COACHING in APPLIED MUSIC EDUCATION: The Solution-Focused Approach to Practice and Performance

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts

Faculty of Music
University of Toronto

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Abstract

The shift towards student-centered learning has been one of the most significant developments in education in the twentieth century. Many research projects have studied the effectiveness of student-centered instruction in facilitating independent learning. In most private music education settings, however, the traditional culture of master teacher and apprentice roles still exists. This study began as an effort to introduce an environment for student-centered learning for advanced music students while respecting the existing culture in music schools.

The client-centered approach in Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) parallels many principles of student-centered learning. SFBT is an empirically developed intervention method from social work and counselling therapy disciplines that aims to create clients’ preferred future by focusing on strengths and solution precursors. In SFBT, unlike many other intervention models, practitioners assume the non-expert stance in their interaction with clients. SFBT provides the tools and framework to promote student-centered learning without imposing changes to the existing student-teacher relationship.
Within the structure of the study, the researcher provided solution-focused private coaching sessions as well as facilitated peer group meetings over one academic semester for eighteen participants studying music performance at the university level. Five withdrew from the study mid-term. Of the thirteen that remained, ten completed all the requirements of the study.

The research explores the participating students’ experience using primarily a qualitative method. The purpose of the research is to explore how students apply the solution-focused concepts and investigate its influence on students’ self-perception and learning. Students’ stories describing self-awareness, motivation, and confidence as well as practice productivity and performance strategies are presented in the data chapters. For quantitative data, pre and post-surveys were conducted to assess students’ perception on their own performance. Two detailed case studies are presented in this paper.

At the conclusion of the research, participants displayed improvements in several areas, including confidence, productivity, and motivation. Several participants have reported successful audition results after the research concluded and credited their success to their experience in the research. The result of this study suggests that solution-focused coaching may be employed as an effective educational tool for advanced music students.
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Prelude

In the spring of 2008, I had just taken over the music director position at a local church and was struggling with some of the non-musical aspects of leading a choir. There was a great deal of tension and hostility carrying over from conflicts that had occurred during the tenure of the previous director. Some people wanted to move beyond what had happened while others wanted me to resolve the issues their way. I loved and hated my new job. The drive to church for our weekly Thursday rehearsal was often accompanied with feelings of excitement and angst - to sing, teach, and try new things with the choir as well as to face what I thought was unfair and undeserved criticism and antipathy.

A colleague who was taking a brief counseling class at the time intervened; she offered to help by giving me a free coaching session. So, I began to talk about the problems in the choir. I explained how extremely discouraging it was to spot frowning faces or hear a loud sigh during rehearsals. I was terrified of people, especially the well-known complainers, coming over to talk to me either after mass or rehearsals because I knew the talks were going to be mostly unpleasant. “What would you like to see instead?” my friend asked. I thought this was rather obvious, but to answer the question required some thinking. After pondering for a few minutes, I answered that I wanted us to be a joyful group where people were united by our love for singing. I also answered that I wanted to see everyone enjoying each other’s company. I believed these were fundamental steps to following our high calling as volunteers serving the community with our time and talents.

“I can see that it must be difficult to work with people who continue to complain and pester you. Tell me, what small signs have you seen recently that says your choir is already the joyful group you want them to be?” Strangely, even though I had just told her our group wasn’t anywhere near being joyful, I suddenly remembered all the faces in the choir that had quietly supported me. They voluntarily came to rehearsals week after week; they participated in all the team building
activities I had suggested and some people even expressed that they enjoyed the freshness of the activities; others showed up to the optional theory and ear training class I taught before our regular rehearsals. All of sudden, I realized that not everyone was being difficult, and things weren’t as bad as I thought they were.

My friend continued with more questions; “suppose a miracle happened tonight while you were sleeping, and it solved your problem. But you don’t know that the miracle happened because you were sleeping. When you wake up in the morning, how would you find out that this miracle has happened?” I wasn’t sure where to begin with this one. “If the problems disappeared? Wow.” The thought was almost unthinkable. After a long silence, I answered, “I think they would smile to greet me when they see me walking in.” Not a very miraculous answer, I thought to myself. “I see. What difference does that make for you? What would you do differently if they smiled to greet you?” she continued. “Well, I guess I would then smile back at them.” “I see. Is that something you can do regardless of how choir members greet you?” “I suppose. I mean, sure, I can do that.” “Great. If you smiled at them, what difference would that make for your choir members?” “Oh. I guess that would put them off guard, and maybe smile back.”

Smiling is a natural part of greeting in normal circumstances. At my job, however, I had been too nervous and tense that I was rigid even before I faced any negativity. I couldn’t remember if I had been smiling at all when I entered church. By answering my roommate’s questions, I realized there were things I could control within myself regardless of how others behaved.

The problems in the choir didn’t disappear right away after our conversation. There was, however, a noticeable change in how I handled myself on the job. First of all, I made a vow to greet everyone with a smile. Secondly, I had a few “strategies” that I was going to follow when difficult conversations and situations became unavoidable. Lastly, I frequently reassessed my approach to “work on what worked” for the choir. Overall, my attitude in confronting some of the issues in the choir changed from that of hopelessness to that of hopefulness. Today, I am
proud to report that not only has my work relationship with the choir completely transformed, but also our personal interaction has become as close as that of a family.
Chapter 1

1 Introduction

1.1 Journey Through Music

The pursuit of excellence in music is an arduous road that demands dedication, persistence, and perseverance. For many, it is a both mentally and physically exhausting process, requiring mental focus and agility, as well as physical flexibility and strength. Performance-related issues such as stage fright and anxiety are indicative of the amount of stress a musician undergoes when performing. Physical injuries are not uncommon to those who relentlessly dedicate countless hours to practice. Yet, many choose to pursue this demanding path, for their love of music. I, too, am one of them, currently pursuing a doctorate degree in music.

I, however, had left the field of music entirely for five years due to a physical condition caused by a degenerative autoimmune disease, known as Ankylosig Spondylitis. Its episodes, in varying degrees, are physically debilitating in nature, making practice an unrealistic and even dangerous proposition at times. Feelings of defeat and discouragement consumed me until I gave up on music and my childhood dream of becoming a concert pianist.

Then one day, I came upon a method called Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT). My experience with Solution-Focused Brief Therapy eventually led me back to pursuing music. Playing a DMA audition after a five-year hiatus was extremely challenging, both physically and mentally. Yet using the Solution-Focused Brief Therapy questions, I created practice plans to prepare myself for the audition that best suited my needs under the circumstances.

In SFBT, language is the main tool of intervention. The language used in SFBT - questions in particular – are constructed with presuppositions that empower clients and facilitate a paradigm
shift in clients’ thoughts from problems to solutions. The solution-building process, as opposed to a problem-solving process, consists of amplifying details of the preferred future and connecting it to clients’ past experiences. The main strategic principles of SFBT are 1) if it works, do more of it, 2) if it’s not working, do something else, and 3) don’t fix what’s not broken.

My SFBT-based practice plan helped me to articulate my goals and clarify small steps in the process, leading to a successful audition. It is from this personal experience that I feel the application of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy principles to music study is worth further investigation.

1.2 Solution-Focused Brief Therapy

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is a therapy method developed by two American social workers, Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, and their team at the Milwaukee Brief Family Therapy Center in the mid-1970’s (de Shazer et al, 2007). Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is highly empirical and pragmatic since it is built on the findings of what worked in actual counselling sessions at the Milwaukee Center. The application of SFBT is rapidly spreading to a wide variety of disciplines beyond therapies to nearly all assistance-providing services such as education, organizational development and employment assistance programs (Cantwell & Holmes, 1994).

The solution-focused approach exhibits characteristics that are useful for application in music performance studies. First of all, the goal-oriented nature of the model results in brevity of the coaching and counselling process. Unlike the majority of conventional counselling methods, which focus on solving problems, the solution-focused approach concentrates on building solutions. This aspect of the model has proven to dramatically reduce the amount of time spent in the overall process of creating change. This characteristic is directly related to effectiveness and efficiency, both of which seem highly beneficial in music discipline.
Secondly, SFBT is client-centered. Similar to music education projects that promote student-centered learning environments in classroom setting, such as ArtsPropel in Pittsburgh (Gray, 1993) and the Comprehensive Music through Performance (CMP) in Wisconsin (Sindberg, 2007), SFBT recognizes the importance of active client participation in order to create positive changes that are meaningful and long lasting. Perspectives, attitudes, and tools used in solution-focused sessions describe the shift of expertise and authority from the coach to the client: a concept that may seem unconventional and perhaps counterintuitive, yet considered as one of the most important aspects of student-centered learning. The fact that the SFBT tools have proven to be effective in private settings between two people whose traditional relationship resembled that of a teacher and a student is another merit.

Lastly, SFBT broadens clients’ perception, facilitates positive change, and validates small successes. Consequently, clients experience positive affects. Self-perception often improves, as noticeable in the areas of motivation, confidence, and competence. In practice, a SFBT session is built upon: an empathic relationship between the coach and the client; amplification of clients’ preferred future; investigation of the client’s strengths and resources through the exploration of the client’s past successes; compliments that validate and encourage the client both directly and indirectly; and endorsement of small step changes which make the process realistic and manageable.

1.3 Inquiry

One of the key goals in education, according to Oare, is to nurture students in a way that stretches their thinking and develop skills, so that students no longer need their teachers (2011); students become independent learners. In music, students who have matured to become independent learners would be self-reliant in their own productivity, musicianship, and decision-making. Hopefully such maturity would also result in a healthy self-perception of competence and a greater sense of confidence.
The members of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra exemplify this quality of mature thinking; the entire operation of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra – from musical matters such as interpretation, rehearsal agenda, and programming to logistical matters regarding concert venues and personnel - is carried out without a conductor (Hazlik, 2010).

It is, however, unclear when and how students transition to become independent learners, especially in private music studies where applied lessons take place in traditional setting of a master and an apprentice. How do students make this transition to become professional musicians? What are the signs that students are ready to make musical decisions on their own? What tools do students have that ensure continuous growth and development of their talents outside of close supervision of their teachers?

Educators have recognized the effectiveness of hands-on education for more than a century; constructivism, the idea that students learn more effectively when they are actively engaged in their learning process, was first discussed in early 1900’s (Brown, 2008). Since then, countless educators who recognized that “no one knows better how the students learn than the students themselves” (Brown, 2008) have contributed to the emergence of experiential and experimental learning in various disciplines, including music education.

However, previous efforts that have been made to investigate student-centered learning in music education have been limited to group settings such as the public school classroom (Brown, 2008; Blair, 2009). In performance, chamber music study - with the absence of an authority figure such as a conductor or coach - is perhaps the closest example of a student-centered learning environment; Hanzlik considers chamber music to be the most democratic and liberal setting within music institutions that fosters “independent musicianship, critical thinking, problem-solving, and interpersonal relations” (2010).
My personal experience as both a teacher and student has shown that the attributes of liberal and democratic student-centered learning are difficult to promote in conventional settings for private music studies. I believe the aforementioned qualities of the solution-focused approach would be beneficial in assisting university level music students who are working towards recitals, auditions, and competitions. The SFBT questions can be useful in helping music students articulate goals as well as strategize and monitor progress in order to increase productivity and effectiveness of their practice. The client-centered aspect of SFBT can be adapted to foster mature and independent musicians who not only think and play for themselves, but are confident about their artistic decisions as well.

This dissertation will explore the experience of student participants as they are introduced to solution-focused principles to supplement the apprenticeship culture in traditional private music education. The students’ experience may reveal valuable insights about how to empower them to become independent musicians, as well as how to improve productivity and self-perception. Perhaps the language and perspectives of solution-focused coaching may be helpful in creating student-centered learning environments outside of the conventional lessons and classes, and provide the experience and tools that may assist in developing musicians who manage their creative talents with independence, integrity, and respect.

