brought to life upon hearing Derek’s singing and through his descriptions of their times together:

He (Percy) used to come and stay with my family—one hundred and fifty miles from school—he’d come on school holidays and we’d prepare music and give a little recital. He really shepherded me through that. To have that kind of attention was incredible.

The formidable imprint of Percy Heywood stood in amusing contrast to another musical figure that was present at the school. Derek painted a vivid picture of her, bringing to life a character fit to grace the pages of a novel:

The piano lessons were quite interesting—I was never any good. The lady who gave them was a refugee from Germany originally. She was a good musician, but a strict task mistress: Frau Kuhnau. If you made any mistake at all she had a ruler and she’d wrap your knuckles with it, which wasn’t a great motivator, and so I never got very far with piano. I don’t blame her, just a natural inability (he chuckles).
Although the description of Frau Kuhnau illustrates the type of schooling that was often found acceptable in educational institutions at that time, the choral atmosphere at the school was described by Derek as a rich environment which provided opportunities rarely afforded today’s high school student:

The singing was remarkable. We did an oratorio every year with a local girls’ boarding school. So by the time I graduated from the Senior School I’d sung Messiah, Creation, Elijah—a lot of the biggies—and had solos in each. And every week it was a new anthem of the classics like Stanford and Parry.

The contribution of these incredibly rich musical experiences to the formation of Derek’s musical self cannot be underestimated. From a practical standpoint, such exposure gave Derek an understanding of major choral works at an early age and helped develop a musical confidence with regard to singing and performance, both choral and solo. Moreover, participation in the choral medium on such a regular basis contributed to a sense of belonging, as Derek described it, just as much a part of his life as his love of cricket and rugby, and just as lauded by the population of the school. The love of music from his childhood had found its rival in the music-making of his school years.

The real turning point in Derek’s musical life, however, was his audition for a prestigious spot amongst forty-six hopefuls for one of two available choral scholar positions at Cambridge University:

When I went to the Senior School it was a very musically rich environment. My music teacher, who was a former King’s College Cambridge Choral Scholar, thought that I might have a chance to do the same as he did, and coached me for the “choral trials”—curious word—and I’ve written a lot about that in my journals actually, because it was an amazing event that part of a week, going through that.
“Standing trial,” as it were, sent Derek’s life in an unforeseen direction; a remarkable turn of events.

“**It Really Changed My Life**: The Shift of a Self-View

“It is a rarefied atmosphere, Cambridge.” The description came from Bob Chilcott, a founding member of the King’s Singers and now noted choral composer and conductor. He was giving a talk at the Phenomenon of Singing conference in St. John’s, Newfoundland in 2011. The stories of his experiences at Cambridge and the influence of the cultural and religious tradition of English song and singing held the attention of an appreciative audience. We all chuckled as he described Kings College Chapel; the “glorious structure” whose acoustics, Sir David Willcocks apparently claimed, “could make a fart sound like a seven-part Amen.” Immediately I recalled Derek’s own story of the choral scholar trials at the prestigious institution:

The audition was being run by David Willcocks—you may have heard of him (we all laugh at his reference); he was at Kings College at the time. It was nerve-wracking and my stomach was churning. I didn’t think I had any hope at all of getting this, but I’d been fairly well prepared by my singing teacher at school. Cambridge was this wonderful place you’d heard about and everybody *raved* about, especially in terms of musical tradition. So we went to this room at Kings College, and sitting around the walls were all these eminent looking people, very stiff and formal, and utterly intimidating, and that’s where we had the ear training tests and the initial things just to see if you had a voice. Those went fairly well. Then it came to the sight reading and it was...Brahms Requiem! ‘Oh, this is great, I *know* it!!’ (he whispered this thoughts to us). But like a fool—just goes to show how naïve I was—I said, “I’m sorry Sir, I know this.”

“Oh, very good, how is that?” (he imitates Willcocks’ upper class accent).

“Well, we’ve sung it at school.”

“You’ve sung it at school have you? Well...sing it anyway!”

And that was it. They didn’t give me anything else to sing—they obviously hadn’t any plan B (we all laugh). I was just so lucky, so lucky...when I think about that. It’s amazing the luck that you get.
We all listened intently as Derek described the events and marveled at the opportunity provided the seventeen year-old. None of us had even been in such prestigious company. The “trials” took place over several days, and after the initial tests, Derek still had a solo to perform and a “defining moment” to come:

I was singing “Quia fecit mihi magna” from the Bach *Magnificat*. Willcocks was running the whole thing, standing in front of us. But three miles away at the other end of King’s College Chapel, at a very high place, there’s an organ, and Simon Preston—you’ve probably heard of him too—started playing the accompaniment. But Preston started too slowly and I thought ‘Oh my God, I’m not going to be able to sing this, I can’t carry all those phrases at this tempo.’ So I looked at Willcocks and caught his eye with my panicked face, and sort of gave a little gesture and started to conduct the tempo I wanted. It was just instinctive—I wasn’t being clever, it was out of sheer fear that I wouldn’t make it through those phrases—and he yelled out, “Simon!”

“Yes?” the call came back from way across the chapel.

“Too slow!”

And immediately the tempo became more manageable and the performance went quite well. Fortunately there’s quite a long introduction to that (he chuckles), so by the time they’d communicated over the distance, things were okay.

Derek congratulated himself on a successful sing and waited for the outcome, still somewhat unconvinced of his capabilities (though one might guess they held considerably more signals of musical giftedness than fart-like qualities):

Word came that they needed a baritone at Kings and a bass at St. John’s and I got the bass position at St. John’s. It just changed my life musically, because you were saying earlier, just wondering all along if you had it, or if you could do it, if you had that ability…I sort of knew it, but that just cemented it—‘hey, I guess I’m quite good after all.’

Derek described the incident as “perhaps the defining moment of my musical life when Preston’s tempo was too slow.” I wondered on this. Why exactly was it “defining”? Were there
elements to the narrative that illuminated not only a turn of events that sent him in a direction of
a more musically filled life, but something deeper, more telling? Searching the details of the
narrative and listening once more “for a story rather than to a story” (Cole & Knowles, 2001, p. 120), it becomes clear that not only did this incident set Derek’s life on a musical track at a
prestigious school that otherwise would have been out of reach—a track that was to provide
invaluable musical experiences—it showed him that “he could do it,” and in the process cemented the confidence needed to pursue music as an integral part of his life. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly to his future (and the conductor self yet to come), it displayed a
particular personality trait: when the circumstance arose, Derek was capable of taking charge; his “instinctive” musical understandings came to the fore. This combination of innate musical instinct and the training he received, which was looked upon as more a way of life than any grand vocational destination, allowed him to rise to the occasion. Thus we see a shifting of his
“self-view” which Ferguson (2009), borrowing from Swann and Schroeder (1995), describes as encompassing “beliefs and feelings a person holds about (themselves), including identity, the part of self that tends to be defined by society” (p. 89). The unsure personal reflections, described as “just wondering all along if you have it,” received confirmation by the highest choral authority possible, and the self which is constructed both through interactions with others and through such reflections (Bruner, 1990) experienced a shift in its sense of what it was to be a choral musician. This initial shift, at the ripe old age of seventeen, was to contribute significantly to Derek’s general belief system in his teaching career. Additionally, it opened a world of musical experiences that contributed to the evolution of his musical self, as well as the development of his future praxis—characterized by Bowman (2002) as “experiential resourcefulness” (p. 69)—in a most profound manner.
A Self Graft in Practice

As we have seen, Percy Heywood’s influence loomed large in Derek’s journey to Cambridge. Skretta’s (2000) description of the contribution of mentors is fitting here: “the most important thing mentors have done is to measure me against my own ideas…modeling different, varied versions of who I might wish to become” (p. 130). Heywood would offer one last bit of advice:

“Don’t study music,” he told me, “it may interfere with your love of music.” He studied English. I’ve never forgotten that. It never occurred to me that music would be a life choice—just an integral part of life.

The advice from Percy Heywood stuck with Derek and he began a history degree at Cambridge. He chose to pursue education only toward the completion of this degree, at which time he entered the University of Exeter to obtain his “certificate of education.” Percy’s brand of “shoulder tapping” is curious when set in contrast with the shoulder tappers of Henry’s stories and the quiet support of Mr. Duncanson in Sonya’s endeavours. Such a philosophy as Percy’s had a strong influence in the development of Derek’s attitude concerning “music as an integral part of life.” Although Percy had himself obviously moved toward a career which involved instructing music, there was no push for this to become Derek’s focus. In fact, Derek recalled the music students at Cambridge, dripping in assignments, absorbed in the minute details hidden in the grand histories of musical eras, wrapped in the analyses of the theoretical workings of this composer and that. Perhaps, as a result, throughout his discussions with Elroy during their interviewing of each other in the first focus group session, Derek confessed, “choral conducting never even crossed my mind, truthfully.” The experiences at Cambridge, however, made an overwhelming contribution to his future self.

Derek was able to articulate the meaning derived from being immersed in such an incredible musical environment just as Henry was able to articulate the musical “way of
knowing” gleaned from immersion in congregational singing. Derek noted in his journal, “being part of the Cambridge scene really shaped my musical approaches and skills,” and during our first personal interview, he expanded on the profound impact of such an atmosphere:

Cambridge was such an amazing experience; lots of rich things happening. I sang in the madrigal society under Raymond Leppard, who later became conductor of the English Chamber Orchestra, and I also sang with the Cambridge Opera Group. But it was that every day routine of singing that really stood out. Every day we gathered at five-thirty for about thirty-five minutes to prepare a new anthem, new psalm setting, Magnificat, new Nunc Dimittis, and if you’re lucky, you look ahead to a tough anthem for the weekend; but there were no extra rehearsals. We would then dash across the road to the pub, put down a half pint of bitter, come back across the road, and sing the service at six-thirty. Singing every day—six days out of seven and twice on Sundays!—it just took you so much further musically than I’d ever been.

The routines of Cambridge not only influenced his musical skills, they molded his knowledge surrounding the expectations of the rehearsal process:

You were expected to be thoroughly prepared even to the point of singing a solo at a moment’s notice, and if you didn’t sing it perfectly you risked receiving the glance of the conductor.

Additionally, the Cambridge experience strongly shaped his understanding of choral repertoire—specifically British repertoire—and how it ought to be performed. Derek elaborated in his journal:

*Raymond Leppard’s direction of literature of the sixteenth, seventeenth centuries together with the enormous amount of works by Tudor composers like Byrd, Tallis, Tomkins, Weelkes, and Gibbons had a profound influence on me. This literature is very difficult to perform without the right lilt and metrical approach.*

In chapter seven I spoke of Elroy’s development of a “personal style” discovered through musical engagement (Cumming, 2000). Cumming asks, “does the self form the sound, or the sound the self?” She is interested in whether features of musical execution shape our emotional
life. For Cumming, realizing emotion and personality as a quality of sound, performance process and musical training become a means of self-formation. Much of Elroy’s understandings regarding the shaping of music were born of his training with Mrs. Reimer. Derek’s began with singing in school and reached the apex at Cambridge:

So by the time I left Cambridge the style of music was so engrained, and it’s still there, but it’s been pounded into you. That’s a very key element, style. You can teach it but it’s graft in practice, and constant exposure to it impresses you. Actually, we’d make up Tudor anthems because it was so engrained how you’d respond to a particular phrase, and I think back on the shaping and it’s priceless.