1.4 Research Questions

Based on my personal encounter with Solution Focus Brief Therapy (SFBT), which raised my awareness and curiosity for the concept and practice of student-centered learning, the current research explores the possibilities of incorporating solution-focused approach in private music studies. The main question I aim to answer in this study is: how do university level students apply solution-focused concepts and tools to performance studies? The impact of the solution-focused application as described in students’ experience may reveal insights about the following sub-questions.
1. How does the solution-focused application influence the productivity and effectiveness of students’ practice?

2. How does the solution-focused application influence students’ self-perception, especially motivation and confidence?

3. How useful is the solution-focused approach in developing independent and self-regulated learners?
Chapter 2

2 Getting to Know Solution-Focused Brief Therapy

2.1 Background

The solution-focused approach is a widespread practice that is derived from Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), which was developed by two American social workers, Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, and their team at the Milwaukee Brief Family Therapy Center in the mid-1970’s (de Shazer et al, 2007). De Shazer and team believed that they would gain valuable insights about how to be more effective with their clients by closely monitoring the way they worked with their clients, and installed a one-way mirror to observe the sessions conducted on site. Their findings from these observations led to the formulation of the SFBT model. Constantly refining the art of communication in their work with clients and on the solution building practice, de Shazer and Berg dedicated their entire professional lives working with individuals, couples and families seeking help. They also trained many other professionals at the Milwaukee Brief Family Therapy Center as well as around the globe.¹

Since its conception, various other professions and disciplines have also adapted the Solution-Focused approach. The reasons for such vast application and popularity could be summarized in the following way. First of all, SFBT is a brief therapy model. Instead of analyzing the problem to understand the cause, the model looks directly at the clients’ desired outcome. Consequently, the SFBT approach becomes incredibly efficient with both time and energy. Secondly, SFBT is client-centered, and the clients, who are considered the experts in the situation, are empowered to take actions in the most appropriate and realistic way for themselves. This approach increases the chances of success for actualizing clients’ goals while minimizing resistance. Lastly, SFBT is a strengths-based model, considering clients’ strengths and resources as the most significant

contributors for success. Validating clients with affirmations and compliments often produces a sense of appreciation and approval for the clients, from which they gain confidence and motivation to create positive changes.

### 2.2 Problem Solving vs. Solution Building

People seek professional help when they are faced with a challenge they feel they cannot solve on their own. When faced with such a challenge, it is often assumed that analyzing the problem will somehow help in finding a suitable solution (Szabo & Meier, 2008). This seems to be common sense and its logic has proven true in the history and development of medicine.²

Timberlake, Farber & Sabatino (2002, as cited in de Jong & Kim Berg, 2002) list the stages of problem solving as following: “description of problems and collection of data; problem assessment; intervention planning; intervention; evaluation and follow-up.” According to de Jong and Kim Berg (2002), this approach is “problem-focused” and “past-oriented.” The practitioner is viewed as the expert, whose expertise is considered the main tool for solving the given problem. The client or patient takes little or no part in devising his or her own treatment and intervention plan.³

The solution-building approach contravenes these problem-solving methods. Rather than investigating “what’s wrong,” it explores “what’s wanted” (Warner, 2007). It is future and goal oriented. It aims to empower clients by acknowledging their strengths and resources. Every

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² For many deadly diseases of 19th and 20th centuries such as tuberculosis and cholera, tracing problems to its cause led to understanding and discoveries for preventative measures. Once proven successful, this problem solving method dominated most medical approaches, which in turn influenced various other counselling models (deJong & Kim Berg, 2002).

³ The process of problem solving: A client/ patient gives a detailed description of their problem from which a practitioner makes an assessment and gives a diagnosis based on professional knowledge. The practitioner, then, proceeds to provide an intervention or treatment plan. The treatment is carried out and the practitioner monitors the process until the problem no longer exists (deJong & Kim Berg, 2002).
client is regarded as the expert of his or her own situation and the intervention reflects what is important as well as manageable for clients according to their perspective. The role of the practitioner is changed from that of the expert to that of the facilitator, and this shift inevitably demands an adjustment in the perspective and use of language. As a result, the relationship between clients and the practitioner is transformed to that of a more collaborative nature.

2.3 Solution-Focused Perspectives

Based on the observations and reflections on the sessions conducted at the Milwaukee Brief Family Therapy Center, de Shazer and the team arrived at the following conclusions shown in the table below. These conclusions are the underlying principles and assumptions of the Solution-Focused Brief Therapy that the Solution-Focused practitioner takes to sessions (Szabo & Meier, 2008).

Table 1. Tenets of Solution-Focused Approach

- Client is the expert.
- Client has the experience with the solution.
- Client wants what's best for them.

- Change is inevitable.
- Change is best made in small increments.
- Small changes can lead to a big change.

- Solution is not necessarily directly related to problem.
- Solution-building language is different from that of problem-solving.
2.3.1 Client & Coach

The solution-focused approach makes unconventional assumptions about the clients and the role of the practitioner in a helping conversation. According to de Jong and Berg (2002), “the clients’ frames of references and perceptions about what would be most useful to create more satisfying lives for themselves should count for as much as – if not more than- scientific expertise about problems and solutions.” No one knows about the clients’ worlds better than the clients themselves. No solution will fit perfectly into each client’s situations unless it is tailored to his or her needs and abilities. In order to customize solutions that cater to the uniqueness of each client, the coach must view the clients as the experts of their own lives. This noble perspective is accompanied by other positive assumptions about the clients’ intentions, strengths, and resources; these assumptions are helpful in mobilizing clients to recognize what’s working in their lives and take further action.

The coach, on the other hand, is no longer the expert who prescribes what might be helpful for clients in a single directional manner. Rather, the coach is a guide that explores clients’ strengths and resources in collaboration with clients, putting aside any personal biases or judgments. The coach approaches clients with the most respectful, non-authoritarian disposition at all times, most
often described as the “not-knowing stance.” Warner (2007) states, “adopting a not-knowing posture, one of genuine curiosity toward clients’ successes, strengths, and aspirations instils motivation to change, hope and empowerment.”

The aforementioned assumptions and attitudes create an empathic and collaborative dynamic in the relationship between a client and a coach. This relationship is particularly useful in helping conversations as shown in the study conducted by Asay and Lambert in 1999. According to the study, the four factors that contribute to the success of a session are the client’s resources, the counselling model or technique, feelings of hope and expectancy, and the relationship between the client and the practitioner. The relationship component makes up forty percent of the success factors.

Table 2. Common Factors of Successful Therapeutic Communication (Asay & Lambert, 1999)

2.3.2 Change & Preferred Future

The solution-focused attitude towards change is underwhelming for two reasons. First, the solution-focused approach recognizes that nothing remains constant, and therefore change is inevitable. If change is certain, the solution-building process only needs to make sure that the direction of change is constructive (Jackson & McKergow, 2007). Secondly, the change doesn’t need to be elaborate. The solution-focused approach is influenced by systems theory (de Shazer et al, 2007) that believes that a small change in one part of a system can affect the entire system. For example, a family member’s behaviour affects his/ her interactions with other members of the family, influencing the dynamics of the entire family. Since small changes can lead to big
changes, taking small steps, which are realistic and manageable, towards the clients’ preferred future makes sense.

The solution-focused approach connects the clients’ preferred future and the changes that need to be made in the present by focusing on what’s already working. Heath and Heath (2010) call this “bright spots.” Jerry Sternin, while working for Save the Children in 1990, was left in charge of solving the malnutrition problem among children in Vietnam. He was given six months and limited funds even though the malnutrition problem was more complicated than one could imagine. Malnutrition was symptomatic of poverty, poor hygiene and sanitation, synonymous to no clean water. Sternin’s first step to solving malnutrition in Vietnam was to survey the children in one poverty-stricken village, with the help of local mothers who desperately wanted their kids to be healthy. Sternin, then, looked for “bright spots”: children who were bigger and healthier than the most despite the poor conditions they shared. Studying how these kids were fed revealed the secrets to the mystery. The healthy kids were fed four small meals a day even though villagers typically ate two big meals a day; it was easier for kids to digest small portions of food. The food was much more nutritious - although the moms were unaware of this - because it contained shrimps and crabs, and served with sweet-potato greens. These ingredients, which were easy finds in the village, were neglected because they were considered either adult food or low-class food. This small change in the children’s diet was the first step towards a solution for the nation’s malnutrition problem.4

2.3.3 Solution & Problem

In 1982, a family came to the Milwaukee clinic, and raised twenty-seven different issues with one another during the first session. None of these twenty-seven issues were clearly articulated and de Shazer and his team found it difficult to come up with a suitable intervention that would address all of these issues. In desperation, de Shazer and the team asked the family to look for

things that are “already happening in their lives that they would want to continue to see happen” (de Jong & Kim Berg 2002). The family returned for the second session two weeks later, and claimed that things had improved and they felt that their issues had been resolved. Since the problems were not really explored during the first session, de Shazer and the team concluded that the solution did not originate in understanding the problem. Rather, the problem seemed to resolve itself when the clients focused on what was already working and what they wanted to achieve: the positives and the goals. Focusing on solution-building became “a fast track to problem solving” (Szabo & Meier, 2008).

A problem often feels overwhelming because it seems to be present all the time. However, no problem is present all the time, and the intensity of the problem rarely remains constant. Examining a client's past to look for an absence of a particular problem, as demonstrated in the Vietnam malnutrition story above, or situations when the intensity of the given problem was diminished can be an outlet for creating a possible solution. Regardless of how miniscule it may seem, these small nuggets can initiate a paradigm shift in clients from problems to solutions. Upon recognizing that they have already experienced a bit of the solution, clients realize that the actions they need to take in order to create positive changes are within their grasp. “The solution pre-cursors” become proof of competence and the source of confidence, and the path to the solution seems realistic and manageable.

2.4 Solution-Focused Lexical Choice

Language is a crucial component in solution-building. According to Gergen (1985), “language is not only an expression of what we are thinking about. Through talking and listening, activities that use words, we humans also formulate and create new ideas and make changes” (as cited in Berg & Szabo, 2005). This idea is reflected in the assumption that the language for solution-building is different from the language for problem-solving. It is crucial, therefore, for the

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practitioner whose role is to facilitate the paradigm shift for the clients to employ carefully thought-out and intentional language.

2.4.1 Simple and Powerful Words

The language used by SFBT practitioners for solution-building is surprisingly simple in its outer appearance. Szabo and Kim Berg (2005) advocate the use of simple everyday language, such as those illustrated below, to communicate to clients that they can talk and understand each other.

- The conjunction “and” is used to create agreeability while “but” is avoided to minimize resistance and dispute.
- The words “instead” and “suppose” can be used to shift the client’s focus from current preoccupation, which is assumed to be negative, to preferred future, which is assumed to be positive. i.e. “what do you want instead (of the problem)?, “suppose this wasn’t a problem anymore…”
- “What else?” is a simple question that encourages clients to broaden their perspectives beyond first impression.

The hidden power of these simple everyday words is the presuppositions that are embedded in the language. For example, a question “suppose you were to [make these changes], what difference would it make?” assumes that the client is able to create the changes they want to make and such action will make a difference. Asking “what else?” questions is significantly different from asking “anything else?” questions. The former assumes that there is something else, inviting the client to further explore the situation whereas the latter has a greater chance of inviting a negative response, “no.”

Preserving the original meaning of the words as clients intended them is important in the solution-focused approach. As such, solution-focused practitioners tend to stick to clients’ words instead of paraphrasing or interpreting. Solution-focused practitioners also refrain from giving immediate responses through offering advice, reassurance, or comments that minimize the problem. Instead, a gentle nod, thoughtful gaze, or non-specific responses such as “um hmm” is used to demonstrate to the client that the practitioner is listening and simply absorbing what the
client is saying. Bavelas and de Jong’s recent study (2013) showed that solution-focused therapists preserved clients’ words exactly significantly more than therapists who used different counselling methods, such as cognitive behavioural therapy or motivational interviewing.

2.5 Solution-Focused Questions

The solution-focused model is a strengths-based approach that investigates the clients’ strengths and resources with genuine curiosity. The “not-knowing stance” of the practitioner commands the practitioner’s language to be explorative and tentative in tone, question-oriented in form, and action defining in nature. What does the client want changed? What difference does that make for the client? Has there been a time when this change was present even in small bits? How has the client coped with the problem? What would the client do differently as a result of change? Is it something the client can carry out now despite the presence of the existing problem? These questions investigate the clients’ goals, strengths and resources, as well as possible intervening strategies by exploring the client’s future, the present, and the past. For clients, questions solicit objective perspectives of their situations and increase their motivation to create positive changes. There are five specific types of solution-focused questions: the outcome question, exceptions question, coping question, scaling question, and the relationship question.

2.5.1 Outcome Questions

An outcome question is one that explores the client's desired future, identifying goals and its impact. “What would you like instead of the problem?” immediately shifts the client’s gaze from problem to preferred future. A question that explores a session goal is also a type of an outcome question: “what needs to happen in our session today so that you would, at the end of the session, feel that this was worthwhile?” The question can also be built on supposition. Supposition makes the pictures of the future more vivid and realistic. For example, the session goal question mentioned above could be rephrased as the following; “suppose it’s one hour later,

and we finished our session, and you feel this session was very helpful. What did we do or talk about in our session?” Because events in the past are concrete and definite, the past tense of the question is helpful in creating concrete memory of the preferred future. The “miracle question” is another tool that facilitates clients to experience their preferred future by eliciting details.

Insoo Kim Berg accidentally came across the idea of a miracle when she was working with a client who was having a tremendously difficult time. Her husband was an alcoholic who couldn’t keep a job. Her four sons caused so much trouble at school that she was getting phone calls from the teachers daily. She was tired and worn out from supporting a family on her own that she felt suicide was her only option. In mere desperation and hopelessness the client said, ‘I need a miracle!” (Berg & Szabo, 2005). Picking up on the client’s language, Berg asked what difference a miracle would make. Surprisingly, the client was suddenly able to articulate a list of things she had hoped for: an unimaginable turnaround from a person contemplating a suicide! This is the birth of the miracle question and it has since been shaped and groomed to become an efficient solution-building tool.

2.5.2 Exceptions Questions

No problem exists all the time in constant intensity despite how pervasive and distressing it seems (Warner, 2007). The solution-focused approach examines the client’s past not for the cause of the problem but for the exceptions to the problem. When was the last time the problem was absent or less severe in the client’s life? How were things different? What did the client do differently then? What contributed to these exceptions? What difference did it make for the client? The practitioner puts the client’s past experiences under a microscope to find precursors of success, and highlights them to help the client realize their own strengths and resources. If the exceptions question is asked after the miracle question, the practitioner can ask the exceptions question in reference to the miracle; “when was the most recent time when you remember something happening that was at least a little bit like the miracle?”
2.5.3 Coping Questions

Coping questions are asked to diverge the client's attention away from the negative impacts of their problem. Much like exceptions questions, coping questions survey the client’s past, searching for client-generated strategies to manage the difficulties and pain associated with the client's problem: resilience. This is particularly useful when the client has a difficult time identifying exceptions to their problem. In such instances, the practitioner asks the client, “how have you managed so far despite all the challenges?”, or “what have you found helpful so far?” It is important to establish empathy by acknowledging the client’s struggle and not to undermine the magnitude of the client's problem in their reality. The coping questions, however, place the focus on the client's ability to deal with the problem, with highlighting the client’s resilience and sustainability. The client’s coping strategies can be utilized as some of the most manageable and appropriate solutions for the client.

2.5.4 Scaling Questions

The scaling question is a versatile tool that can explore the preferred future (i.e. outcome question), assess the client’s progress, investigate what has worked, and devise a realistic and manageable strategy in observable behavioural terms (de Shazer et al., 2007). The scale is usually linear and numeric consisting of numbers 1 to 10. However variations can be made depending on the client. For example, an illustration of a ladder or stepping-stones can be used in sessions with little children. The top of the scale represents the client’s preferred future. The question “what is happening when you are at 10 on the scale?” explores the consequences of the miracle in observable details. The question “on the scale of 1 to 10, where are you today?” assesses the client’s present situation according to the client’s perspective. Regardless of the client’s answer, the practitioner looks at the positive contributors. For example, the client may answer that he or she is at 3 on the scale. Instead of analyzing why it’s only at 3, the practitioner asks the client, “why 3, not 2?” This question assumes that something is working positively in the client’s life and the practitioner is focusing on the client’s previous successes and coping strategies. Then the practitioner can turn a scaling question to a future exploring question such as “what is happening when you are at 4?”, or “what needs to happen so that you can move one
step higher on the scale?” The goal is not to arrive at the top of the scale immediately but to make a small step forward. This makes the process of change realistic and manageable.

2.5.5 Relationship Questions

Relationship questions are useful for providing an objective view on the given issue or situation. When focused on the problem, the client’s view narrows and the shift in perspective becomes focused on the negative. In cases with clients in involuntary situations they may be unable to see the matter in views other than their own. However, the clients may develop a greater awareness and understanding of how others may see the situation when a relationship question is asked. I.e. “what does your social worker need to see happen so that she may report to the judge you no longer require counselling?” The relationship question does not interfere with the solution-focused notion of regarding the client as the expert and still allows the practitioner to maintain the “not-knowing” stance. The practitioner can also compliment the client indirectly by asking relationship questions such as “what would your best friend say you are good at?”, or “what would your husband say he appreciates about you?”

SFBT language is not merely a tool that transmits information between two people; it is a tool for intervention (de Shazer et al 2007, as cited in Smock et al, 2013). According to de Shazer and Berg, clients are four times as likely to engage in a ‘solution-building conversation’ when practitioners facilitate sessions with three specific types of behavior: asking questions that elicit aspects that are helpful in solution-building; asking questions that seek details; and offering verbal rewards by either giving direct compliments or asking questions that compliment the clients indirectly (as cited in Bannik, 2007). The solution-focused questions effectively investigate “what” and “how” of the client's preferred future as well as success precursors in the client's past, validating the client’s strengths and resources and connecting them to what the client can do in the present.
2.6 Summary

The solution-focused approach exhibits characteristics that are useful for application in music performance studies. First of all, the goal-oriented nature of the model has proven to dramatically reduce the amount of time spent in the overall process of creating change. This characteristic is directly related to effectiveness and efficiency, both of which are highly regarded in music discipline. Secondly, SFBT is client-centered. Similar to music education projects that promote student-centered learning environments in classroom setting\(^7\), SFBT considers client agency as a key element in creating positive changes that are meaningful and long lasting. The fact that the SFBT tools have proven to be effective in traditionally expert to non-expert dyads forebodes well for applications in private music studies. Lastly, SFBT improves self-perception, as noticeable in the areas of motivation, confidence, and competence. Contributing factors are: empathic relationship between the coach and the client; amplification of the client’s strengths and resources; compliments that validate and encourage the client; and endorsement of small step change. These characteristics of SFBT seem highly applicable and beneficial to music discipline, especially in performance studies.

\(^7\) ArtsPropel in Pittsburgh (Gray, 1993) and the Comprehensive Music through Performance (CMP) in Wisconsin (Sindberg, 2009)
Chapter 3

3 Literature Review

This chapter is organized in three sections. The first section presents the extant literature on teaching philosophies and practices for music education, specifically in an applied music lesson setting. The literature surveyed in the first section describes the climate of learning environments in conventional private music lessons, mostly influenced by teacher behavior, as well as students’ perception of the lessons. Collectively, the literature in this section seems to reveal the dominant beliefs of effective teaching practice in private music education.

The second section of the chapter surveys pedagogical research conducted in efforts to explore student-centered learning in North America. In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the recognition of the value of student-centered learning across various disciplines. In music education, however, the majority of effort for creating student-centered learning environments is found in larger group learning environments, such as classroom, orchestra or band, and chamber music. Creating student-centered learning in private music education is an area that may benefit from further explorations and in-depth studies.

The third section of the chapter provides a survey of recent research involving solution-focused approach. The purpose of this section is to familiarize readers, the majority of whom are anticipated to be musicians, with applications of solution-focused practice in educational settings, as well as related research. Successful applications of solution-focused practice in other various disciplines serve as models for the proposed research in applied private music education.
3.1 Beliefs and Values of Private Music Teaching Practice

The literature on effective teaching practice in one-on-one instruction for music performance is limited in its scope and volume. Many researchers, including Duke, Flowers, Gaunt, Kennell, Madsen, Siebnaler, Simmons, Wolfe, and Yarsborough (Gaunt, 2008) as well as Schmidt (Fredrikson, 2007) have commented on the fact that the literature on effective teaching practice for private instrument or voice studies is still in its infancy. Brand (1992) credits the juvenile status of the literature to “the nature of private instruction, focus of skill-based instruction, and lack of training in research methodologies” (Fredrikson, 2007). In recent years, however, researchers have noticed the growing volume of the literature pertaining to effective teaching practice and teacher training for private music instruction (Fredrikson, 2007; Gaunt, 2008), indicating that these topics are of great interest and concern to many scholars.

The extant literature about effective teaching practice has examined a wide variety of teaching aspects in efforts to understand the attributes of effective teaching practice in private music education settings. According to Fredrikson (2007), numerous investigations have studied the attributes and variables of teaching effectiveness in the applied music lesson setting: student satisfaction (Rife, Shnek, Luby, & Lapidus, 2001), student motivation and practice (Hurley, 1995; Madsen, 2004; McPherson, 2000/2001; Pitts, Davidson, & McPherson, 2000), adult students and motivation (Williams, 2002), and students’ perception on effective teaching (Abeles, Goffi, & Levasseur, 1992; Mills, 2002) are examples of some of the attributes and variables that have been explored in the recent years.

At a first glance, the increasing attempts to incorporate students’ perspectives in these research studies appear to have made an improvement in the diversity of focus in understanding effective teaching practice within the private music studio. Earlier, in Duke’s comprehensive survey of the literature published in the 1972-1997 period (1999/2000), only 13 out of 86 publications Duke included in his survey, examined student response and achievements in relation to teacher behaviour. The focus of studies that explore effectiveness in teaching, evidently, was primarily centered upon the teachers. Even in the cases where the relationship between teacher behaviour
and student achievement were observed, Duke claimed that the data was not strong enough to generate significant conclusions.

Perhaps, one might argue that this statistical data of the literature reflects the prevalent values and beliefs upheld by the population in music performance discipline during this period, and the research focus, since then, has moved from teacher to student. A second look at recent studies on effective teaching such as those listed by Fredrikson, however, would indicate that there is an underlying assumption that teachers’ behaviour has greater influence to shape the students’ learning process and the outcome even though the amount of time students spend with their private instructors are minimal. Private lessons typically range from half an hour to an hour and half at a time, once a week in most cases, and sometimes two to three times a week.

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky rationalized this assumption with ‘the concept of scaffolding,’ in which he claimed that learners achieve higher levels of competence when they are supported by another person with expertise than when they are on their own (as cited in Parkes, & Wexler, 2012). Perhaps this theory, along with corresponding research that has demonstrated that teachers’ expertise is directly related to students’ learning (Connelly, Clandinin, & He, 1997; Shulman, 1986, 1987, as cited in Sindberg, 2007), informs the general notion that “if we improve the teaching, then student learning will improve as well” (Sweeny, 2011). Under this lens, it is understandable that educators who are passionate about effective education may feel the urge to further study teachers’ behaviors and attitudes, while neglecting those of students.