Derek recognized how much a part of him the execution of a particular style of music had become. The influence of a specific cultural tradition shaped his beliefs through daily musical activities. Here, I call upon Cumming’s (2000) definition of beliefs as referring to “relatively stable but informal views, held by an individual or social group, of how some aspect of experience is, or ought to be, organized” (p. 12). We see how Derek’s beliefs surrounding choral participation, the manner of this participation, and the values and behaviours attached to the act of choral singing have been influenced. Furthermore, we see how he appreciates this as a beneficial and positive experience. We cannot neglect, however, the understandings surrounding musical performance that is, as Derek pointed out, “pounded into you.” One must note that within the Cambridge choral culture, participation is restricted to those with superior talent and ability; they must pass the trials for admittance. There is an expectation that the singer comes to rehearsal prepared, and the pace of learning is swift and unrelenting; the choral atmosphere is elite and the rules of participation are straightforward and born of tradition. Thus, Derek’s personal style is at once personal and collective, both individual and a product of socialization.
Journey to the “New Sound World”

After Cambridge, Derek had no expectations for a future teaching or conducting choral music. A little experience, however—much in the flavour of those whose stories have come before his in this document—provided a brief encounter on the conducting podium:

At Exeter, traditionally teachers in the Faculty of Education put on a Christmas concert. We looked around and asked “who’s gonna do this?” The previous year an ex-St. John’s scholar had done it, so they said to me, “you do it.” I’d never conducted in my life, and we did Buxtehude and Britten; fairly complicated stuff for one who’s never conducted. I just sort of waved my arms around and they responded at relatively the right time (we all laugh) and it seemed to work. Then I taught history for four years and didn’t conduct or even think about conducting again.

After receiving his certificate in education, Derek taught history in the “Black Country,” so-called for its location amongst the soot and grime in the heavily industrial Birmingham area. He continued singing lessons during this time and got quite a few gigs as a soloist. Then, “for a whole variety of reasons,” came the decision to immigrate to Canada. He admitted that he was actually quite reluctant to leave because things were going so well, but the decision to move to the modest metropolis of Brandon, Manitoba stood; a new life began. Derek described the culture shock as “quite severe,” and although he greatly appreciated the introduction of new singing experiences, particularly the German Mennonite traditions, the new atmosphere where singing was not a valued part of daily school life took some getting used to. This lack of choral singing in the schools led to another turn of events for the history teacher. It was a beginning that stood in contrast with the trials at Cambridge:

I went to the principal and said, “there doesn’t seem to be a choir here, do you mind if I try to start one?” He agreed and I recruited a choir—all girls at that time since the boys “didn’t sing”—and we did Britten’s Ceremony of Carols. It went surprisingly well. I was surprised that it worked!
And so, inspired by his own positive school choir experiences, Derek found himself in a situation where his prior knowledge served him well to an extent, but he felt he had thrown himself into a new musical world, a world for which he lacked the specific conducting training familiar to others:

It was a very steep learning curve. I’d never, ever taken any conducting, nothing at all, no training whatsoever! It was from watching others that I learned, purely from observation and just feeling the music.

Regardless of the challenges he faced, word got out of the quality of Derek’s choirs and the music teacher who “drifted into conducting” was invited to take the post of music supervisor in his school district. His success was recognized from a student perspective as well. This, in particular, inspired him to continue:

It started as a treble chorus and then finally guys got into the choir in the seventies. Students would leave and come back and tell me what the experience meant to them. In fact, many who went on to become successful musicians in their own right told me how valuable their time had been with me.

Yet concerns regarding his lack of formal conducting training were ever present:

I was really up against a brick wall when the conductor at Brandon University came ill and I was asked to fill in for him. That was really tough because we did major works. I knew the works intimately, Elijah and the sort, I understood the energy and the spirit, but the technique? So it was a very slow learning process...

Still, he found opportunities for professional development and his musical self-view (Ferguson, 2009) continued to shift:

For years and years I always said, “I’m a singer.” That’s what identified my musical persona. Luckily, the Manitoba Music Educators Association brought in high profile people each year to present. Watching and
listening to how they conducted and rehearsed was huge. Suddenly, I was more interested in following a conductor than singing. Every year, and every experience fed my knowledge, and I kept moving forward.

Samaras et al. (2004) suggested that the first use for personal history self-study is the exploration of “self-knowing and forming—and reforming—a professional identity” (p. 905). Derek’s narratives exposed recurring motifs surrounding the construction of his professional identity. Moreover, his stories shed light on his journey of coming to terms with a morphing conceptualization of his self as history teacher, as singer, and finally, the gradual acceptance of his self as choral music educator. Prescesky (1997), in reference to preservice teachers’ journey into the teaching profession, suggests our struggle to take on a new professional identity can undermine one’s confidence and shake our sense of personal worth. As we have seen throughout the narratives of the various co-researchers, this assertion is not limited to preservice teachers; it can encompass the identity shifts we experience during our professions. Derek is no exception.

The evaluation of his personal abilities concerning conducting produced feelings of inadequacy, and presented a deterrent to higher aspirations:

I realized my shortcomings and my limitations. I realized I don’t think this is a long term thing for me. There was a nun who I think was a bit upset that she hadn’t been asked to take over and so she came up and criticized me after every rehearsal. Certainly I didn’t have the conducting technique, but I knew the music, I knew the style, and I felt I had a lot to offer in that respect. But I never took a conducting course, just picked up things along the way—fermatas, preparation gestures, things of that sort—and so there are shortcomings that prevent me from moving on, and as a result I would never dream of contemplating going beyond where I am right now. But I do know I had a very successful school career.

Brenneman (2007) reminds that in studying our experiences we may investigate the processes through which our personalities are developed and formed. For all of us participating
in this study, dealing with “those inadequacies you feel” as Henry put it, and seeking validation for our musical ventures, have represented significant points of negotiation in the development of our musical selves. For Derek, validation in his choral conducting abilities truly blossomed after winning the Mathieson trophy in 1982, a feat that would be repeated the following year (!) The Mathieson trophy, a prestigious national honour, had an effect on Derek’s confidence similar to Sonya’s recommendation to Musicfest Canada. Her confessions of feeling that she needed outside approval and success to “finally feel like a conductor” are echoed in Derek’s sentiments.

When we won the Mathieson trophy I had a really outstanding group that clicked, and it was a turning point because I began to think ‘hmmmm, maybe I can do this now.’ I could consider myself a bit more of a formal conductor. I was looking at adjudicator sheets and I saw that things were good, but it was instinctive rather than schooled. And so in the 80’s I came to grips with thinking I might be okay at this conducting thing.

Henry interjected, teasing: Everybody else already knew it.

I wondered on our conversations in the focus group sessions concerning the value and validation formal schooling seemed to afford; techne always seemed to win out over praxis (Bowman, 2002). Thus, I returned to the topic of what was considered “adequate training” and the feelings attached to such training, or lack there of, during our second personal interview. I was puzzled that Derek’s Cambridge experiences and his musical upbringing didn’t seem to be enough—he was a Cambridge choral scholar for gosh sakes!—and I pointed out to him, in our private interview, that he had just completed a sabbatical at the university level for a respected conductor.

Ya, I guess I’ve learned that what I do is adequate or semi-adequate for the job, and I think I have the musical sensibilities to create a musical experience that is successful. My musical background has trained me to understand the multiple subtleties that you need to inject into a musical performance. But always sort of niggling in the background is the, you know, sort of ‘I needed some more training to be able to communicate better’ thoughts.
Still, I’m very sensitive—I try not to be defensive—but I’m very sensitive to things when it’s going wrong or not quite working and not having the wherewithal to set it right.

Derek’s sentiments hearkened back to a conversation between Henry and Sonya. Sonya had identified with Derek’s stories. She had elaborated on her feelings of entering conducting “through the back roads” and struggling to “feel like a real conductor.” Henry had expressed similar doubts:

_I was forty years old. I was Elroy’s age. But I didn’t have the training that Elroy had—that confidence building thing and a pocketful of excellent teaching behind me. And so I felt I was always running back a block to catch up, to pick up papers and bits and little pieces, and to try to piece something together so that I could get through..._

And yet, through our discussions Derek recognized contrasting perceptions similar to Elroy’s understandings; “there’s so much more about being a conductor than just the musical skills.”

_You hear all sorts of choirs conducted by people with all the right bits of paper, but they don’t have the soul to give the shape, and the nurturing, and attention to the text and how it’s brought out by the sweep of the music and the rhythmic properties of the music. For them it’s a school thing, not an instinctive thing, and they’re not good conductors. I think I’m a good teacher. I know how to relate to teenagers and I think that helps—a balance of joking around and getting a lot of good work done. I think I have very good communication skills in front of a choir and we get an incredible amount done in a short time._

It becomes apparent that, like Elroy, Derek’s understanding of music-making encompasses more than the intellectual side of musical skills. Qualities of communication and what it means to be a teacher are of equal import. Not only are these skills viewed as needing “soul” in order to achieve effective delivery, musical style itself involves a kind of participation in choral singing that excites the individual to engage with the audience; attention to musical qualities is synonymous with active, individual participation as part of a collective whole:
I once heard a talk on choral styles which was very interesting. The ideal style seemed to be where the choir envelops itself and it’s all about blend and balance so you don’t get individual voices standing out—in fact that’s very undesirable—so it’s subjugating your ego in the collective whole.

The tradition that I was aware of, and had always been encouraged to sing in, was to sing with great energy and always be very up front, especially with the enunciation of the text. George Guest at St. John’s would always, always say, “spit the words out, boy!” I find conducting choirs, even now, that’s a real problem; singing out and really reaching the audience or the congregation.

I was shocked when I went back to Cambridge ten years ago to a concert and these guys had their scores way up here in front of their faces; I mean they were buried! There was absolutely no intent or attempt to communicate with the audience, and the audience was totally irrelevant. It was all about enveloping yourself in a musical experience—the conductor was waving his arms around in a general sort of way—but they were all in a little cocoon and we were invited to look in on it; there was no connection which was so different from what I’d done.

The Cambridge experience of Derek’s promoted a specific kind of music-making which made its mark on his “personal style,” and for Derek, this personal style was connected to a way of being in the world, larger than simply musical performance; it was about connecting with others making the music and those listening in. His understandings surrounding choral music performance highlight a relationship between what Cumming (2000) terms the inward and outward faces of musical identity. Emotion and personality are realized as qualities of sound which have contributed to the formation of his musical self and the musical values Derek holds dear. More specifically, the “outward face” of Derek’s musical identity is characterized as “a pattern of actions” relayed through performance. This outward face of identity, however, is always connected to an inner self described by Cumming as “what it is to be me” (p. 11). Becoming aware of our outward face allows one to realize the ideologies which govern our actions, promoting critical awareness and greater understanding of our inner self. We are then able to enter into “new sound worlds” (p. 11) and understand our abilities to explore new musical
experiences. It is curious to note that in all our narratives, our ideas of not being trained—that is acquiring a specific skill set that is assumed to be valued in our profession—left us feeling like outsiders or imposters approaching various aspects of our discipline “through the back roads,” no matter how rich our previous musical experiences and successes. We viewed the idea of not being “trained” as not being “properly” socialized into a particular aspect of musical culture. Bernard (2005) revealed the centrality of music-making in our professional identities, highlighting the importance of recognizing and celebrating one’s personal biography. Self-study can help us bring our own biographies to the forefront of the understandings we have regarding our professional practice, allowing us to examine repressive ideologies and reminding us, as Henry realized in chapter five, that what we bring to the table is “pretty significant.”