Actual teaching practice, as observed in numerous studies, describes and confirms aforementioned beliefs and assumptions well. Duke’s study on teacher-student behavior in Suzuki string lessons (1999) demonstrates that teacher verbalization dominates the class and student verbalization is minimal. While the statistics show decrease in teacher verbalization and increase in student involvement in Duke and Prickett’s earlier study (1987), it is still difficult to
determine whether the difference between the 1987 and 1999 studies is a result of the changing trend in educational practice or the difference in individual teaching philosophies.

A more recent study by Duke and Simmons’ offers a closer look into teachers’ participation in private lessons through a narrative account. In 2006, Duke and Simmons examined video recordings of three American artist-pedagogues who received the 2002-2003 Distinguished Teaching Award by the Center for Music Learning at The University of Texas in Austin: pianist Nelita True and oboist Richard Killmer on faculty at the Eastman School of Music, and violist Donald McInnes on faculty at the University of Southern California. The researchers identified 19 common teaching behaviours from these three teachers, despite the difference in their personality, instrument, and teaching style, and organized the elements in three categories: goal and expectation, effecting change, and conveying information.

Table 3. 19 Elements of Effective Teaching (Duke & Simmons, 2006)^8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals and Expectations</th>
<th>1. Repertoire assigned is well within their technical capabilities; no student is struggling with the notes of the piece.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>2. Teachers have a clear auditory image of the piece that guides their judgment about the music.</td>
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<td>3. Teachers demand a consistent standard of sound quality from their students.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Teachers select lesson targets (i.e. proximal performance goals) that are technically or musically important.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>5. Lesson targets positioned at a level of difficulty that is close enough to the student’s current skill level that the targets are achievable in the short term and the change is audible to the student in the moment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>6. The teachers clearly remember students’ work in the past lessons and frequently draw comparisons between present and past, pointing out both positive and negative differences.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effecting Change</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7. Pieces are performed from beginning to end; in this sense, the lessons are like performances, with instantaneous transitions into performance character; nearly all playing is judged by a high standard, “as if we are performing.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8. In general, the course of the music directs the lesson; errors in student performance elicit stops.</td>
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<td>9. The teachers are tenacious in working to accomplish lesson targets, having students repeat target passages until performance is accurate.</td>
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<td>10. Any flaws in fundamental technique are immediately addressed; no performance trials with incorrect technique are allowed to continue.</td>
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<td>11. Lessons proceed at an intense, rapid pace.</td>
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<td>12. The pace of the lessons is interrupted from time to time with what seems to be “intuitively timed” breaks, during</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>which the teachers give an extended demonstrations or tell a story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The teachers permit students to make interpretive choices in the performance of repertoire, but only among a limited range of options that are circumscribed by the teacher; students are permitted no choices regarding technique.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Conveying Information Teachers make very fine discriminations about student performances; these are consistently articulated to the student, so that the student learns to make the same discriminations independently.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Performance technique is described in term of how the physical motion affects the sound.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Technical feedback is given in terms of creating an interpretive effect.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Negative feedback is clear, pointed, frequent, and directed at very specific aspects of performance, especially the musical effects created.</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Positive feedback is infrequent, but of high magnitude.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Teachers play examples from students’ repertoire to demonstrate important points; the teacher’s modeling is exquisite in every respect.</td>
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</table>
It is understood that the researchers’ intention was to investigate the teachers’ contribution to the lessons; student responses and progress were not the focus of examination. As such, the study makes very little reference to students’ contribution to and responses in the lessons. Even so, the common teaching elements that the researchers have identified among the three renowned teachers reveal that the teachers, who have been recognized as exemplary figures in the discipline, operate with substantial authority that shapes and influences the course of student’s learning by making constant assessments and interventions.

Parkes and Wexler (2012) followed Duke and Simmon’s study in an attempt to explore the common elements of effective applied music teaching principles within a different population. Parkes and Wexler replicated the methodology of Duke and Simmons’ 2006 research as closely as possible. While the teachers who participated in the study were in similar pedagogical positions as those in Duke and Simmon’s study, the students whose lessons were investigated were less advanced. As a result, Parkes and Wexler identified the following 7 additional elements from their study.

1. Student struggles with repertoire or notes in performance.
2. Teacher accepts flaws in student performance.
3. Short student performance of one phrase or short section.
4. Side coaching where the teacher assists the performance as it occurs.
5. Teacher demonstrations of correct rhythm/notes.
6. Gestural conveying of information such as conducting or clapping time/beat.
7. Teacher practice discussion of/demonstration of how to practice.

Furthermore, Parkes and Wexler claimed that a few elements identified by Duke and Simmons were not applicable for the student population in their research; the pace and intensity of the lessons and types of verbal feedback were different in the two studies.

Perhaps, an observation can be made that teachers’ behavior is also informed by students’ conduct. As shown in Parkes and Wexler’s study, if a student comes to lesson unprepared, the teacher needs to operate with flexibility that accommodates the student’s proficiency at the time.
This collaborative and reciprocal nature of teacher-student relationship is demonstrated in studies that investigate student variables such as age and competence.

Siebenaler (1997) examined the teacher-student relationship within a private piano lesson environment. Comparisons were made between young students and adult students. Siebenaler noticed the difference in learning activities as well as teacher participation in both groups; there was a higher percentage of teacher talk and demonstration for adult students, whereas with young children, a higher percentage of clap-and-sing activities were observed. Colprit (2000) and Duke (1999) both studied the student-teacher relationship in Suzuki method string lessons. Duke’s observation that advanced students beyond secondary school level received more negative feedback than positive feedback corresponds with Colprit’s observation that a high percentage of younger students received praise during lessons. These studies seem to indicate that private music teachers, even in traditional environments, consider age and level when determining an appropriate approach.

3.2 Student-Centered Learning

There are several different perspectives that inform educational practice. Student-centered learning is primarily informed by constructivist perspective, which believes that students’ development comes after experience, and that learning is enhanced by active engagement (Blair, 2009; Brown, 2008). Students’ perception and experience, therefore, becomes the premise upon which educational practice is constructed. This means that teachers’ decisions are no longer based solely on their expertise, but in consultation with how students are doing (Sweeny, 2011).

One of the educational elements that constructivist perspective has greatly influenced is assessment. The traditional view of assessing students’ learning has been summative; it occurs at the end of an instructional unit. A midterm, a term paper, or a graduation recital is a good
example of summative assessment. Summative assessments are most often accompanied by grades, based on a point system of preset standards. Summative assessment, while providing a valuable reference to standardized norms, has several pitfalls, according to Scott (2012). First of all, summative assessments do not reflect or measure students’ individual growth or achievements; the assessment fails to be meaningful on a personal level. In addition, summative assessments are also perceived as an end to learning, as opposed to being a stepping-stone to future learning; it doesn’t necessarily ensure or connect to learners’ future development.

An assessment procedure that allows collaboration between teachers and students is formative assessment. “The goal of formative assessment is to monitor student learning to provide ongoing feedback that can be used by instructors to improve their teaching and by students to improve their learning. Formative assessments help students to identify their strengths and weaknesses and target areas that need work, as well as help faculty recognize where students are struggling and address the problems immediately.”

Formative assessment activities that allow students to demonstrate their learning include drawing a map of ideas, writing a summary for lecture, and utilizing portfolio in which students can collect their works-in-progress. These activities allow students and teachers to consult each other throughout the learning process. Teachers have the opportunity to observe students’ understanding on a given topic without giving a grade or comparing it with other students’ work.

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9 retrieved from: www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/basics/formative-summative.html (n.d.)
10 retrieved from: www.cmu.edu/teaching/assessment/basics/formative-summative.html (n.d.)
11 Portfolio is a collection of students’ works in progress, which offers an overview of the development and progress of students’ work.
And students have the opportunity to receive constructive feedback so they can revise their work before the final submission. The evaluation on individual learning process is more meaningful for each student and has lasting impact for continual learning (Scott, 2012).

In music education, the influence of the aforementioned perspectives and practice can be found in various educational methods. Early childhood music education methods such as Kodaly, Eurhythmics, and MusikGarten are examples of experiential learning in which young children learn musical concepts through various games and singing activities.

Arts PROPEL, an arts education reform project between Harvard Project Zero, the Educational Testing Service, and the Pittsburgh Public Schools, presents important artistic concepts through the use of “domain projects” which guide students’ learning through three stages: production, perception, and reflection (Gardner, 1989). In music discipline, the production stage involves music making activities such as performing or creating music. Once students have experienced the music, activities that explore students’ work follow: the perception stage. Students’ reflection on their learning concludes the domain project. The hands-on experience of these models represents constructivist perspectives.

Comprehensive Musicianship through Performance (CMP) and the Three Artistic Processes are good examples of a music education approach in public schools that facilitate teacher-student collaboration throughout the learning process (Brown, 2008; Sindberg, 2007; Scott, 2012). The commonalities between the three models – ArtsPROPEL, CMP, and the Three Artistic Processes - are the taxonomy of learning activities for holistic development in the artistic disciplines, intentional inclusion of active student participation in all stages of instruction, and the use of formative assessments through students’ self-reflection.
In CMP, which began as a project in public school board in Wisconsin in 1970’s and has since been regarded as a successful teaching method as well as philosophy (Sindberg, 2007), teachers are given tools to include student participation for decision making and evaluation throughout the entire learning process. The five components of the model are selection, analysis, outcome, strategies, and assessment. Students are directly involved in the process of choosing repertoire to perform or study because they are more likely to be motivated to learn about the repertoire of their interest. Analysis of the chosen repertoire is facilitated through in-depth discussion, led by the students. From the discussion, students may choose learning goals that would be meaningful for them. An example of an outcome statement might be, “we want to know learn more about the composer,” or, “by next week, we want to know how many keys changes happen in this piece.” The students can then, again through discussion, come up with a strategy to meet their goals. Assessment is done throughout the learning process where student reflection is an integral part. (Brown, 2008; Sindberg, 2007)

Similar to Arts PROPEL mentioned above, the Three Artistic Processes developed by Scott Shuler (2011) advocate music education that is not focused on any one aspect of music, such as instrument-specific skills or general knowledge. Instead, the Three Artistic Processes—creating, performing, responding—attempts to deliver a holistic experience of music as an inseparable entity. The model assists teachers to facilitate a learning environment in which students make musical decisions, assess their own learning in relation to an appropriate quality standard, diagnose areas of weakness and identify strategies to improve their own work. Shuler claims that utilizing the three artistic processes develops skills in creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration. Several components of each artistic process resonate with that of solution-building conversations. For example, “beginning with an end in mind” is one of the key solution-building perspectives for goal setting. This parallels the first stage of Shuler’s artistic processes: imagining and selecting. Similarly, self-reflection and evaluation are crucial parts of both solution-building and artistic processes. The constituents of the three processes are outlined in the table below. Shuler’s Three Artistic Processes is used as a framework for data analysis in chapter 8 of this paper.
Table 4. Artistic Processes (Shuler, 2011)\(^{12}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Creating</th>
<th>Performing</th>
<th>Responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imagining</td>
<td>Selecting</td>
<td>Selecting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developing idea(s)</td>
<td>choosing an artistic</td>
<td>choosing an artistic</td>
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<td>(concepts, ideas,</td>
<td>work (repertoire) to</td>
<td>work and/or</td>
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<td>feelings)</td>
<td>perform</td>
<td>performance to</td>
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<td>experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Analyzing</td>
<td>Analyzing</td>
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<tr>
<td>experimenting,</td>
<td>analyzing structure</td>
<td>seeing/ hearing and</td>
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<tr>
<td>researching, and</td>
<td>and researching</td>
<td>comprehending visual/</td>
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<tr>
<td>designing ways of</td>
<td>background of work</td>
<td>aural features of</td>
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<td>presenting the</td>
<td></td>
<td>the work and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>idea(s) through</td>
<td></td>
<td>performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>artistic materials</td>
<td></td>
<td>mentally assembling</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>what is seen/ heard</td>
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<td>into a whole</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making, Evaluating,</td>
<td>Interpreting</td>
<td>Interpreting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Refining</td>
<td>developing a personal</td>
<td>developing a personal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>interpretation of</td>
<td>response to</td>
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<td>work (an idea of its</td>
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<td>and performer(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rehearsing,</td>
<td>Evaluating,</td>
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<td>Refining</td>
<td>Evaluating,</td>
<td>evaluating quality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Refining</td>
<td>of artistic work and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>its performance</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

artistic work
evaluating quality and refining successive versions (“drafts”) of the work
to life through performance
evaluating quality and refining successive version of the performance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presenting</th>
<th>Presenting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>presenting in performance or exhibiting completed work for others</td>
<td>Performing works for others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many scholars, including Burton (1990), Garofalo (1983), Labuta (1997), and Reimer (2000), have commented on the prevailing emphasis to develop technical skills as a key component of music education, especially in instrument rehearsals, (as cited in Sindberg, 2007). These scholars, however, agree that an educational approach that reaches beyond the acquisition of technical proficiency has a lasting effect on students. Educational models such as Arts PROPEL, CMP, and the Three Artistic Processes combine several different aspects of experiencing and interacting with music in order that students enjoy the lasting impact of their music education.