**Synergy out of Struggle**

Danielewicz (2001) describes how repeating and reliving her narratives continues to change her (p.2). In reliving these narratives we are able to bring to the surface questions which aid us in articulating our thoughts on various issues in our professional practice. During their interview time together, Derek and Elroy explored numerous aspects of their musical life histories. Like Elroy, Derek pondered where his non-musical conducting skills came from: “Where did I get that ability, that energy, that communicative stuff that makes things happen?” Elroy posited that he had reached a point where he was comfortable enough to express himself freely. They spoke of taking opportunities and making opportunities, of receiving support and approval from colleagues, and the importance of taking risks midst feelings of uncertainty. Through this Derek recognized the substance of collaborative inquiry:

> It was very interesting to hear the self-doubt that people have about themselves, discover that what they have works, and works very effectively.
One particular area of exploration included discussions involving contradictory thoughts that accompanied success and its connection to our apparent need for the outside validation of our abilities. Derek spoke of the tensions he felt surrounding festival participation:

Derek: I think on the Mathieson and being at the festival with my choirs and how it relates to extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. How important is it to have those things on the mantle? I’m so conflicted about it. I adjudicate a lot of festivals, and if it’s competitive I try to subvert it as much as possible. I’m very competitive personally, and winning is a pleasant feeling, but I always found when I went home after that event that I felt so hollow and empty and not at all “ya, we won over them!” And this is telling, the year we won the Earl Grey and the Lieutenant Governor’s award for best choir at the festival, I said “okay, now’s the time, I’m not going to enter competitively anymore.” That’s an awful thing to admit, “okay, I’ve achieved what I wanted so I’ll get out of the field.”

Elroy: But look at the Mathieson and the recommendation to Musicfest for Sonya. Some of these are markers that say “you can do this” and without that, others may not have benefited from you going on. Those markers are important.

Elroy makes an excellent point, highlighting how these kinds of traditions in the choral discipline can spur us on, and yet, on a personal level, I understand Derek’s struggles. I investigated similar conflicting feelings in my initial self-study in the introduction of this dissertation. Nonetheless, as Bruner (2002) contended, we live and grow by being in dilemmas. Throughout Derek’s journey of self-formation, understandings and values formed early on in his musical life provided consistent balance to the tensions which surfaced in his professional career. Pondering the choral traditions in which Derek was raised, his personal ideals, and his attitudes toward preparation and competition, I asked him, “are you always driven to excellence in performance?” His answer was revealing:

That’s an interesting question; it’s such a complex thing. Yes, you want to have wonderful, fine, vibrant, authentic performance of a given piece of music and I believe that’s important. But an equally important aspect I think is the *group synergy* in making music. That is what gives me the
most satisfaction, and if it results in a superb performance, well that’s
great too, but it’s the social bonding that choir represents that’s key for
me. It’s a very gratifying thing in conducting, contributing to that
synergy.

Derek’s reply exposes a core value inherent in his conception of music-making. He further
articulated his commitment to ensuring such a focus in choral singing:

Those regional youth choirs that we put together, it was so many nights
on the phone and the blood, sweat, and tears of organizing something
like that, but we were amazed at the energy that came into the camp—
the wow! It’s very important in the rural communities; there’s that
collective energy that happens and it makes the work worth it.

Speaking of his current ensemble, Renaissance Voices, Derek connected elements of his
professional practice to his musical life history when speaking on what he feels is the attraction
for those who continue to come out and support the choir at concerts:

The energy and commitment to process has been satisfying to an
audience. People come back, not necessarily in terms of musical
precision, but for the atmosphere; the sincerity with which they sing
creates something genuine. I think it goes back to what music has
always been for me, whether it was playing piano and singing with my
mom in the living room and her encouraging me in my feeling good doing
that when I was just a little boy singing those little songs, or going to
school at eight and choir being really important and all the boys loving to
sing. It was having those great experiences, and you know, even going on
the bus to rugby games, we’d sing all the way, hymns, pub songs, and
the like; it was a singing tradition and it was valued whether you were in
the choir or not.

Finally, one narrative in particular summarized Derek’s attitude toward the “it” of the
choral experience, and articulated his understanding of its true worth when measured against
tangible accomplishments:

One moment I’ll never forget, we were touring around in the late
seventies and we were staying overnight in Winnipeg Beach, and there
were seven or eight of us that had wandered down the beach and sat on the rocks and looked over the lake, and it was so beautiful; the sun was behind us shining onto the water.

The people involved have reminded me that that was just a beautiful moment and it’s nothing to do with music in some ways, but again, I come back to the word synergy. Here we were—we’d been experiencing music together—and here we were just sitting on the rocks, nattering away…and I joked that CBC should come out to film this because this is the life. And that’s over thirty years ago. So again, it’s not really a musical moment but it epitomized to me what involvement in making music has been, it’s the community; it’s vitally important. I can look to the awards and these other things (he refers to recordings of note) but that has given me the most satisfaction.

Clandinin and Connelly (1995) remind that we bring our history into every moment of acting and being. Derek has been a preservice teacher advisor for many years now. Both in discussions with Elroy, who also advises, and in personal interviews, he spoke of his personal belief in the importance of empowering new music teachers and choral conductors. He described the significance of giving them “a chance to develop and evolve a language of communication while maintaining their presence and their reputation.” Specifically, one of his goals, he told me, is to help them “develop a way of conversing and understanding their students,” that is, to help them create synergy as they enter their own professional practice. Such a personal belief has developed from Derek’s own understanding of his education and subsequent teaching career. Britzman (1991) describes learning to teach as a process of becoming. Even in “retirement” Derek’s process of becoming continues, and this process is one he shares with future educators in his care.
Derek’s Compost Pile

I return once more to the theme of self-doubt and the constant negotiation of our “outward selves” and “inner selves” to illustrate what I feel is a “utopian moment” in self-study for Derek; the point where “the self is invited to be more than, or better than, itself” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004, p. 340). I believe this moment can be reached not only through reflection on specific narratives, but also through the questioning of our practice that collaborative self-study incites. Reflecting on a conducting seminar with Jon Washburn, conductor of the Vancouver Chamber Choir, Derek explored tensions in his professional practice once more in our final personal interview, and I joined him in critical discussion:

Derek: He asked me to do something, which was conduct the choir and to talk about everything I was thinking of doing as I was doing it, and I thought ‘oh God, I can’t do that, it’ll be ridiculous.’ But I did it, and it was brilliant and the choir just stood up and applauded me at the end and I thought ‘well you know, maybe I have got it after all.’ You know it’s just this self-doubt all along—you know ‘Can you do it?’ Even conducting the university chorus this year; all throughout the year they sang better and better with a more unified sound and better tone and all the things you work on. But even then there’s this ‘oh, did I pick the right repertoire, am I working at the right level with these people?’ And yet, in the end they were very good and I had a lot of very positive feedback from Henry and some of the other prominent names around, and again it’s ‘okay I can do it so I guess I’ll do the next’...I tend to be self-deprecating when I make comments about what the choir is doing and I tend to downplay the successes.

Cath: Here’s all the reasons it won’t be perfect (I interjected, reflecting on my tendency toward the exact same actions).

Derek: That’s right. And one of the girls with great wisdom approached me during the tour this year and said, “do you have a moment? You know, just celebrate what is and don’t make excuses or downplay what we’re doing, just be positive.” And I thought, ‘ya you know, she’s right,’ it’s sort of a fail-safe way of dealing with things, and I do it all the time.

Cath: I do it all the time too. People used to ask me “why don’t you have recordings for sale?” and the answer in my head was, ‘it won’t be perfect and I can’t stand to have that recording and not be able to make it better and think about being judged on it when I can’t make excuses.’ And then I started to realize it’s not about me. Shamefully, that came a little later.
Derek: I have downstairs a drawer full of high school stuff (recordings) always with the thought that I might do a compilation—a huge drawer full—it makes me wonder, ‘what image do I project?’; and it’s selfish and very self-centred...But then I remind myself that success is measured by how much you can inspire an ensemble to be part of a transformative experience.

At the onset of this research I wondered if we as choral music educators had the courage to “go there” (p. 7). This question grew out of Loughran’s (2004) challenge regarding self-study research: “do teachers of teachers have the courage to think aloud as they themselves wrestle with troubling dilemmas?” (p. 154). The narratives of each participant have proven this to be possible and have shown how much we can learn from our students in our journeys of professional practice. Derek sums up the experience in a most poignant fashion:

You’re revealing things now that have been very...deep-seated, I guess. You’re bringing up things about my whole approach. It’s really quite interesting going through this whole process because often you don’t think very profoundly about what you’re doing. Now I’m forced to dig deeper and pull up this mud and look at it (he laughs heartily). Actually I like doing it because I’m at that point in my career and life, and it’s like building compost, and you get it in your hands and you’ve got all the dirt (he holds out his hands and pauses for reflection)...I love my compost pile.
CHAPTER EIGHT POSTLUDE

So many aspects of Derek’s life history impacted my thinking. The values he held dear, such as the importance of group synergy and the underlying collectiveness of choral performance, are wonderful teaching moments revealed through narrative. In contrast, those personal feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt as a conductor, issues which were questioned in the postlude of chapter six, made a particular impression. The eternal negotiation of achievement and competition, of “extrinsic and intrinsic motivation,” as Derek put it, are worth a second glance. The choice to move away from the competitive atmosphere and questioning whether that was a decision made because, as a conductor, “what needed to be achieved was done,” I recalled that after winning the same trophies, I made the identical declaration to myself (!). Reflecting on this led me to ask numerous questions which bore relation to questions that surfaced after examining the decision to create elite choirs in my programs: Is it about me the conductor, or the collective me as part of the choir? How does what we personally value in choral music fit or interact with expectations placed on us by the discipline and what others suggest should be valued? How important is winning and who really wins when we bring home the 1st place prize?

I have long focused on the non-competitive element in festival participation after my early career “need to be recognized” was fulfilled. In fact, the motive behind my decision to begin touring followed the same kind of philosophy, “we’ll just go overseas, drop our bags, and sing.” In my travels adjudicating and giving workshops I have encountered many instances where other conductors spoke of the competitions they have participated in. I’ve sat on the sidelines while others went on about whether they would go here or there this year and spoke of their winnings in this competition and that. My choirs had gone here and there just to sing, and
they sang to great praise, but my attitude has resulted in a biography that is not filled with listings of particular awards or trophies. Rather, the accomplishments that I value include being asked to guest conduct, or being invited back to do a workshop or clinic. I value finding ways to network with other conductors and just seeing kids sing. I’ve attempted to focus on the quality of the work done by the choir rather than the quantity of particular recognitions. This has been a choice and often a difficult one at that; a choice I am conflicted about just as much as Derek, since it is not an easy task to leave your judgments behind. But then I go back to those times where, like Derek’s story of the walk on the beach, the group synergy has made me recognize what’s important. The following story drives this point home.

* * * * *

I’ve set the computer so that the pictures fade in and out on my screen, allowing me to travel back in time as a moment of respite during the laborious task of writing. The images are full of smiles as groups of singers chat during walks down the cobblestone streets. There are snapshots of the sampling of new cuisine and look, the discovery of that perfect shopping find. Then one particular moment in time emerges. It is of the choir standing in a circle in the centre of a church. I remember it well.

It was our second time going to Holland. The last time round we performed to screaming crowds that were so appreciative of our musical offerings the young high school students in the choir left completely elated; on a supreme musical high. I had announced to the choir that this would be my last year; I was going back to school. We had discussed taking a trip, but it had been left and left. Finally, in November they asked if we could go to Holland since I’d raved about it time and again, and a few of the choristers had actually gone on the first trip. So I scrambled to put something together. I called my dear friend from Utrecht and she organized a few concerts, but there was no sense of urgency that the trip be all about performing, we’d just sing in churches, at the train station, in the streets, wherever it struck our fancy. This approach had been much appreciated the first time around by those passers by who had stopped for some entertainment. Still, I recognized
that members of the choir desired formal performance experiences and we had a lot of repertoire that had been dutifully prepared. My one wish was to recreate the final performance which had been so rewarding the first time through. We’d perform at the same school in the evening for new friends that the students had billeted with, and I was confident it would be the highlight it had been last time round, both musically and communally. That anticipated experience became the focus of the tour.

As the trip approached, I kept receiving word that performances were difficult to organize because of the timing of our trip this go around. Concert after concert was falling through. I relayed this to the students and they weren’t terribly concerned as long as the big final concert was going to be okay. So we went forward.

After touching down on the Dutch soil reclaimed from the sea, we had days of exploring and indeed we just stopped and sang here and there. The spirit of the group was strong; we were having a great time. Then I received a phone call from my friend: the concert wasn’t going to work in the evening as the school was booked for an event. Could we sing an afternoon concert? Well, I suppose there’s no choice, I thought. Then another phone call; the timing of our trip coincided with a particular special day at school. Like the spirit weeks enjoyed by students on this side of the Atlantic, the students of the school in Holland had their own version. This week ended, however, with a day where the students were allowed to do everything and anything to the school they desired. There was only one rule: no eggs. There was a concert scheduled for the afternoon and through a student connection they were able to get the winner of “Dutch Idol” to come and perform. We could perform then.

Oh. My. God. I imagined the atmosphere and the situation I’d have to put my students in. We had prepared all this high-level choral repertoire and now our ONLY concert was going to be what sounded like a gong show. My friend, feeling horrible that this was out of her control, offered a workshop. We’d learn music together and do a feature song with the Dutch Idol.

Our workshop was fun, collegial, and in the spirit of our trip. But the performance allowed us only a few numbers of our prepared repertoire. Dutch pop songs collided with Bach. There were screams and cheering, but were they for us or the idol? Were they out of
true appreciation for our offerings or out of compassion? My singers were utterly defeated; all this way, all this organization, all this fund-raising, all this money, and what a mess.

The next day, after much whining and complaining about the trip, and even some tears, we went on a walking tour of the medieval town of Utrecht. I was humiliated and so upset that the organization of the trip had fallen through to this degree. Sure there were things out of my control, pregnancy leaves and uncooperative colleagues, but the trip was my responsibility, and it was a disaster.

Throughout the walking tour the group was in terribly low spirits. At the conclusion of the tour, we arrived at the Dom Kerk, a towering medieval church in the heart of the city. It was here during our last trip, I had told them, we had been denied the opportunity to sing, even when we asked for permission. I suggested that this time we just go for it; they wouldn’t kick us out over a Hassler “Kyrie.” It was, ironically, a piece they had disliked from the beginning of rehearsals. The polyphonic lines were challenging and the tuning was so difficult. I had promised that the performance of the piece in the right setting would make a staggering difference and so we gathered in a circle in the middle of the church and sang. Faces began to lift as the ambiance of the venue and the acoustical experience made their impression. It was absolutely amazing and the sound had an almost physical presence, full of a curious blend of comfort and excitement; a sonic voyage back in time. And then we came to rest on the final chord and they held it as long as they could, not wanting to let go. After the final cadence, the silence amongst our group lasted and lasted. We stood completely still and listened to the echoes of the soaring melodic lines enjoying all the little nooks and crannies of the massive old stone church. Then, when it was time, and not a millisecond too soon, the utterance of a single word from one of the singers summed up our collective experience in the stark, haunting, colossally humbling surroundings: “Whoah.”

After we left the church the mood was filled with smiles and the sound of effervescent chatter. The polished bumps and bends of the cobblestone streets throughout the old city felt the footsteps of a different choir than the one that had never stepped inside the old church. This was a changed group, the disappointments and frustrations of the day before had vanished. It reminded me of words of encouragement I had received from
Henry years before, and more than once, “Let the music carry you through.” Indeed it had; a most beautiful erasure; synergy at its best.

Despite its reward, this is a difficult story to tell. My conductor self cringes at the colossal screw-ups and feelings of failure I relate to the tour, and I still wish I could go back and change it. I recall one of the choir members, whom I taught privately, telling me about a church choir venture she had organized that had fallen through and her utter embarrassment at how things had turned out. I told her, “try taking a choir all the was across the ocean and only having one organized concert that ended up being with a pop singer.” We both laughed at the situation and found comfort in our resonance. And so I recall Derek’s words and reflect:

But then I remind myself that success is measured by how much you can inspire an ensemble to be part of a transformative experience.

Am I Going to Get the Right Data?

At the conclusion of Derek’s chapter I spoke about all of the researchers’ courage and willingness to “go there”; to journey to those difficult places of self exploration. Contemplating this issue, one I voiced at the onset of this journey and have returned to a number of times, I relate it to another research concern that I am going to assume many qualitative researchers face throughout the data collection process: “am I going to get the right data?” As I described in the postlude to chapter six, this worry sometimes led me to become disconnected from the conversations that were taking place around me. By listening to previous data recordings and in visiting with co-researchers over coffee, over the phone here and there, and through emails, I was able to embrace a bit more of the co-researcher persona and each subsequent focus group session and personal interview improved. As a result, my narratives flowed more freely and the
questions I posed arose from truly listening to what my co-researchers were saying, rather than to reacting to whether I was viewing their narratives as adequate or inadequate data. And so, I was able to value our group synergy as co-researchers, and leave the analysis for later, thereby vastly enhancing the data collection journey. I encourage others to create research designs that allow them to both improve as researchers as they move through the data collection process, and to learn from their participants in the manner that I have. You don’t want to miss anything as you rummage around in that compost pile.
The overarching question of this study was: How has the “musical self” of five choral music educators influenced their professional practice? The narratives of these educators show that any answer to this question is wonderfully complex and necessarily idiosyncratic. The following section draws additional connections between prior knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, and understandings surrounding the formations of the musical selves of the five educators involved in this study. Additionally, the role of governing ideologies of the choral music discipline in supporting or constraining these educators’ professional teaching knowledge is made explicit in summarizing how musical life experiences have impacted professional practice.

During the collaborative research process, numerous common themes emerged as memories and narratives triggered more memories that lay dormant. The feelings and the accompanying understandings surrounding these memories were shared and questioned. These feelings and understandings had often been unvoiced; felt, but kept private. Throughout the research process, the shape and subtleties of our narratives shifted as they were expressed in relation to the narratives of others. Some of the strongest themes are presented below. I doubt that the revelation of any of these themes will surprise. We find ourselves in the unique position of understanding how often we say “me too,” and yet, through deeper examination, realize how individual each of our experiences are. And so, just as much as the enjoyment of recognizing the shared themes that thread their way through our musical lives, it is the soul-uniqueness—the idiosyncratic manner in which we navigate our way around these themes and interact with them—which self-study exposes. This reveals our patterns of interconnectivity, our
commonessence, and implies that collaborative self-study has the capacity to change our profession on a larger scale when we allow reflexivity to guide our actions.

**Family Influence**

Family experiences played a significant role in each participant’s life. Family values, as well as joint music making, influenced prior knowledge. Early images of nurturing a talent were experienced across the board. Additionally, support of musical interest in the early years had a significant impact on whether music was pursued later in life. Each participant relayed images of early music making. Derek spoke of his mother singing and playing “lovely little tunes” at the piano, and Henry remembered his mother’s beautiful alto voice and organ entertainment. Elroy recalled his mother sitting with him every time he practiced and understood that larger family gatherings at Christmas must have influenced his perceptions of choral singing. Elroy’s extended family, however, did not favour music as a career choice. Here the influence of family showed itself to be one of supporting a child’s individual interests, as well as a model of leadership under his father’s guidance. Thus, Elroy’s personal knowledge is of a unique kind, in that his desire to pursue music was, in a sense, fought for, rather than readily afforded.

Sonya too experienced family music making in the church. It is her concept of family though, which is unique. Sonya connects the idea of family not only with her immediate family, but also with her congregation, and those she holds dear. In fact, Sonya felt drawn to other musical situations that she also identified as “familial,” specifically, her high school choir experience. This understanding has flowed her into her professional practice with the creation and nurturing of a family-type atmosphere in her own classroom. Her students, in turn, recognize
this atmosphere; “the bond between us was so well that we were all basically a family” (Sonya’s student, p. 215). In this manner, “family” has shaped Sonya’s personal practical knowledge.

Perhaps what we can take away from this, is that we have the ability as educators to seek out and encourage the pursuit of musical interests where we see them lie. We may also encourage approaches to ensembles that make students feel that they are supported in a “familial” manner and mirrors those supportive relationships of the home that set musical paths in motion.

**Mentors and Significant Role Models**

Numerous figures exacted an influence over each of us. These figures were perceived as modeling both positive ways of being and ways “not to be.” For example, Henry recognized in a professor what it is like when “people don’t do joy” and emerged determined not to live his musical life in a similar manner. Sonya spent years away from choral music after watching a sibling being excluded from the choral experience. This left her feeling that who she was “wasn’t good enough.” Thus, potential role models were lost, and more importantly, their potential for positive impact squandered.

On the other hand, there were many constructive influences that were celebrated in numerous personal narratives. These teachers inspired through actions and words, and set lives on musical courses. Henry referred to some of these educators as “the shoulder tappers” (p. 157); those who had the foresight to say, “you should do this” and who, through their support of our various abilities, made us believe that we had the potential to pursue a life in music. In Elroy’s case, strong teaching from his first piano instructor cemented his musical skills and gave him confidence that has endured and fueled his career. For Derek and Henry, singing experiences and
professional development opportunities with giants in the choral field afforded them knowledge that has been incorporated into their practice to this day. These were experiences of a lifetime.

Most importantly, perhaps, is the acknowledgement of the modeled “way of being” that many mentors and role models imparted. The gracious manner of interacting with graduate students was modeled for Henry when he entered his Masters program. Sonya spoke of the quiet support of her high school teacher, and the “family” he created in choir, as mentioned in the previous section. Derek remembered the individual attention of his singing teacher in grade school, without the guidance of whom he would never have auditioned for a choral scholar position that he acknowledged as “changing his life.” I, myself acknowledge the contribution of mentors who “kept me in check” and inspired me to communicate in a meaningful way with my current students. Each of us has incorporated these mentors and role models into our own repertoire of behaviours. We carry their values, and profess some of the same opinions. The narratives surrounding these figures in our lives emphasized how they continue to allow us to refine and elaborate our personal practical knowledge in our attempts to emulate their actions. In our efforts to emulate such mentors, we become positive role models ourselves, and the cycle continues.

The self-study process provides an opportunity to revisit our images of significant figures in our musical lives and reflect on the characteristics that either supported or constrained our musical development. Reflecting on a difficult narrative of exclusion, Sonya asked “have I done this to any students? Now that I’ve really looked at this story and how it made me feel and affected me for so long, I keep going over my years of teaching, asking if I might have done this and not even known it” (chapter six postlude, p. 217). Later she described “catching herself,” not allowing a student to quit choir because of their insecurities; this was a first. Henry vividly remembered a narrative where he had done the same, resulting in the promotion of his student’s
agency. Csikszentmihalyi (1993) describes the possibilities for positive action when one is able to become more fully conscious, that is, to put it simply, gain a heightened awareness of self and surroundings. Through self-study we are able to “work at” the self, to move toward making a choice as to the kind of selves we wish to create and, as a result, the kinds of social forms we wish to build.