Unfortunately, the student-centered approach demonstrated in these models have been designed and delivered exclusively in classroom settings. For advanced performance studies, the concept of student-centered learning still remains relatively fresh. There are efforts underway, however, for more performance-focused studies, such as in band (Block, 2011), chamber music (Hanzlik, 2010), and piano pedagogy (Elgersma, 2012).
3.3 Solution-Focused Brief Therapy

3.3.1 SFBT Application in Schools

The application of the Solution-Focused Brief Therapy has been widely spread in many disciplines and environments outside of counseling and helping professions. The success of its application in general educational settings seems to indicate that an investigation and appraisal of the solution-focused approach in music education, and piano pedagogy in particular, would be a valuable endeavour.

Education

In education, SFBT principles and approaches have been adapted for students with learning difficulties, teachers and staff working with high-risk students, and for promoting and creating safe school environments. An example of SFBT application within a non-solution-focused environment is Working On What Works. Working On What Works (WOWW) is an intervention program designed for problem students and their teachers in inner city schools of Chicago (Kelly, & Bluestone-Miller, 2009). WOWW, was able to improve the behaviour of problem students as well as positively affect the dynamics of the relationships between students and their teachers (de Jong & Kim Berg, 2008).

Another example of SFBT intervention that affected the entire school and its population can be found in Austin, Texas. Gondola Garza Independence High School is an alternative high school that has undergone a complete transformation to become a Solution-Focused school for not only the students but teachers and other staff (Kelly, Kim & Franklin, 2011). More than 80% of their student population are at-risk students. However, the success rate of these students graduating from high school and pursuing a post-secondary education has dramatically improved after the implementation of SFBT practice.
In a recent research study conducted by graduate students at McGill University, elementary students with reading difficulty were divided into two groups, one of which received solution-focused intervention, while the other received extra traditional academic assistance. The group working with SFBT improved in reading performance and increased their level of confidence over the group receiving extra academic assistance (Daki & Savage, 2010). In these examples, the key elements in creating positive change were the focus on each student's strengths and resources, recognizing exceptions to problems and celebrating small successes. This fostered a positive attitude and greater confidence, which also increased the likelihood of achieving the desired outcome.

Safe School Environment

Bullying has been considered a serious problem that threatens the safety of students, and therefore requires immediate and effective interventions. However, the more traditional problem-focused interventions have seldom proven successful as it is impossible for teachers to supervise every interaction of the children outside the classrooms. Furthermore, once the problem is formally addressed, it often creates tension among parents, teachers, and school administrators. Instead of concentrating on the problem itself, a shift of focus towards creating safe school environments has been much more effective in minimizing the problem of bullying (Young, 2009). A good example of solution-focused intervention for creating safe and enjoyable school environment for the bullied student without identifying the bully and the victim and penalizing the negative behaviour is found in Hull, England (DeJong & Kim Berg, 2008).

3.3.2 SFBT Related Research

In order to claim that solution-focused practice is an evidence-based practice, especially since Solution-Focused Brief Therapy is an empirically designed counseling model, scientific data based on a quantitative research that support the founding theories and the efficacy of the model seems necessary. The following studies add to the growing list of quantitative research that support the validity of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy.
SFBT and Affect Study

Anthony M. Grant and Sean A. O’Connor from the School of Psychology at the University of Sydney conducted a comparative study on the efficacy of solution-focused questions vs. problem-focused questions. Two self-coaching questionnaires were used in two separate sessions: the questionnaire for the first session elicited problem-focused thinking whereas the questionnaire for the second session, which took place a week after the first session, directed the participants’ attention towards the solution.

In each session, the participants completed a set of measurements before and after the session to appraise positive and negative emotions, confidence in solving the problem, and sense of competence in understanding and solving their problems. The pre-coaching measures did not show any significant differences between the two sessions. The measurements for the goal approach, which measured the sense of competence, increased after completing the questionnaire in both the problem-focused and the solution-focused sessions. However, the increase was notably greater in the solution-focused group. The measurements for negative emotions were greatly reduced after the session in both the problem-focused and the solution-focused sessions with no significant differences between the two sessions. However, the measurements for positive emotions showed that the solution-focused session was significantly more successful in increasing the positive emotions. The measurements for understanding the nature of the problem showed negligible difference in both sessions. Surprisingly, the problem-focused questionnaire that asked the participants to reflect on the problem did not increase the participants’ understanding of the nature of the problem. Furthermore, “there was no significant relationship between understanding the nature of the problem and goal progression, suggesting that an understanding the nature of the problem is not necessary for goal progression” (Grant & O’Connor, 2010).

Microanalysis
Microanalysis is “the close examination of the moment-by moment communicative action sequences” (Bavelas & Tomori, 2007). A team of researchers led by Janet Bavelas at the University of Victoria conducted a study using microanalysis that compared Rogerian “client-centered or non-directive” therapy and Solution-Focused Brief Therapy. The language of the therapists was analyzed in observable details in each of the teaching videos by Carl Rogers, Nathaniel Raskin, Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, by examining the first fifty verbal expressions and responses, also known as utterances.

First, the research identified the therapists’ utterance as either questions or formulations. Questions seek either more information, clarification, or confirmation from the client. Formulations refer to verbal communication that either summarizes, paraphrases or reflects on the client’s language. Secondly, the content of the therapists’ utterances was analyzed. The purpose of the research was to determine if the content of these two therapies differed from one another and whether or not the content of the therapy was positive, negative or neutral.

The result showed that “the two approaches differed in their use of formulations versus questions” (Bavelas & Tomori, 2007). Carl Rogers and Nathaniel Raskin, the client-centered therapists who aimed to remain non-directive and neutral in the sessions, used predominantly formulations in their communications with the clients. The solution-focused therapists, Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg, “used an equal amount of formulations and questions (Bavelas & Tomori, 2007). In Rogers and Raskin’s sessions, the therapists language was predominantly negative. In de Shazer and Berg’s sessions, the utterances were significantly more positive. From these findings, Bavelas and Tomori concluded that “the possibility of positive or negative input from the therapist is always present, regardless of case details, and it is the therapist's choice that determines which direction the therapy will go in” (2007).
Chapter 4

4 Methodology

4.1 Pilot Study

Two pilot studies were conducted to test the feasibility of the research topic. The structure and design of these two pilot studies have been the basis of the current research discussed in this paper. I will provide a brief summary of the two pilot studies to provide readers with relevant background information.

The first pilot study was conducted with two DMA students at the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto, in the manner of SFBT. As in typical Solution-Focused Brief Therapy intervention, each participant received two coaching sessions. The initial session was devoted to establishing an empathic relationship between the researcher and the participant, allowing the participant to articulate their goals, highlighting the participant's strengths and devising a realistic strategy to positively enhance the subject matter. The follow up session took place approximately one week after the initial session and explored any positive changes the participants experienced after the initial session.

Both participants were preparing for upcoming recitals. The first participant was concerned that she didn’t have enough time to practice solo repertoire while pursuing a career in chamber music. She felt that she was inefficient with her time and was unhappy with how she managed her practice. Solution-focused questions helped her to articulate the times she felt she was efficient in time management and was satisfied with her practice. Based on this information, she made a practice plan for herself for when she was on the road, traveling for concerts. She recognized and utilized the factors that would keep her accountable to her plan, and she decided on small self-rewards to commend her efforts. When she came back for the follow-up session,
she expressed joy as she found herself much closer to where she wanted to be in working towards her solo recital.

The second participant was concerned with being able to maintain undisturbed awareness while under performance pressure. The first session was invested in exploring exceptions to her problem, when she was able to enjoy undisturbed awareness and its contributors. When she was stuck for answers, SFBT questions allowed her to explore other perspectives on the matter. In the follow-up session, she commented that the initial session really challenged her to find answers for herself because she was placed in the expert’s position.

The second pilot study was conducted with six Master’s level pianists in a performance class format. An information meeting was held to introduce SFBT and the design of the performance classes; the classes were to be treated as a platform in which the students could showcase their weekly work, and experience solution-focused reflection on their progress. The participants decided on the lengths and frequency of the sessions: six sessions, every other week for an hour. No expert advice or critiques were given. Instead, the participants in the class were guided to ask the performer solution-focused questions to help her reflect on the positive aspects of the previous week’s practice, and to plan out the following week.

Other group activities facilitated in class included exercises in giving compliments – such as “the resource gossip” designed by Björn Johansson (Röhrig & Clarke, 2008), and working on the “I am great” book (Haesun Moon, personal communication, 2008), which was a compilation of personal success and achievement stories, as well as compliments received from others. The group generated much support and enthusiasm for each other, and reported an increase in confidence as a group. Each participant found different aspects of the group sessions helpful; some enjoyed the more casual and relaxing performance environments while others enjoyed the exercises that helped them articulate their practice plans until their recital.
4.2 Qualitative Paradigm

One of the key criteria in designing the research methodology for this study was to formulate a procedure that recognizes and accommodates the diversity in individual participants while observing the phenomenological impact of the research: supplementing private lessons with solution-focused coaching. Qualitative research methodologies deemed most appropriate in investigating answers to the aforementioned research questions.

According to Marshall and Rossman (1989), “qualitative research begins with real-world observations that may serve as motivation for developing personal theory, leading to the exploration of related theory and literature” (as cited in Hanzlik, 2010, p.82). My personal experience and experimentation with the solution-focused approach in my own studio - in lessons with my students and in my own practice - has led to a strong conviction that a formal study in application of solution-focused approach in music study may offer valuable insights to developing independent musicians.

4.3 Research Method

I considered several different frameworks for the research design: narrative inquiry, participatory action research, and case study.

Before the research began, I as a teacher and a student had identified a common challenge most music students experience at one point or another in their academic development: how to practise well. My own “lived experience” provided the context for this research. I expected that students participating in the research would also have stories to tell of their “lived experience” about practising from which I could collect valuable data and expand the horizon of my understanding. In this perspective, narrative inquiry seemed to fit the bill. However, in-depth observation into students’ lives outside of the study setting was unrealistic, and I found it challenging to present a
holistic picture of the participating students’ “meaning making process” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004) from the type of data I would collect.

I considered Participatory Action Research (PAR) as another possible research method because I recognized that I, along with the students who would participate in the research, belonged to a community that has shared interests. “PAR seeks to understand and improve the world by changing it. At its heart is collective, self reflective inquiry that researchers and participants undertake, so they can understand and improve upon the practices in which they participate and the situations in which they find themselves” (Baum et al, 2006). Improving the efficacy of one’s practice and dealing with performance issues are two of the most common concerns among music students. To illustrate, when I proposed to conduct a study that may improve the efficacy and productivity of practice, many students showed an interest in the study; an overwhelming number of twenty-four students attended the information session on a cold winter day half paralyzed in a massive snowstorm. This confirmed my belief that music students studying performance took their practice very seriously and were eager to make improvements in their practice: a shared interest in the community. Unlike most research that employed PAR, however, the primary focus of the study was the impact of solution-focused intervention on individual level rather than societal.

Case study, according to Yin (2014), is an appropriate research method for “situations when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions is being asked about a contemporary set of events over which a researcher has little or no control” (p.14). My proposed research meets these criteria; my research questions are centered around how the solution-focused approach would compliment the traditional apprenticeship culture in performance studies. The process of maturing as an independent musician is an on-going process for the students and me; and I, as a researcher, have little control over the development of participating students.
For the scope of this paper, an in-depth study of a smaller population seemed more realistic. Even though eighteen students initially participated - of whom ten have completed all the research components - two cases that strongly demonstrated active but different applications of solution-focused approach were selected from the entire pool of participants to be presented in a ‘multiple case studies’ (Yin, 2014) model. The two cases were selected based on the number of individual coaching sessions the students received, the verbal and written response that communicated active personal application of solution-focused approach in their practice, and the scores from the pre/post research surveys. The students’ cases are preceded by my “self-narrative vignettes” to provide context for this research (Kennedy-Lewis, 2012).

The use of pre/post-research surveys collected data on students’ perception regarding their level of motivation, confidence, and competence among other factors. The surveys provided quantitative data from the research, albeit somewhat subjective and relative. One can argue that the quantitative data in this research qualifies for a mixed methodology. However, the quantitative data is not as robust as the qualitative data collected from this research, and presented only as supplementary and reference information to the qualitative research findings.

4.4 Target Research Participants

The target participants were advanced music students at the undergraduate and graduate university levels. For this reason, the search for participants was limited to the students majoring, or planning to major, in performance at the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto. Some of the first or second years students were not yet enrolled in full time performance programs. Students in these cases demonstrated a strong desire to be enrolled in the full time performance program the following year.
4.5 Participant Recruitment

Several methods of recruitment were employed: a call for participation via email was sent to the entire student body studying performance at the Faculty of Music, University of Toronto; the entire roster of applied music teachers at the Faculty were contacted by email to inform their students about the research; and an information session was conducted to provide the scope of research to those interested in participating in the study. The email text used for recruitment can be found in the Appendix A.

4.6 Participants

Eighteen participants initially joined the study. The participants were comprised of two doctoral students, five masters students, and eleven undergraduate students. Of the eleven undergraduate students, five were freshmen, two were sophomores, three were juniors, and one was a senior. Since SFBT takes a futuristic approach and focuses on constructing the desired future more than analyzing the influences of the past events and problems, the process of constructing participants’ future was the primary interest of this research. Therefore, the involuntary variables such as participants’ age, gender, and ethnic backgrounds were not examined in this paper. All participants signed a consent form for confidentiality and release of videography collected from the research. All eighteen participating students completed the pre-research survey. Five participants withdrew from the study after the reading week, which marked the median of the term; three participants submitted a formal written request to withdraw stating that they couldn’t meet the time commitment required for the study as the end of the term approached. Two participants withdrew without submitting a formal request; there were more than three unaccounted absences in the second half of the study period for these two participants.

I was informed after the research that the two students became ill during the term and could not manage regular attendance. Thirteen participants remained till the end of the study, but only ten completed the post-research survey. A possible explanation for the decreased number of students who participated in the post-research survey is that the surveys were distributed during the final exam period, and students, who were asked to complete them at their convenience, did not consider it a priority.
4.7 Research Design

The formal part of the study was conducted from January 2013 to April 2013 through the winter term of the academic year. The study included two forms of intervention based on the structure of the pilot studies: individual coaching sessions and group performance classes. The research attempted to model the solution-focused approach in its content as well as delivery. Thus, the idea of co-construction was very important. Students were viewed as collaborators and co-creators of the research rather than participants of the research. Therefore, students had a lot of freedom to shape the study to accommodate their individual needs: freedom to participate in as little or as many individual coaching sessions after two mandatory sessions; freedom to choose topics for discussion in both individual sessions and in group meetings; and mid-term feedback incorporated in the research activities in the second half of the term (i.e. outreach concerts as preparatory activities before students’ upcoming performance such as juries and recitals).

Two individual coaching sessions as well as participation in weekly group sessions were compulsory elements of the research. Students received a minimum of two individual coaching sessions using the solution-focused approach. Students were encouraged to continue with individual coaching as often as they felt it was helpful and necessary throughout the term. Students were given a practice brochure\textsuperscript{13} that contained solution-focused questions for each stage of practice: goal setting, strategizing, and evaluating. The brochure was designed to encourage students to continue the solution-building conversation on their own. However, no homework or assignments were given using the practice brochures.

Students were put in small groups of 4-6 people and each group met weekly in a performance class setting. The activities for the performance class varied and always reflected what the students wanted to do in the class. The main activity, however, was “mock” performances that

\textsuperscript{13} See Appendix E.
provided students with opportunities to play their works in progress - even if they were not memorized and only presented as excerpts. The participants would receive indirect feedback through reflective conversations facilitated by members of the group using solution-focused questions.

The concept and tools of the solution-focused approach were introduced to students through the lived experience; the researcher who operated as the coach demonstrated solution-focused language and perspectives without explaining or teaching in lecture in order that students naturally engage in the solution-building conversation and immerse in the experience. Coaching materials used in individual session such as the practice brochure designed for this study or coaching cards designed by some of the leading institutes in solution-focused coaching (coaching cards by SolutionSurfers, Switzerland; SCORE cards and Optimism cards by Brief Academy, Singapore) fortified the presentation of solution-focused language and perspectives to students.

4.8 Data Collection

The data chapters begin with my personal experience of being a music student and a solution-focused researcher. My experience provides the context for this research and shapes the research questions and design. Personal recollection and journals are two primary sources of qualitative data for the chapter on my experience.

For the participants, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. However, the main body of data is qualitative. Creswell (2009) identified four basic types of tools to collect qualitative data: observation, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials. In this research, videography was used as the primary method to collect qualitative data from private interviews, conducted in the format of individual coaching sessions, as well as the group meetings, conducted in the format of performance classes. Video recordings were made using an iPhone, which were then transferred to a secure external hard drive and transcribed.
Field notes, researcher’s journals, as well as the email correspondence with students were secondary methods of data collection. Field notes were composed during the sessions, and entries in the researcher’s journal were written after the completion of each session. The summary of each individual coaching session was sent to students via email upon requests. Occasionally, students emailed the researcher to report their progress during the week. These email correspondences provided valuable additional data from the participants.

Quantitative data was collected through pre/post-research surveys that examined students’ perception throughout the process. The collected data provided subjective measurements on students’ motivation, self-efficacy, competence, lesson preparedness, and clarity of goals as well as practice strategy. While the quantitative data collected through the surveys were neither robust enough to make strong claims nor objective enough to make valid comparisons, it did offer grounds to either support or challenge the observations drawn from the qualitative data.

4.9 Data Presentation

Considering the explorative and descriptive nature of the study (Yin, 2014), a narrative approach seemed appropriate to present the research data. Narrative portraits of the two cases selected from the study were composed by the researcher, then reviewed by the participating students for verification. Such process increases accuracy in the data presentation as well as relevance in the data interpretation (Maxwell, 2005, as cited in Hanzlik, 2010). The students’ feedback was incorporated into the revision of the narrative portraits.

4.10 Data Interpretation

In general, researchers agree that interpretation and analysis method for qualitative data can take various shapes and forms and are not limited to existing possibilities (Creswell, 2009; Denzin &
Interpreting case study data, in particular, involves “playing with the data and searching for promising patterns, insights, or concepts” (Yin, 2014).

Interpreting the research experience of two different individuals posed an interesting challenge. No two things were alike; personality, education background, goals, and needs. And neither were their processes and stories. As a result, the interpretation of data took different approaches for each case presented in this paper. For the first case, a “general inductive approach” was used; and for the second case, Three Artistic Processes (Shuler, 2011) and Bloom’s Taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) were used as interpretive frameworks.

A general inductive approach “primarily use detailed readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by an evaluator or researcher” (Thomson, 2006). In contrast to deductive analysis in which the researcher approaches the data with a preset theory or hypothesis, inductive analysis begins as an exploration without such theory or hypothesis. Therefore the inductive analysis, which has been described as a “goal-free” approach (Scriven, 1991, as cited in Thomson, 2006) because theory can “emerge” from raw data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, as cited in Thomson, 2006), seemed an appropriate approach to interpreting the data of this study.

Initially, interpreting the second case also started as an inductive analysis. Unfortunately, no clear discoveries were made even after several readings of the transcripts, and a new attempt was made with an analysis framework. Considering that the development of the independent learner is central to the research interest, Shuler’s Three Artistic Processes (2011) – a student-centered model for comprehensive student music education- was considered. Shuler claims that the Three Artistic Process facilitates creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. The data was re-examined using the four learning outcomes mentioned above. In examining factors of critical thinking, Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy was used.
Bloom’s taxonomy is “a framework that classifies statements of what we expect or intend students to learn as a result of instruction” (Krathwohl, 2002). The revised taxonomy (Anderson, Krathwohl, et al, 2001, as cited in Krathwohl, 2002) describes the hierarchical cognitive process and outcome as students internalize the following learning behaviours: remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating. According to the revised taxonomy, the highest educational objective is achieved when students are able to synthesize the information they received.

In this study, the transcripts of the individual coaching sessions proved to be the most important source of data as the students’ words and stories were preserved without alterations or modifications. The researcher read through the transcripts multiple times. In the first case study, the transcripts were read repeatedly until several themes emerged. In the second case study, the transcripts were read in attempts to find supporting evidence that demonstrated positive impact of solution-focused application as well as characteristics of independent learning. Significant utterances or passages that bestowed meaning to the student’s perception and behavior were categorized according the emerging themes or the classifications according to the chosen analytical frameworks. The process was repeated by a secondary researcher for triangulation\(^{14}\) in order to increase the validity of the interpretation (Maxwell, 2005, as cited in Hanzlik, 2010). Then the primary researcher read the transcripts again with a specific focus to formulate patterns from the select themes.

The explorative nature of the research questions warranted an explorative approach for interpretation. For this reason, two cases studies were approached as separate and individual; no direct comparisons were made between the cases. Instead, data was examined and interpreted using a set of themes and patterns unique to each case, and no generalizing theory was formed from studying the data.

\(^{14}\)“Triangulation is the combination of two or more data sources, investigators, methodologic approaches, theoretical perspectives” (Denzin, 1970; Kimchi et al., 1991, as cited in Thurmond, 2001). The process of triangulation increases the validity of data interpretation.
4.11 Limitations

There are a couple of factors that may have influenced the outcome of the study. The first is the framing of expectation during the process of recruitment. Some students who were referred to the study through recommendation of teachers or colleagues may have had an expectation that shaped and influenced their experience. The general impression I had from the majority of the first year undergraduate students was that they joined the study to “get extra help.” This brings me to the second limitation: it was extremely difficult for the researcher, as an advanced music student and teacher herself, to remain a “non-expert” while interacting with the students, especially when the students expected to received expert advice. While solution-focused questions were the main tools for the study, the researcher was not always successful in employing “the non-expert stance” of the solution-focused approach at all times.
Chapter 5

5 Portrait of a Researcher

5.1 My experience: The Beginning

There are many adjectives and nouns that I can use to describe who I am and what I do. In the
music world, I have most frequently been labeled as a pianist, student, and a teacher. I could
also add ‘a choir conductor’ to the list. My musical journey began out of rivalry when I was five
years old in an attempt to keep my pride as ‘an older sister’ before my cousin who was only a
few months younger than I. She had started taking piano lessons, and I, being ‘older,’ thought I
should be able to do anything she was able to do.