**Engagement with Music**

Interesting what keeps coming up here, “what imprints us?” Because the strongest imprint in my life is this, right here (Henry drops his hand on the hymnals), and you can never imagine how strong that imprint really is where you heard your first music. (Henry, chapter five, p. 154)

It was found that music participants were introduced to early in life still factors into current musical tastes. In chapter five, I described this music as being *relationshiped* into our being, in that the style, as well as particular pieces, are so special to us that they are considered an integral part of who we are. In this sense they become representations of our musical selves. For Henry, congregational singing has been an influence from “in the womb” and has been a constant throughout his life to the point that he has recently recorded these meaningful hymns and spirituals with his professional choir.

Sonya was raised on gospel music. Her commitment to this full and free style of worship also relates to who she is. It provides her with encouragement and inspiration and helps her to overcome troubling situations. As such, it stands as a model for her way of being with her students. Sonya’s early love of “List C” pieces from the Royal Conservatory of Music piano books stays with her as well. Here, she is joined with Elroy who also loved “the angular
melodies and disjunct rhythms.” Through the process of journaling, Elroy realized the influence of this music on his current tastes and his desire to always be trying that new, avant-garde piece. He admitted to finding “some identity in that” and continues, as evidenced by the description of his concert at the onset of chapter seven, to express his personality as a quality of sound; his “personal style” (Cumming, 2000) is realized through the music he chooses to make.

It is interesting to note that we all sang some of those earliest remembered pieces for each other. From “Whispering Hope” to “Christopher Robin” to “Kling Glöckchen” to a bit of the Partridge Family, these pieces, it appears, are deeply embedded in our craniums, as are many of our first experiences with harmonies. This particular way of being surfaced for each participant, revealing a natural predisposition toward choral music.

I wonder how often we ask students what their early music favourites are, and whether there are ways to make the joy that one finds in these early experiences a part of our students’ experience within our ensembles.

**Cultural Influences**

Barakett and Cleghorn (2008) define culture as “the ways of perceiving, thinking, believing, and behaving that characterize the members of a particular social group” (p. 148). Both our cultural upbringings and our involvement in various musical cultures shaped many aspects of our musical selves. There were wonderful experiences afforded each of us, but these experiences were not always felt to be worthy of recognition. Assumptions that our experiences were “less than” when held against others’ had negative effects on participation, or worse, became the source of lifelong insecurities. Sonya described her experience in the gospel tradition as travelling down “the back roads,” as the gospel style of music was not viewed as “formal” enough. Henry described
himself as the “scared farm boy from up north” upon traveling to the U.S. for graduate work. Thus, feelings of inferiority were revealed. Certain experiences however, gave balance to such feelings. For Henry, the recognition that he had something to offer as a result of his unique cultural experiences with congregational music and the German language were described as what “he had to bring to the table.” This morphed into a belief that every individual’s cultural upbringing affords them some particular musical “gifts” to share with others, although these “gifts” may not readily come to the fore. The experiences unique to Henry’s culture created stronger commitment to community, and a confidence in experiences that, although not formative in nature, held great personal significance. He challenged Sonya to realize the same.

In Derek’s case, a rich cultural tradition of singing, void of the social stigmas perceived as attached to choral singing in North America, drove him to form a choir in the school he taught at upon his arrival in Canada. As a result, his life was set on a new musical course. The distinct English tradition and his schooling as a Cambridge Choral Scholar created a musical confidence in the English choral style, and in vocal technique. There was an understanding that this knowledge was engrained in his musical being. This knowledge was felt to be of less value, however, when Derek entered the conducting forum. The skills of cultural tradition (singer in the English tradition) did not translate, and a lack of particular schooling created feelings of inadequacies when he entered another culture (conductor in the Canadian choral community). It appears then, that we do not always perceive ourselves as equals in a musical community. This was understood as stemming from both the values we assume are carried by society at large, as well as the values that have been traditionally placed on our specific positions within a musical culture, be it leader, conductor, accompanist, or singer. Often, these positions were understood as ranked, and feelings of inadequacy subsequently emerged. Making our narratives explicit allowed us to interrogate numerous aspects of culture and realize also what is both common and
unique about our experiences within these cultures, thereby re-framing these positions as cooperative.

**Self-Doubt**

This theme seemed to be inescapable no matter the point in one’s career. As described above, Derek experienced self-doubt when faced with a perceived lack of “the right training” even though his formative musical experiences were formidable (perhaps more than any of us) and his choral experience prestigious. Henry described his lack of schooling heading into graduate studies as “always running back a block to catch up, to pick up papers and bits and little pieces.” These feelings persisted despite having the public support, even adoration, of his home province.

Sonya, despite her training in piano and leadership in the church setting, still battled insecurities, while I described my own feelings of inadequacies at the piano as a perceived failure when set against those who shine in this respect. Even Elroy experienced feelings of confidence set against intimidating situations where one feels “over their head.” These feelings all seemed to stem from some perceived lack of skill level, specific training, or immediate natural ability. The idea of not being “trained” in the “right way” was equated with not being properly socialized into a particular aspect of musical culture. At times these feelings manifested themselves in a retreat from the spotlight, or an avoidance of display (as in Derek and my lack of recordings). This led to an as-yet-unanswered question: why can’t we recognize our larger music education, that is all the rich formative experiences and complementary aspects of our lives—leadership, respect, empathy, humour, to name a few—as worthy of equal attention? How can we negotiate our disciplines’ apparent overwhelming value of formal musical education with the
appreciation of our “informal” musical knowledge? Voicing these struggles was a significant first step:

    It was very interesting to hear the self-doubt that people have about themselves, discover that what they have works, and works very effectively. (Derek to Elroy, chapter eight, p. 283)

    There was a collective recognition that these feelings most often grew out of assumptions that others had not undergone any struggles because of their current status in the choral community or because they displayed an outward confidence. What was discovered numerous times, however, is how the recognition of these perceived inadequacies are able to transform into effective teaching tools when we share our narratives of struggle. It became clear then, that sharing “me too” narratives had the power to set others’ paths in an affirmative direction. In this sense, these narratives move beyond the scope of simply “being of comfort” to excite new forms of action both for our students and ourselves. For example, Henry posed a question to Sonya in their personal interviews that helped Sonya connect her feelings to her practice:

    This seems deeply imprinted in your persona, your struggles to feel adequate.

    How do you go about spotting this in your students? I would think you are pretty sensitive to the student that’s sitting alone on the step.

Sonya subsequently experienced two situations during the research journey where she was able to reflect-in-action (Schön, 1983) and create a positive situation for both a student and a student teacher. She also described her ability to ensure that considerations of her students needs are behind her actions rather than any personal needs for recognition. This was clear evidence of the power of collaborative self-study to create significant change in our practice. We are able, as choral music educators, to move from recognition and examination of personal narrative, to
identifying with our students’ narratives, to heightened empathic awareness, to good intentions, and finally to transformation of professional practice. This makes explicit the evolution of the musical self and the outcome of recognizing our patterns of interconnectivity. It stands as a model for positive change in our professional practice. It stands as a commitment to a particular way of being with our students which goes to the very heart of the ontological focus of this research.

Community, Synergy, and the Pursuit of the Transformative Experience

Themes of community and the transformative properties of participation in choral music surfaced and resurfaced throughout our narratives. These were the most prominent themes of this research. It became evident that building and maintaining relationships carried the most weight in the formation of our musical selves and were the source of the most satisfaction in our involvement in the choral medium. A commitment to community had grown out of many diverse areas of our lives: family, church, mentors and role models, epiphanal experiences, the wisdom that comes of years of conducting experience. It was the relationships and the community that we found sustained us. The collaborative conclusion drawn was that focus on community is what gives meaning and purpose to our practice. Carrying this knowledge led to a focus on building community within our choirs, be they the choirs we are fortunate to work with long term, or the one-weekend guest conducting spot where one strives to make connections with the singers passing through out lives. With this focus in mind, we are in a position to ask both “why” and “how” we are educating, and focus on the mutual experience of the conductor and singer or student. Derek described this phenomenon as synergy, and spoke of the way that it can filter into
our larger experiences together. He recalled a moment during a choral tour thirty years ago when
the group walked down the beach together and enjoyed the sun shining onto the lake:

   So again, it’s not really a musical moment but it epitomized to me what
involvement in making music has been: it’s the community, it’s vitally
important.

SUMMARY

This thesis strives to be a dynamic document which continues to allow the co-researchers to
revisit, relive, and re-frame their musical narratives; an iterative and recursive process much like
the formation of a self. It is my hope that readers will find resonance in both the writing and the
musical life histories re-presented in this thesis, and discover something of their selves in the
reading. As Mead (1934) contended, a process becomes meaningful when people are able to
share an interpretation. In addition, I hope that my journey as a researcher, and the process of
coming to complete a dissertation, offers a guide to other researchers just as the records of
other’s incredible journeys comforted me along the way.

The overarching question of this study was: How has the “musical self” of five choral
music educators’ influenced their professional practice? There is, of course, no single answer to
such a question. The musical life histories found in the second part of this document represent
the findings of this research, and these “findings” are complex and individual. As a close friend
who is also involved in narrative thesis work told me recently, “the power really is in the story.”
The discoveries made during the collaborative research process revealed that the process of
coming to understand and articulate our musical selves is one of constant becoming. And so, this
thesis is, as a composition, through-composed. I have taken a page from Elliot Eisner (1998),
who suggests that strong qualitative work prizes a flow of ideas. Thus, relevant literature, new ways of framing old ideas (particularly with regard to neurological theories of the self), and analysis through the lenses of multiple discourses, has been woven throughout the chapters in Part II of this document. Additionally, as one progresses through the narratives, each participant’s voice begins to interact more with the others involved and connections between their narratives and understandings of these narratives begin to connect. This is done in the hope that the reader may discover what is both common and unique to each individual. Thus, though there are some common threads that run throughout the narratives, we come to understand them in subtle, nuanced ways.

Personal understandings and questions arose for me as a researcher regarding the potential contribution of collaborative self-study to choral music education, as did “big” questions that “guide career long reflexivity” (Cole & Knowles, 2000, p. 23). These surfaced as a result of examining my own narratives throughout the research process as well as our discussions—particularly in the third focus group session—which focused on the second purpose of this research: to discern the role of institutional context and governing ideologies of the choral music discipline in supporting or constraining choral music educators’ professional knowledge. These understandings and questions, which were accompanied by personal narratives connected to those of the participants, were presented not in one concluding chapter regarding myself, but after each participant portrait in an effort to link participant and researcher experience. In fact, my own narratives appeared throughout this document in an effort to show how our stories consistently relate and interact. This was done, not in an effort to present “particular details about individual selves,” (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 7) or to label or identify various aspects of a musical self, but rather to aid in understanding the “processes of selving” (p. 7). This relates to Csikszentmihalyi’s (1993) description of complexity, discussed in chapter
three, and its two components: differentiation and integration. Differentiation surfaces in the uniqueness of each individual’s personal journey, that is, their different paths to a musical career and subsequent practice, as well as their individual and distinct experiences and understandings. Integration—“the extent to which different parts communicate and enhance one another’s goals” (p. 157)—comes into view through the linking of our experiences as expressed through personal narrative, and the revelation that collaborative work involving critical reflection on the self can provide a position from which to write our own programs for action. That is, we position ourselves to take charge of our ideas and feelings, and in the process create successful social forms (Csikzentmihalyi, 1993). This can occur more readily when we take our personal processes of thinking, refining, and reframing and make them public (Loughran & Northfield, 1998). This would enable us to transform our communities of practice (Abercrombie & Turner, 2000), that is, places where we learn and rehearse our skills and assign them value, to convergence zones (LeDoux, 2002). This is a space where information from diverse brains, containing diverse understandings and experiences, can be integrated among choral music educator human beings described by Anderson (1997), and elaborated upon in chapter three, as “everything we are,” rather than who we feel we should be in a given environment.

There was much resonance—much “constructive interference”—experienced along this journey. Through engagement in collaborative self-study, we as co-researchers saw that much of our professional practical knowledge was constructed around similar attitudes, beliefs, and experiences. This, in part, reveals how the choral environment—it’s traditions and practices—has shaped us. It also reveals the connectivity of our musical lives lived; the synaptic nature (LeDoux, 2002) of our personal librettos. Certainly, many similar themes have woven themselves through our various narratives. For example, family and influential teachers figured prominently in our lives, creating lasting imprints. These imprints, which surface in the form of
ideas, intonation patterns in our speech, behaviour-fragments, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions are involuntarily incorporated into the repertoire of our selves (Hofstadter, 2007). As such, we become inhabited by other souls, other I’s, and these “soul-shards” (Hofstadter, 2007) continue to live in us. Our personal narratives exposed many such imprints. Those that made the most impact came from figures that imparted a particular way of being which drove home the importance of mindful modeling, and the fact that we as choral music educators must, as Beattie (2007) suggests, “create relationships and learning environments in which students feel they are valued members who are responsible for maintaining those relationships and environments” (p. 3).

Exploration of our desires to emulate powerful figures in our formative years shed light on the powerful, yet illusive, “it” in choral conducting and education. What makes some choral practitioners successful while others struggle? A background of musical training, although it was found to offer great confidence and created self-doubt when absent, was concluded to be ineffectual without strong leadership, the development of empathic intelligence, and a commitment to the pursuit of group synergy. Narratives and discussion which ignited these insights expanded our views regarding what it really is to be “musically educated” (Bowman, 2002).

To this end, self-doubt was revealed as another major theme throughout our narratives. It is not the theme itself that should be focused on, but how each participant’s narratives reveal how they dealt with resultant tensions in their idiosyncratic ways, revealing their soul-uniqueness (Hofstadter, 2007). This exposed the development of a distinct professional knowledge, the understandings of which we were able to begin to articulate to one other, and more deeply comprehend on a personal level through a collaborative methodological process. We admitted our fears, and confessed to our insecurities. We exposed our early naiveties, and examined and
interrogated our personal perfectionism, as well as the assumptions we hold and have held about others in this regard. We questioned the value of the first place win and found that reflection on our insecurities can aid us in making positive changes in our practice which shift the focus from our own feelings of inadequacies to the recognition of the achievements of our students. We collectively found that taking risks in the face of fear resulted in great reward, and that our feelings of self-doubt shared a mutual existence no matter what stage of our careers we were at. Such a train of thought led us to be mindful of those formative experiences, which, as they fade further and further into our musical pasts, must not be lost sight of, as they can inform our professional practice and encourage us to recognize the trials and tribulations of our students as they too battle through similar experiences.

Perhaps most importantly, it was consistently revealed through our storytelling that we have much to learn from our students. This realization drove home the ontological purpose of self-study, which, as Bullough and Pinnegar (2004) remind, “includes a commitment to a quest for understanding and to a way of being with and for children, colleagues, and our students” (p. 340). Thus we came to understand that the focus of choral music education must always be on the relationships. It was collectively expressed that the focus must always rest on commitment to the development of community.

Many smaller discoveries of similarities amused us along the journey. Each of us laughed as we shared memories of the crazy arm movements which added such pizzazz to our first conducting experiences and excitedly remembered that initial, exhilarating introduction to harmony. We got fired up as we recalled challenges that were conquered, moments we left our comfort zones, and how the act of making music has shaped our “personal styles” (Cumming 2000). We also found ourselves attempting to describe the ineffable feeling when you really begin to communicate with the singers in your choir. These were the many episodes that
continuously popped up rhizomatically (Deleuze, 1997) as we dug in our various “soul soils,” described by Douglas Hofstadter (2007) as key elements in our earliest years out of which grow our souls. They represented a dynamic interaction, both dialectical and dialogical in nature, allowing us to revel in the wonderful feeling of saying the same thing as another, and yet expressing it in our own inimitable way. And so, as we explored our “selves,” discursively formed, and still “under construction,” from multiple disciplinary vantage points: biological, sociological, neurological, philosophical, psychological, and historical. We saw these selves continuously looping, turning inward on themselves in a never-ending process of becoming. And we discovered that interrogating these stories in a cooperative and supportive environment had an immediate and positive impact on our professional practices.

The process of collaborative self-study revealed that our musical selves were very much relative to Hofstadter’s (2007) understanding of the self as a strange loop. This concept was described in detail in chapter three. It is reiterated here in order to draw further connections between the various sections in this thesis and to emphasize the positive potential for this methodology in understanding both the formation of our musical selves, and our understandings surrounding that self and its subsequent impact on our professional practice. Hofstadter contends that our understanding of our reality exists at a symbolic level, that is, the highest level of brain activity. This symbolic level holds “concepts, meanings, desires, and ultimately, our selves” (p. 196). It is a meaningful structure in itself, which is comprised in turn of many meaningful structures, the adaptability and re-structuring, as well as the interaction and communication between which, constitutes the self. Our new ideas continually compound as they are added to, much the same as the re-telling and re-investigating of our personal narratives. Each of us represents a vast meaning structure, a vast pattern or group of patterns. This pattern includes hopes, dreams, memories, reactions to music, a sense of humour, self-doubt, beliefs,
attitudes, and values. It is, to a certain extent, transferable with others at a neurological level (p. 230). Thus, in sharing our artifacts, through expressing our stories, and making our values, beliefs, and attitudes explicit, we place tiny fragments of ourselves in other’s brains. In this manner, we co-feel, implying that through a sense of shared goals and experiences, and in the revelation of numerous themes—only a few of which are restated in this summary but are revealed consistently throughout chapters five through eight—we can have a shared sense of self. Stated more simply, our self-patterns have even more triggering power than we first perceived. We are thus confronted with the “unexpectedness of universality” (p. 242); the inherently dialogical nature of the self is revealed at a neurological level and our “other awareness” (Ramachandran, 2007) is heightened. The effect of revisiting stories, voicing them numerous times, inviting comments from others, supportively interrogating each other’s formerly held assumptions, and hearing stories similar to our own, show how self-study methods of inquiry can contribute to developing our empathic awareness when we engage in such practices collaboratively. We invite discussion of the issues in our discipline from a bottom up approach and recognize that the music educator self is not made up of specific details or categories, but of connections. In actively searching out and recognizing our patterns of interconnectivity, we, as co-researchers, gained a richer sense of self throughout this research process; we underwent a transformative experience, shedding our skin through narrative acts, revealing our intimate interconnectedness; our commonessence. Thus, the purpose of this research was realized; we came to better understand how five choral music educators’ life experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and understandings surrounding the formation of their musical selves have come to shape their professional practice.
Implications for Professional Development and Future Research

All those little moments you may never have brought out again, may never have remembered, are relived. I had even forgotten about some of the stories I told in the sessions. Seeing how you’ve pulled out these valuable moments and connected them brought out the stories once more. When do I get a full copy of this? (Derek, after the member-checking of his chapter)

In reading these again I’ve made such wonderful discoveries about myself. It’s interesting to see your organization of these events; how you connected things, what was the line of inspiration in your eyes. When you spoke of how you felt in those first years of your undergrad degree, it showed me another side of things. (Henry, after reading his finished chapter)

This has affected our practices together. We’re communicating more this year and collaborating and team teaching next year, and connection with teachers in the schools is big. I think that’s a next step for sure. (Elroy at a debriefing lunch after the end of the research journey)

It was through this process, especially the last time we met as a group, that I realized many things…it’s so strange to read it—I mean I lived it, I know how it went down, but hearing and seeing it come back at you, you just see everything in a different light, and can think about things differently. (Sonya, after the data collection period had ended)

Going through this process has forced me to take stock and "check in" with myself as to what my reasons for teaching are. I was surprised to notice what a boost to my confidence this study has provided for me. I like the person that I have read about and the journey that she has taken and I am thrilled that she is me; it provides the confirmation that I needed that I am in the right place doing what I was and am called to do. (Email from Sonya after research completion)

Countryman (2007) revealed that “no published studies have privileged the voices of music teachers articulating their beliefs, goals, and dilemmas” (p. 26). This study may provide a means for future choral music educators to engage in a meaningful, ongoing, and accessible form of professional development; to take a step back and view their professional practice from a new vantage point in cooperation with others. But there is also room for more formal arrangements. Perhaps the lack of instances featuring music educators “discussing the big questions of professional practice” have not surfaced as Countryman (2007, p. 25) noted, because an
appropriate framework has not been presented. Focus groups sessions designed around purposeful discussion provide a possible structure. If I may suggest, based on personal experience as well as the suggestions of other academics (eg. Bowman, 2002), our professional development as choral educators tends to be focused on the technical improvement of our choirs through things such as new warm-ups, ideas concerning rehearsal procedures, conducting gesture, or the pursuit of new and engaging repertoire. But, as Derek mentioned in a discussion during the member-checking of his chapter, “we don’t really sit down and talk about this stuff, and I think we need to, and I think people want to.” To this end, Derek and I briefly brainstormed ways to sneak guided discussions into the busy lives of conductors and classroom teachers. Professional development days gathering music educators within school divisions and sessions at larger music education conferences or through choral associations immediately emerged as accessible venues.

The design of this study offers a framework for purposeful discussion. The first two focus group sessions function as vehicles to draw attention to choral music educators’ musical life histories, allowing those involved in discussion to journey back and revisit their early influences. It also allows these histories to be celebrated while reminding educators that our students too have their own histories which beg acknowledgement. The second focus group session draws attention to connections between our formative musical influences and professional practice. The final focus group session, which employs Mezirow’s (1990) conceptual mapping, stands on its own as a means of examining issues of our discipline and becomes even more meaningful a tool when our personal narratives have been previously explored, providing us with a concrete method of “troubling certainty” (Barrett and Stauffer, 2009), thereby investigating how our discipline shapes us.
Those involved in this study, including myself, experienced a kind of personally moving professional development from beginning to end of this journey that was, at times, difficult to put into words. The journey was more of an emotional experience than any of us had anticipated; perhaps this is what happens when we have the opportunity to voice our narratives and feel our musical histories are valued by others. Additionally, the opportunity to discover and re-discover our musical selves enabled each of us to articulate our practical knowledge in new ways. We, as choral music educators, love to talk about the music—of composers and compositions, teachers and conductors—and discuss our skill sets; these areas of our discipline are easy to get at and we have a language in place for exploring them. Professional development in the area of the self, however, addresses not only our technical concerns, but goes to the heart of how we educate; what we truly value in our teaching. It addresses how we, as Wayne Bowman (2002) would say “educate musically”; not abandoning our quest for technical fluency, but developing “a broader range and a different order of questions than have conventionally occupied our attention” (p. 78). Mary Beattie (2007) contends that “inquiry provides a central organizing framework for professional learning” (p. vii). This research has sought to outline a practical means of moving in this direction, and has shown the outcome to be beneficial beyond measure. Our task now is to create arenas for interaction and to commit to this kind of purposeful communication within our choral communities. This means inviting more voices to the forum.