I enjoyed music very much even though I hated practising. I never felt I knew what to do in my
practice. I remember being in sixth grade so clearly when I was prescribed by my teacher to
spend an hour in practice everyday. I struggled through the hour even though I was working on
five different pieces of repertoire; every minute seemed agonizingly long. I made frequent trips
to the bathroom and kitchen trying to shorten the amount of time I had to sit in front of the piano.

Quitting, however, was not an option as I had promised my parents that I would stick to piano
lessons at least for ten years. I discovered that people around me began to see me as “the girl
who played the piano”, and I, too, began to identify myself as “the girl who played the piano.”
Once piano had become a part of my identity, I felt destined to pursue higher learning in piano
performance.

My journey in music has deviated from the original course I set as a child to become a concert
pianist. Yet my enjoyment of music remains strong as I have established a new destination for
myself: piano pedagogy and solution-focused coaching. I feel very grateful for the love and
support of my parents and my teachers that have brought me to where I am. And I also feel very fortunate that I came upon Solution-Focused Brief Therapy because it has renewed my passion for music.

5.2 Solution-Focused Piano Lessons

My encounter with Solution-Focus Brief Therapy left me wondering about the applicability of its concepts and tools in music education. At the time, I was teaching piano privately in my home and at a local school. While I enjoyed teaching very much, there were unavoidable challenges. Often, young students, despite obvious talents and potential they possessed, seemed to lack motivation and discipline. Adult students, while full of motivation, often lacked confidence.

Could the questions I found so helpful in creating manageable plans also help my young students formulate realistic goals and routines for piano practice? Would the adult student, who obviously had a wealth of experience and knowledge, experience increase in confidence when the questions explore past successes that highlight their strengths and resources? Would my students feel empowered enough to tackle difficult learning tasks on their own?

I began to experiment in my lessons. I seemed to have more success with younger students than those who had been playing the piano for some time. The following is an excerpt from a lesson with a seven-year old beginner student who was learning to play “Bingo” on the piano.

Student: (plays and makes mistakes in a few places)

Me: Ok. On a scale on 1 to 10, where at 10, I’ll say this was good and we can move on to the next piece, and 0 is the opposite, where was that?

Student: Hmm. 7.

Me: Great. What makes it 7? What did you do well already?
Student: Well, I played almost all the right notes. I think the rhythm was good too.

Me: Great. What else?

Student: (points to a section in the music) I played it hands together here well.

Me: I see. Now, what would you do differently when you are at 8 on the scale?

Student: I think I would play with the right fingerings. (points to another section on the music) And I won’t take time in this part.

Me: I see. Would you like to give it another try and see if we can make it an 8?

Student: Yes. (plays again, this time without making any mistakes)

Me: Ok. Was that an 8?

Student: (shakes her head) No, that was a 10.

Me: Wow. Would you like to move on to a new piece then?

Student: No. I’m going to try again and make it 11.

Me: (puzzled) 11? What happens at 11?

Student: I’m going to play it super fast!

I was fascinated that my expertise as a piano teacher was not necessary for my student to make objective evaluation of her own performance and decide on next steps in her learning. The student seemed more engaged now that she had an opportunity to articulate her thoughts. Furthermore, the student seemed to unleash her playful and creative side in the lesson. My assumptions that solution-focused approach would be applicable and beneficial in pedagogical settings had been confirmed in my interaction with a seven-year old student.

5.3 Solution-Focused Audition Preparation

I always knew that the road to excellence was synonymous to stretching one’s abilities. But playing an audition for a doctoral program after a five-year hiatus added another dimension to my understanding of persistence and perseverance. From a technical perspective, I didn’t have the agility and power in my fingers that I once had when I was actively playing. I was also out
of shape mentally as I had not had the opportunity to put myself under stressful situations such as an audition. Perhaps the biggest challenge I faced was that I did not have teachers who guided me through the process; I was responsible for not only the musical decisions, but also how I managed my time and how I coped with stress.

Needless to say, I was beyond feeling nervous. Luckily, I had a solution-focused intervention. In the first weekend of February 2010, I attended a two-day workshop, “Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: Train the Trainer”, facilitated by Peter Szabo, founder and director of Solution Surfers\(^\text{15}\), at the Faculty of Social Work (FSW) at the University of Toronto. By this time, I had already attended the requisite number of Solution-Focused workshops to obtain the certificate from the FSW. However, I couldn’t pass up an opportunity to watch an internationally acclaimed solution-focused coach in action. After all, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy was the main reason I wanted to go back to school - to find a way to apply it to the world of music. I hoped to become the catalyst to introduce and foster solution-focused perspective and practice among musicians, professionals and students alike, in both teaching and learning. I vaguely thought going back to school would help me find a path to establish this as well as the credential to build my career in between the two worlds I had come to know. So with this big picture in mind, I bravely gave up two days of practice less than two weeks before my audition in order to attend the workshop.

At the end of a highly interactive and engaging first day of the workshop, our imagination was put to test. Peter Szabo casually, but in serious tone, announced to the class that technicians had come to work on our classroom door while we were out on our lunch break and installed a miracle shower on our door. He took a small piece of masking tape, walked over to the classroom door, and taped it on the top of the doorframe as if to mark this “shower.” Apparently, this miracle shower was invisible but when you walk through the door, it would

\(^{15}\) An international training organization based in Lucern. http://www.solutionsurfers.com/
silently wash away all the problems that you came wearing to class. The homework was to notice small positive differences this shower brings for the rest of the day.

As people in the class grabbed their belongings and headed for the door, I noticed that it was happening all too fast. I needed time to think about what I wanted washed away, and I needed this experience to be more real in order for me to sincerely believe it, so that I can warrant positive changes – or at least so I thought.

I had a lesson scheduled with the head of the piano department that evening, and I knew I wouldn’t be able to access a practice room before the lesson. Rather than to fret, which would have been my normal course of action in similar situations, I decided to stay behind to take time and really articulate my thoughts and savour “the miracle shower” experience. I somehow believed this was necessary if I wanted to maximize the benefits of this simple exercise. I thought it would be most helpful for me to think about my upcoming DMA (Doctor of Musical Arts) audition since it was the most significant event in my life at the time and I was feeling very nervous and anxious. I decided the first step to taking this miracle shower was to identify “the dirt” I wanted washed away: fears and doubts. The following is extracted from the notebook I used that day. (The content in parenthesis is implied).

Fears
• I would fail.
• I’d make a fool out of myself.
• I’d be embarrassed – they would think it’s ridiculous of me to have applied or even to think that I’m fit for the program.
• People I care about would be disappointed in me (if I don’t make it).
• The talent people said I had was in fact not as great as I thought they had said.
• I’d be permanently labeled a 2nd rate pianist. (Perhaps even ) 2nd rate child?

Doubts
• I had too long of a break.
• I (have always) had problems with memory.
• I never matured to my full potential -> I’m too old to impress an audition panel with just my musicality.

Once I was done articulating my doubts and fears, I wrote what would be different if this “dirt” on me was completely washed away. “I’d have more confidence in myself, and in dealing with stressful situations,” I thought to myself. Then, I imagined my “cleaner-self” emerging, freed from all the doubts and fears that had previously made me apprehensive and even fearful of what’s to come.

I wrote a counter-statement for each of the entries on the first page, under fears and doubts, reassessing my world under a positive and fearless lens. Each entry began with a description of my new world, followed by fresh interpretation - what it revealed about my situation, who I was, and what I had done. I titled this page “the jewel underneath the mud”. (The content in parenthesis is implied).

The Jewel Underneath the Mud
• I have done my best under the given situation to a point that my back is suffering, fingertips blistered, nailed cracked. -> I am strong: willful, determined, motivated, and disciplined.
• I did manage to add 3 more pieces (to my audition repertoires since the time I learned of the changes in the audition requirements). -> I am very capable.
• The acting chair of the department thinks I can do it. -> I have already displayed my ability/ capability to someone who is heading the department.
• My parents have seen how much I have worked, and the physical pain I am under as a result of my rigorous practice (regimen), and that I’ve persisted despite the pain. They have always been extremely supportive and have always thought the best of us. -> (They will love me regardless of the result).
• There’s always someone better than you. My goal, in applying for DMA, is to find a channel to link teaching and Solution-Focused. I can do this with or without the DMA degree, and there are many teachers who are great educators who do not have a doctorate degree. -> It’s not the most devastating thing that can happen to me (even if I didn’t make it).
• I made a surprising comeback in a very short amount of time. And things were more accessible than I imagined it would be.
• I’ve worked on memorizing differently this time. And even with (memory) lapses, I’ve always pulled it together.
• I’m definitely (more) mature – in setting goals/ directions, the way I tackle pieces in practice, strategies I come up with to ensure success.

I read these statements several times, very slowly. As I imagined my new self, I remembered a TV show I used to watch as a kid: Family Matters. A science genius kid, Steve Urkel, - who is socially inept and tragically “uncool” - is hopelessly in love with his neighbour and schoolmate, Laura. To win the heart of his beloved, Steve designs and builds a machine that transforms him to become a new, highly fashionable, and attractive self, Stefan. Steve walks into the machine, presses the button that would create the magic, and the process begins. All the lights on the machine light up and nervously flicker. Anticipation builds as the needle on the geek-o-meter laboriously moves up from Steve’s picture to Stefan’s picture, until finally you hear the sound of a bell, “ding!,” signaling the arrival of handsome and cool Stefan.

In my mind, “the miracle shower”, in essence, was the same transformation machine Steve Urkel had built. The only difference is that the transformation is internal: it happens in my mind and therefore is invisible. I decided that an elevator would be a more adequate copy of Steve Urkel’s transformation machine. For one, taking an elevator requires more time in transition than walking through a door: I can use this time to imagine the gauge needle climbing up to my new self. And two, the elevator door opens to the sound of a bell upon the arrival to my destination floor: “ding!,” I would walk out of the elevator, tossing my long hair back as often done in shampoo commercials, feeling light and uplifted.

I read my notes again, and when I felt ready to undergo this highly anticipated transformation, I took off the piece of masking tape Peter Szabo put on the doorframe and walked over to the elevator. Taking a deep breath, I entered the elevator, put the piece of masking tape inside the elevator, and pressed for ground floor.
When the elevator door opened on the ground floor only a few seconds later, I felt strangely rejuvenated and ready to take on the world. I didn’t toss my hair as I had imagined, but I was nonetheless smiling just like models on commercials. I was glad the building seemed to be empty and no one spotted me smiling to myself as if I had lost my mind. I was only too eager to see how the rest of my day would unfold: *would the transformation make any difference?; what would I notice?; how long would it last?* The following is extracted from the notes I wrote that night as part of my homework. (The content in parenthesis is implied).

How did I notice the change?

In how I responded to someone else’s playing – (while I was waiting outside the teacher’s studio, I inevitably heard people practising or playing in their lesson)

Last week:
- Listening to someone playing in his/her lesson made me feel insecure, unsure, and nervous.

Today:
- I was intrigued by what they were playing, and I wanted to learn the pieces. I imagined myself playing it in concert. I really enjoyed some of the musical expressions I noticed in their playing.
- I was playing a guessing game about what this student was playing, and asked the teacher what she was playing when she opened the door. She told me it was Scriabin no.2, and quickly asked in a surprised and disapproving tone, “You don’t know it?” I have heard of the piece a few times but didn’t know it well enough to recognize it. (Rather than to feel inept and inadequate), I just brushed it off, and didn’t let it bother me.
- I had trouble focusing while I played and made a few mistakes – some very unexpected ones. But instead of beating myself, I found myself saying, “now I know to go home and work on these sections.”
- When the teacher made negative comments about certain things, I was able to take it at face value, without feeling insecure or fearful.
- I found myself saying something about how nervous I was and how I was going to have panic attacks. And as I was saying these things, I realized I really didn’t mean them. I was saying them out of a habit – of being a very concerned (and humble) student. I told myself that I could do it, and without wagering too much. Anything
The timing of events was impeccable. I had arranged a couple of lessons with the acting head of the piano department at the time. I had studied with her in my undergraduate years, and I wanted her input even though I was afraid that she would be disappointed with the lack of improvements in my playing, perhaps even deterioration, from the time I left her wings. The fact that I had been reclusive from serious music making and music studies for five years was constantly looming over my head, and I felt self-conscious and inadequate at the smallest signs of other people’s dedication and excellence: *what was I doing all these years?; it’s too late to go back.*

Despite the overwhelming doubts and fears, I knew I needed some guidance if I wanted to have a better chance at making the audition, and I knew I could always count on my teacher for help. When I had finally convinced myself, three weeks before the audition, I conjured up some courage to pick up the phone to arrange a lesson.