There exists an impressive amount of self-study literature in the field of education. The focus of this literature continues to be, for the most part, teacher education practices. As such, it involves primarily the voices of teacher educators at the post-secondary level and their work with preservice teachers. The voices of preservice teachers are emerging more and more as studies of this nature continue, but there is one voice that remains silenced in this research: cooperating teachers within the school system. These are the teachers who work with students during their
teaching practicums and whose influence looms large in the experiences of preservice educators.

More research is needed which prizes their narratives of musical history and encourages examination of their professional practice. As we have seen, Sonya’s experience with collaborative self-study research impacted her practice in this area, and Elroy saw this as a “next step” in research of this kind. I concur. Another step is to engage choral music educators across the country—and across countries—in dialogue that recognizes our interconnectivity and invites discussion of the “big” questions that surround our discipline from a “self-first” rather than an “issue-first” stance.

**Implications for Pedagogy**

From a pedagogical standpoint, this research holds numerous implications; its format can be adapted and applied to classrooms at every level of instruction as a means of developing community, or student self-discovery. It could be presented as a casual exercise or a more in-depth exploration spread out over the course of the school year. Moreover, it can impact how we approach our pedagogy. As evidenced throughout this document, being thoughtful in one’s teaching greatly affects professional practice. A process such as self-study allows us to continually re-vision our knowledge and put our new insights and understandings into practice. A process that is collaborative opens up the lines of communication and in the process, positively challenges and transforms our wider profession; we become more ethical practitioners who may engage in complex pedagogical practices. Understanding myself as a music educator, how I define that on a personal level, and how I understand what that means to me, has impacted my practice greatly over the course of this research process. Right from the beginnings of this study, from the exploration of multiple disciplines of the self to the data collection and analysis phases,
the language of my classroom has changed; I speak from a heightened point of respect for the individual self conceptualized through multiple discourses, and consistently share my knowledge.

From a personal standpoint, this research has also altered the structure of the undergraduate courses that I instruct. I now view my curriculum as a living curriculum, where research is recognized not simply as a formal institutional domain, but as an integral and ongoing part of daily engagement in the classroom. Life is research. And research methods are, as Clandinin and Connelly (1994) contend, relationship methods. To this end, I strive to apply approaches which recognize the individuality of my students both in the outline of courses and during our time in the classroom. Rather than relying on a prescribed way of doing things, my course structure is now more malleable so that changes can be made according to individual needs and abilities, while maintaining clear expectations for student achievement; there is, of course, still a mark expected at the end of the course. Finding ways to invite student opinions and recognize their multiple ways of knowing can be difficult when attempting to strike a balance between “what needs to get done” and guarding against any unconscious diminishing of individual complexity. bell hooks (1994) reminds that “engaged pedagogy is physically exhausting,” but urges us to “teach students how to listen, how to hear one another” (p. 150). Thus, the development of community is paramount and the implementation of methods of purposeful self-reflection is a must.

How does this look? There are specific practical initiatives I have taken and I offer concrete examples here. I meet with students individually throughout the length of courses and invite and challenge them to evaluate their own progress. Some of this includes such tried and tested formats like video taping. The key is that their self-observation is always purposeful; it is guided by specific expectations and tools such as detailed checklists that allow students to focus
on their technical specifics while reflecting on larger questions/issues surrounding their progress from social, psychological, and emotional points of view. When we meet, students are then in a position to communicate not only what they are seeing technically in their conducting, but to evaluate the language they are using to communicate in front of a group, and to observe and converse regarding the “image” they are presenting in concert with their actual feelings at the time. My hope is that this leads to “informed action” (Cole & Knowles, 2000); certainly it has led to them to take charge of their own progress and to develop as individuals rather than mimicking/looking to please me.

Additionally, time for guided discussion has crept into my classes more and more. Those initial semi-circle introductions in the first class, which are so often enacted and then forgotten, are invited to show themselves in more than an initial “this is who I am in front of you guys” statement, problematized by Bernard (2005). Specifically, in my foundational conducting course, we gather for a potluck outside of class time to have a social event and watch a video full of old conducting footage. This allows us to talk about the discipline and to realize there is no “right way” to approach the subject. As a class, we survey a variety of textbooks and articles regarding conducting which we then contrast with a brainstorming session centred on what we as individuals believe the art of conducting to encompass. We explore body-mapping principles (Conable, 2000), technical drills, psychological dimensions of the art—including students true feelings and thoughts the first time in front of a group—and philosophical views of numerous “experts” in the field. Neurological perspectives have also become commonplace in my language, providing a fresh outlook on the development of knowledge. However, one exercise in particular was added at the onset of this research.

After we have a number of weeks to become comfortable and form community within our classroom, I give “the self assignment.” Students are asked to describe themselves, then they
approach someone they trust such as a family member or good friend and pose the same question. The next step is to speak to an instructor—academic, private, or ensemble director—and ask the same question. The final task is to describe how they feel, act, and think about themselves in various musical situations from the ensemble atmosphere to the practice room, to the academic classroom, to the social arena. This has been an extremely successful venture. It is not always easy, and I don’t push it if students would rather write and not speak; this is always an important option. Some students have come to class with emails from high school teachers that they’ve reconnected with, and faculty have approached me to express that they’ve been conversing with students and are interested in what’s going on in conducting class. This has opened up valuable and insightful discussion in our classroom, and the personal time I have with students allows me to connect further. Even students who are apprehensive or defensive when the exercise arrives make huge improvements by the end of the course and have approached me to talk about how positive their experience has been. Furthermore, this exercise truly gives me an indication of how students view themselves—shy, outgoing, quiet, reserved, brash, the list goes on—and where their confidence and concerns lie; things I wouldn’t necessarily pick up from their classroom behaviour. It always surprises everyone how similar they are, how there are major themes running through their musical lives. They are challenged to become a communicative and connected community of learners. This exercise takes roughly two half-classes or a third of three. For me, it is a small time sacrifice for such a reward which has the effect of searching out “multiple, local understandings” (Elliott, 2001). In effect, together we make a space for constructive interference in order to create resonance; a “convergence zone” (LeDoux, 2002), that is, a region where “information from diverse systems can be integrated” (p. 315). And thus—mirabile dictu—complexity emerges.
Afterword

What a journey it has been, full of twists and turns. I began my travels with a critical eye, from a place of vulnerability and uneasiness; I was full of assumptions. Along the way I found a means to further interrogate my musical self and the choral music education discipline. I also found a way to celebrate and affirm my actions as choral music educator. This was in large part due to the time spent dialoguing with my co-researchers. They taught me a great deal. We all taught each other a great deal. I wholeheartedly believe that the collaborative nature of this research, the opportunity to think on the self, search our minds (and closets and storage spaces) in order to unearth those early musical memories, voice our narratives in dialogue with others, revisit them more intimately on a researcher-participant level, and reflect on them through my interpretation as researcher/narrator has been a transformative experience. I’ve found my voice. And yet I feel we have only scratched the surface. But that is to be expected in a journey which is considered one of life long importance, of growth and continued reflection; a process rather than a product. And through such a process of selving—*mirabile dictu*—continual transformation occurs.
Bibliography


APPENDIX A: INITIAL PARTICIPANT HANDOUT AND PROPOSED TIMELINE

Sharing Our Stories

We can encourage one another to tell stories about experiences that hold elements of surprise, positive or negative. Stories are products of reflection, but we do not usually hold onto them long enough to make them into objects of reflection in their own right. When we get into the habit of recording our stories, we can look at them again, attending to the meanings we have built into them and attending, as well, to our strategies for narrative description. When we can pay attention to the assumptions and ways of framing experience … [we] can see ourselves as builders of repertoires rather than accumulators of procedures and methods. (Schön, 1988, p. 26 as cited in Clarke and Erickson 2004, p.56).

Self-Study and Life History Research

Self-study and life history research seek to inform questioning and examining of ourselves and our professional practice through the use of various methods of data collection: personal journal entries, personal artifacts, focus groups, as well as informal conversations, and emails with colleagues (Samaras et al., 2004). This form of inquiry reflects, through the vehicle of personal narrative, on past practices. Identity-oriented self-study research includes retrospective examinations of personal life history (Louie et al., 2003) where emphasis is placed on developing awareness of one’s current self and one’s development as an instructor.

Samaras suggests that the first use for personal history self-study is the exploration of “self-knowing and forming—and reforming—a professional identity” (p. 905). My journal entries wherein I explored the influence of the arts in my life and subsequent teaching practice “exposed” repeating patterns, motifs surrounding the construction of my identity and my writing was vulnerable in nature but attempted to negotiate the borders between self-indulgence and significant experience, and confessional (Cole & Knowles, 1996).

Self-study research may allow educators to reveal points where our relationships with colleagues and students have shaped our practice and caused us to examine what we value in our profession. The purpose for self-study is this sense is not all at an individual level. Loughran (2004) suggests that beyond one’s desire to be better informed about how they think and act (to
purposefully reframe their practice), “is an expectation that their learning through self-study might also help to positively challenge and change teaching and teacher education practices more generally” (p. 155). This may in turn lead us to the “utopian moment” in self-study, the point where “the self is invited to be more than, or better than, itself” (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2004, p. 340).

This research is a combination of narrative research, life history and collective biography, all of which fall under the umbrella of the qualitative research paradigm.

Narrative Research, Life History, Collective Biography

Reflexive inquiry specifically, is described by Cole and Knowles (2000) as “reflective inquiry situated within the context of personal histories in order to make connections between personal lives and professional careers, and to understand personal (including early) influences on professional practice” (p. 2). Such inquiry would strongly lend itself to the process of transformation, highlighting the “relationship between what we do and who we are becoming” (McCarthy, 2007, p. 3).

This study seeks to emulate a truly collaborative research endeavour. I look to personal experience methods, characterized by Clandinin and Connelly (1994), as relationship methods, to bring unexpected insights that may change the participants’ view of past experiences (Watson & Watson-Franke, 1985 as cited in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995), allowing them to interrogate each others’ stories in a supportive environment. This set-up allows for greater freedom as the initial data collected may surface in the form of incidents, stories, and anecdotes in linear, segmented or fractured form. Participants may then come to terms with their stories, choosing, after reflection, which ones they would like to share and how they would like to “compose” their lives.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative research is to better understand how five choral music educators’ life experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes, values, beliefs, and understandings surrounding the formation of their musical selves have come to shape their professional practice.
A secondary purpose of this research is to discern the role of institutional context and governing ideologies of the choral music discipline in supporting or constraining these educators’ professional teaching knowledge, thereby assisting us in examining “those thoughts and practices that are usually taken for granted” (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 4). The hope is that by engaging in collaborative self-study and through critical reflection, choral music educators may also be able to more fully understand and evaluate the power relations inherent in the choral music discipline for “until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched, we cannot know ourselves” (Rich as cited in Beattie, 2000, p. 13). It must necessarily follow that in determining how one’s musical self has impacted one’s professional practice, that it be asked “how has one’s professional practice impacted one’s musical self?”

The **overarching question** of this study is: How has the “musical self” of five choral music educators’ influenced their professional practice?

My sub questions include (but are not limited to) the following:

1. What is the “musical self” of five choral music educators?
2. How have life experiences shaped the musical self of five choral music educators?
3. How has prior knowledge shaped the musical self of five choral music educators?
4. How were the attitudes, values and beliefs formed that inhere in the musical self of five choral music educators?

**Data Collection Methods**

1. **Journals**

Journals also provide a place to record past epiphanal moments as they resurface sparked by group discussion and dialogue in interviews and in collecting artifacts to share in focus group sessions. Questions, concerns, opinions, and understandings are welcome in reflective journal writing.
2. Focus Group Sessions

There will be three focus group sessions in total. Each session will have a block of four hours. This first session is designed to honour participant experiences, and establish individual agency. The recognition of co-researchers’ narratives provides a source from which to engage in personal reflection and subsequently, a questioning of larger contexts. The focus group also provides, as previously mentioned, greater freedom as the initial data collected may surface in the form of incidents, stories, and anecdotes in linear, segmented or fractured form. The second session will revolve around professional practice and the third allows us to revisit themes from our previous sessions and interviews and further probe importance, puzzles, influential factors and constraints in concepts and stories we have told and remembered.

The first session is outlined below. The following session outlines will be handed out after the initial session.

Focus Group Session 1

The Formation of Our Musical Selves: The “Early” Years

Sharing of Initial Reflective Journal Writing

- Participants are asked to share the thoughts and stories which arose from initial journal writing prior to first meeting. After personal reflection and brainstorming, participants have decided which early stories they would like to share as we begin to personally and collaboratively “compose our selves.”

Collecting of Artifacts: Examining

- Participants are asked to share pre-career artifacts which have meaning to them or spark stories or images of early musical influences. Artifacts may include recordings, music, books, hymnals, musical instruments, festival adjudications, etc. Who knows what we will end up with…

Focus group questions

- Focus group questions designed to generate discussion and storytelling will include:
  1. Can you describe some of your earliest musical memories?
  2. Who did you share these experiences with and in what context did they emerge?
3. What type of music were you drawn to, how was it expressed?

4. Looking back, did any of these early experiences lead to or influence later music making or contribute to the way you saw yourself as a musician or non-musician?

5. Can you talk about the artifacts you have chosen to bring in and their significance to you?

**Peer Interviewing**

- Engaging in peer interviewing here is seen as a means of supporting life history methods. Reflections regarding mutual actions, and actions we’ve shared with others remind us that we are who we are not just inside ourselves, but also in relation to others (Cole & Knowles, 2001). Pairing off in twos to discuss, elaborate and share, invites deeper meanings to surface through slightly more intimate contact. Participants can branch off in the room and return to discuss not only the understandings that formed when they answered each other’s questions, but what they realized when listening to other’s narratives. Each interview will be digitally audio-recorded so the researcher is able to transcribe both sets of interviews. Interview questions will have grown from previous discussions in the focus group session and may emerge from aspects of conversation that co-researchers found intriguing or wish to revisit. Posed with a format of “Can you tell me more…,” “How did you…,” and “Can you reframe or expand on…,” these questions represent the genuine interests of the co-researchers and the stories and understandings they are sharing with each other.

**Participant Observation**

If possible, I would like to come and observe you in “your natural habitat.” This makes it possible for me to re-story our narratives in greater detail and spark alternative discussion. This may include the workplace, at home over coffee, attending committee meetings: we can be creative.

**One-on-one Interviews**

The role of the interview in this research is to clarify, elaborate and verify experiences, perspectives, issues and knowledge which surface throughout the focus group sessions, and to provide an opportunity for the researcher to strengthen relationships with and among co-researchers. This process consists of:
• **two semi-structured interviews of no more than two hours in length** with each co-researcher to clarify, separately, each co-researcher’s understandings of the choral music phenomenon and explore, on a more personal level, narratives expressed in the focus group sessions while seeking to elicit narratives as yet uncovered by the research process.

• The interviews will be scheduled in between focus group sessions and will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in written form by the principal researcher. Copies will be provided to the co-researchers for perusal to ensure that they are being authentically represented. These copies will be sent to participants’ prior to following focus group sessions and the second set of interviews. It is my hope that informal, unrecorded interviews will take place sporadically throughout the research process as well.

**Data Analysis and Representation**

My analysis of the data will be ongoing and consists of reading the transcribed focus group sessions and interviews and listening to them over and over…. I will be looking for connections and discord, recurring themes and relations to theoretical principles I have previously researched along with relevant literature. The representation of the data will involve your stories both reproduced in your own words and re-storied by me. My greatest concern is that the stories are told so that they are vividly imaginable by others and the reader can extend their own experiences of being in the world through knowing the particularity of another, namely you. As such, it is important that you view the represented data in order to ensure that you are fairly and truthfully represented in as un-biased a way as possible. This process is referred to as member checking.
PROPOSED TIMELINE
October, 2009 – September, 2010

October

• Recruitment of participants, time given for consideration of participation

Late October

• Initial meeting with participants to establish parameters of research process, request to begin collecting early musical years artifacts
• Evaluation of initial focus group design after informal meeting with co-researchers

November/December

• Co-researchers collect artifacts in last two weeks of November
• Focus Group Meeting 1 first week of December:
  Sharing of initial artifacts collected
  Early musical memories, foundations of formation of musical identity
  Peer interviewing
  Sharing of points from journals
• Transcription of focus group one

January

• Prepare for first round of interviews after reviewing focus group session 1
• Informal Interview 1 regarding perspectives surrounding early musical identity formation
• Scheduling of participant observations
• Co-researchers asked to collect second set of artifacts

February

• Transcription of first round of interviews
• “Preliminary” analysis and readings of transcriptions
• Preparation for second focus group meeting
• Focus Group Meeting 2
  Sharing of second set of artifacts from professional practice
• Peer interviewing
Sharing of educational-based narratives of personal schooling and teaching

- Update on progress of ongoing journaling

March

- Transcription of second focus group meeting
- Continued analysis and readings of focus group transcriptions
- Preparation for second set of interviews and observations
- Last week of March Informal Interview 2 perspectives on professional practice, in second and third weeks
- Participant observations scheduled

April

- Transcription of second set of interviews
- Analysis and readings of interview transcripts
- Preparation for third focus group meeting

May

- Focus Group Meeting 3 in first week
  Discussion of observations from participant viewpoint
  Conceptual mapping
  Peer interviewing regarding choral discipline
  Sharing of insights gleaned from journal reflections
- Transcription of final focus group meeting
- Collection of outstanding journal entries
- Analysis and interpretation kicked up a notch
- Re-storying of participant narratives begins
- Peer asked to review current state of analysis

June/July/August

- Member checking and revising of data
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS

You are warmly invited to take part in a collaborative self-study regarding the formation of your musical self and its impact on your professional practice. As a respected choral music educator in the community, your personal musical narratives, and opinions, beliefs and attitudes surrounding choral music education are greatly valued. This study is being undertaken as part of my doctoral research in Music Education at the University of Toronto. The design and conduct of this study is being supervised by Prof. Lee Bartel and you are free to contact him at any time at 416-978-0535 or you may contact the University of Toronto, Office of Research Ethics, ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273.

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore perspectives, life experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and understandings surrounding the formation of your musical self and how this has come to influence professional career. A secondary purpose involved discerning the role of institutional context and governing ideologies of the choral music discipline in supporting or constraining your professional teaching knowledge.
This study seeks to give voice to choral music educators as they explore aspects of their personal practice which is rarely discussed in academic music education literature. This study seeks to develop a truly collaborative and interactive environment amongst its participants. Your supportive nature and desire to continually learn and seek out ways to reflect and develop your music self has made you a wonderful choice for such a study which looks to the construction of new knowledge at both the personal and community level.

The following points serve to delineate the parameters of the study and to clarify the conditions of the focus group sessions and interview process which consists of three focus group sessions four hours in length and two in-depth interviews of no more than two hours in length each. Participant observation is a possibility should you choose to agree to this method of data collection and will be determined based on your level of comfort and the obtaining of permission regarding various institutions involved.

1) You are one of five participants in this study including myself as principal researcher.

2) Please understand that participation in this study is on a voluntary basis and as a participant you are free refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. Similarly, you may decline to answer any interview question at any time or discontinue email contact or journal entry writing at any time.

3) Informal journal entries are requested of you by the researcher and serve to facilitate story recollection and storytelling, allow you to have a variety of stories to choose from in sharing with other participants, and as a means of recording beliefs, values, and opinions as they arise in your thoughts throughout the research process. Informal email contact and interviews are also requested of you by the researcher. The interviews will consist of various background questions and semi-structured interview questions designed to elicit stories of your experiences and will occur in both formal and informal, mutually agreed upon locations.

4) Interviews will be audio recorded. Your identity will be represented by pseudonym.

5) Transcribed data and any restorying of narratives and analysis of the data will be presented to you for a member check to ensure that opinions and stories have been accurately represented.

6) Data from this study will be part of the principal researcher’s dissertation parts of which may be published in future articles. The data will be kept at the researcher’s place of residence to be used only by
the researcher. If the data is used for future publications, anonymity will be maintained and you will be notified. You are welcome to view any future articles or papers stemming from this study.

I, ________________________________, agree to the above conditions for the purpose of the collaborative self-study process. I understand that a copy of this consent form will be provided for the interviewee’s own reference and I am free to contact the researcher regarding this study at any time.

Dated this ______________ day of _____________________, ______________.

Catherine Robbins, principal researcher
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APPENDIX C: EMAIL RECRUITMENT FOR PARTICIPANTS

The following is an anticipated email recruitment for participants in this study:

Dear ___________________,

As you may be aware, I am currently in the dissertation phase of my doctoral studies at the University of Toronto in Music Education. My research involves the formation of the musical self and how our conceptualization of this musical self has come to impact our professional practice. As a respected choral music educator in the community, your personal musical narratives, and opinions, beliefs and attitudes surrounding choral music education are significant and your input in such a study would be invaluable.

My dissertation research is of a qualitative nature and involves participants engaging in a collaborative self-study surrounding the formation of their musical self. Stated succinctly, the purpose of this qualitative study will be to explore perspectives, life experiences, prior knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and understandings surrounding the formation of your musical self and how this has come to influence professional career. A secondary purpose involved discerning the role of institutional context and governing ideologies of the choral music discipline in supporting or constraining your professional teaching knowledge.

This study seeks to give voice to choral music educators as they explore aspects of their personal practice which is rarely discussed in academic music education literature. Your supportive nature and desire to continually learn and seek out ways to reflect and develop your music self has made you a wonderful choice for such a study which looks to the construction of new knowledge at both the personal and community level.

Thus, I would like to warmly invite you to become a participant in this study. If this invite intrigues you, I would value a personal meeting with you to further describe the parameters of this study in more detail and answer any questions or concerns you may have. I would ask that you keep my request confidential until our personal meeting so that confidentiality may be ensured.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of participation.

Sincerely,

Catherine

Catherine Robbins
Home phone: 832-6206
Office phone: 272-1594
Email: catherine.robbins@utoronto.ca
APPENDIX D: ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions were anticipated questions which will guide in-depth interviews. Additional interview questions grew out of listening to focus group sessions and included clarification, extrapolation and reflection of previously shared personal narratives.

Interview 1

1. Please describe your career experience and general music background.
2. Are there any stories which you would like to clarify or expand upon that you shared initially in the first focus group session?
3. Are there any narratives you would like to share which have come to mind either as a result of your journal writing or after hearing the narratives from the first focus group session?
4. What are some of your earliest memories of music making in the home or community? Please describe these memories.
5. What are some of you earliest memories of music making in a school setting? Please describe these memories.
6. What are some of your memories of music making in high school?
7. What are some of your memories of music making at the post secondary level? Please describe these memories.

Interview 2

1. Are there any stories which you would like to clarify or expand upon that you shared initially in the first/second focus group session?
2. Are there any narratives you would like to share which have come to mind either as a result of your journal writing or after hearing the narratives from the first/second focus group session?
3. What are some of your memories/experiences from your first few years of teaching and conducting?
4. What are some of your more recent experiences related to choral music education?
5. Are there any specific figures who stand out in your experiences?
6. Do you recognize any influences from your earlier narratives in your past or current practice?