Waiting for my lesson in the hallway saturated by the sound of fierce practising of other students was one of the most intimidating experience I had to endure in recent years. *Listen to these people play. It’s amazing! Are you sure you belong here? Did you even really study here before? Is this really what you used to do everyday?* A string of doubts and fears seemed to attack me in silent whisper. Even though I had waited for my lessons in similar surroundings week after week for almost twenty years, the scene in which I found myself felt so foreign to me, and I knew I had become an outsider and a stranger to this world. Nevertheless, my teacher welcomed me with open arms and we had a great time catching up as well as playing through a few audition repertoire. She told me to come back for another lesson so she can hear the rest of the audition repertoire. My mind raced through all the things I should do before I came back for the next lesson. I left the studio feeling both elated and nervous.
The second lesson was scheduled a week later, after a full day of Peter Szabo’s workshop. As I entered the music building, having cleansed myself with a miracle shower, I didn’t notice much change from the previous week. The building was still the same, and the people in it were still fiercely playing, penetrating the walls and doors with enormously powerful sound and brilliant technique. Then I noticed a small difference. Somehow, I found myself appreciating the sound coming from behind the doors and walls. Wow, that sounds amazing! I wonder which piece that is. I would love to play it myself. As it is described in my notebook from that day, the rest of the evening continued resonate in this tone, and I was able to maintain positive attitude.

When I shared this experience with the class the next day, I felt a great sense of achievement even though I had yet to play my audition. I knew playing a successful concert or audition depended on the performer’s mental strengths and preparation as much as the performer’s physical ability to execute flawlessly on the instrument. With the miracle shower exercise, I experienced a paradigm shift from being focused on the negative thoughts to noticing the positive and hopeful aspects of my world. The miracle shower had showered me with mental preparation for the audition.

Having experienced such a powerful paradigm shift, I was propelled to set out on a journey to research the possibility of solution-focused application for others in music performance and education: a journey that revealed intimate details of music students’ struggles and dreams. The experience was truly eye-opening and inspiring and I am once again grateful for the participants’ generosity in sharing their time and their stories.
Chapter 6

6 Portrait of a Builder

6.1 Meet Annie

“Well, I am an older student,” said Annie as we began our first meeting. I quickly looked at the form for contact information and Annie was listed as a first year undergraduate student studying clarinet performance. “I transferred from… I already have a bachelor’s [degree],” Annie continued to explain that she had previously majored in engineering and had worked as a project manager for a software company for several years before deciding to return to university to study music. I was intrigued and secretly glad that the study was made available for both undergraduate and graduate students; the open invitation had clearly attracted people with diverse backgrounds.

B: Wow, that’s amazing. You’ve made me really curious. What made you decide to pursue music?

A: Well, I thought about it. This was a long-term plan. It took me three years from the time I decided that I really wanted to give this a try. You know, it’s one of those things, you are either going to succeed or fail. But I’m going to die knowing that I tried. I asked my teacher whether I should do this or not, and a lot of people said it was never the decision that they made, it happened. They just did it and pursued it. They never made the decision. But for me, it was never like that. The decision was made for me that I wasn’t going to go into music.

B: I see. But you played [music.]

A: Yeah. I played it. Always, through high school.

B: And your parents didn’t want you to do it?

A: No they didn’t want me to do it. Well, they wouldn’t say, “don’t go into music,” but you know, you need a lot of support for that. Now that I think about it, my high school wasn’t so good for music, and you would have to have taken a lot of private lessons, and that wasn’t possible. That’s when I had just come to Canada as well, and I was just trying to learn English and pass courses. Music wasn’t my priority.
Distant memories of being in high school arose within me. I, too, had come to Canada as I was starting high school. My priorities were similar to Annie’s: learn English, catch up, and earn necessary credits to go to university. Although I struggled with the decision of whether or not I should continue pursuing music studies in university, I had full support from my parents. They made countless sacrifices so that nothing would interrupt my piano lessons and other music related activities. How did Annie manage to make such a bold decision without support from her parents?

Annie described the turning point in her perspectives that eventually led her to choose to start over in music: an indisputably deliberate and courageous move. Annie’s husband, Chris, whom Annie met during the freshman year in the engineering program, inspired Annie to follow her passion. Chris himself had started out as an engineering student. However, he didn’t enjoy engineering as much as he thought he would and decided to transfer to another department to study philosophy. Annie was shocked at how easily Chris made the ‘switch.’ Annie wasn’t particularly happy in the engineering program but it didn’t occur to her that switching her major was a possibility; she didn’t feel comfortable with the idea at all. “What is the prospect of that in your life?” Annie would ask. Chris would answer, “I don’t know. I don’t care. I’m going to figure this out.” Annie was flabbergasted. To her surprise, there were others among their friends who made the ‘switch’ and changed their major. Annie was quite shocked to witness such boldness in so many people. Despite Annie’s skepticism and worries, Annie began to see that the people who were doing what they wanted to do seemed much happier. Looking at Chris, Annie began to wonder, ‘why am I so miserable and why is he so happy?’ In due time, Annie graduated with an engineering degree and entered the workforce as was expected of her. Chris also graduated but wanted to go back to school to study law and become a lawyer. Annie married Chris and began to support him while he was studying law. When he graduated from the law school and began working, Annie was able to concentrate on pursuing her musical dreams.
6.2 An Engineer’s Dilemma

I was fascinated with Annie’s remarkable passion for music, insights, and courage. Like most adult learners I’ve worked with in the past, Annie seemed quite serious about making the commitment to participate in the study. My experience with adult learners taught me that adult learners were often self-motivated and therefore pleasant to work with; unlike many young children taking music lessons, no adult was forced into taking lessons. Annie had even emailed me after attending the info session to make sure I included her in the study. I wondered what attracted her to the study so strongly.

B: Why did you decide to participate in the study?

A: Well, I was an engineer. So I have a very analytical mind when it comes to everything. But my approach to music, especially practising, has not been as analytical as I wanted it to be. I feel like I’m not thinking about things when I’m practising. I’m just doing things over and over, and I’m not efficient with my time at all. That was the reason why I came to the [info] session [for the research.]

B: I see. OK.

A: And when I heard your presentation on how to think about problems, I realized that when it comes to music, everything I’ve learned about problem solving goes out the window. I never take that sort of approach.

At the information session, Annie found the concept of solution building fascinating. She realized it was different from the problem solving approach with which she was familiar. She also found the fact that positive approach was used in sport psychology interesting and appealing, drawing parallels between the objectives of musicians’ practice and athletes’ training: to foster and maximize one’s talent, to develop the ability to stay focused for lengthy periods, and to perform optimally under stressful situations. Annie found herself get too anxious when she performed even if she managed to play decently in her practice.

B: Ok. Let’s imagine that we finished the study and it’s April. Everything is done, and we look back. And you think to yourself, “wow, that was rather helpful. It was a good
investment of my time.” In order for you to be able to say that about our time together, what needs to happen?

A: I would say two things. One is that I want to be more result-oriented. I don’t plan that well. I want to be able to sit down with some piece that I’ve never played and say, “this is where I am and this is where I want to be in a few weeks.” Everyday, I am just planning for that day. I am not looking ahead in terms of my piece. I just don’t have that kind of planning at all in my system.

B: Not even in engineering?
A: You see, that’s the problem. There are a lot of skills I acquired from engineering but I haven’t been able to put them into music yet.

B: Interesting! But it’s in you.
A: Yeah, I know. That’s the crazy part. I’m very analytical outside of music but as soon as I pick up my instrument, somehow it seems like I’ve lost… (giggles) So I never plan. So better planning would definitely be helpful. My second problem is that I’m never ready. It’s never a finished product that I can say, “I’m done with this piece.” I’m never fully confident that I can play the piece when I get on stage. Or for me to be fully confident on stage, I need many many hours of practice, and I can never estimate how many hours I need to practise for me to get there. That’s the one thing about engineering that makes it very easy to plan. I know exactly how much time it would take me to get things done.

Creating a plan to maximize her time and practice seemed to be Annie’s top priority. She claimed that she only planned for each day and she didn’t have a clear idea of what she wanted to accomplish in a week or a month. Annie definitely was aware of her final deadlines; certain pieces needed to be ready for performance classes or juries. But she didn’t feel she knew the interim steps to prepare herself for the important performances, and claimed that she had never heard of backwards planning until she attended the information session for this study.

**Solution Precursors**

I decided to focus on one thing at a time: planning. Since Annie viewed herself an analytical person in areas outside of music, I inquired if it was the same case with planning.
B: You are definitely analytical when it comes to engineering. Does that mean you are also a good planner when it comes to engineering?

A: Yes. Yes.

B: Ok. So tell me a little bit about that. What makes you a good planner there? What does a good planner do? Or what do you do? You’re a good planner when it comes to engineering.

A: Hmm. What did I do? (pause) I had deadlines.

B: Are they big deadlines?

A: Yup. Going live. Like in three months.

B: So it’s far away in the future and it’s very important. It’s heavy in importance.

A: Yes.

B: What else?

A: So what I did was, every week, on Mondays… I was actually a project manager. (chuckles) On Mondays, I send out an email. Well, I have to analyze what has to be done that week to be able to send out that email. We had one big deadline and some smaller ones. That’s what the upper management gave me: “here’s your final deadline, and here’s your small deadline.” And every week, I would say, “well, if I want to make that deadline..”

B: Who was this? Who gave you the final deadline?

A: The managers. The upper managers.

B: Ah I see. Sorry for interrupting. Please keep going.

A: (looks sheepish and amused) This is so interesting. So every week, I would think about what everyone needs to do and write an email about what needs to be accomplished by the end of the week.

B: So you plan and notify other people.

A: Yes. And on Friday, we have a meeting schedule to check if this happened.

B: So it’s an evaluation of some sort?

A: Yes. It’s an evaluation and also if something didn’t get done, then that changes the plan for the following week. (throwing hands in the air, displays disbelief) But I would never do that for music, it’s funny! Now that I’m talking to you about it, it’s like, “why wouldn’t I do that?”
We continued our conversation about Annie’s skills and experience relevant to planning in her previous job. Annie realized that she had many different types of deadlines: the project deadline, smaller interim deadlines, and weekly deadlines. The upper management created the project deadline and interim deadlines. Annie, as a project manager, would set weekly deadlines in order to meet the upper management’s deadlines. Her weekly routine included creating a plan for the week and emailing it out to her team on Monday mornings, and meeting with her team on Fridays to evaluate and discuss everyone’s progress. Annie would modify the plans for the following week based on the reports given in the Friday meetings.

In music, Annie was also given big deadlines similar to those given by the upper management in the company where she used to work before returning to school: juries and other class performances. However, creating a plan with smaller deadlines for herself in music was challenging because she did not know how much time to invest in practising in order to feel confident when performing. Annie claimed that she often felt she was not ready for performances, and lacked the experience to properly estimate how much practice would warrant confidence. The only time she felt satisfied with her performance was when she had invested an obscene amount of time preparing for the performance; she couldn’t afford to practise this way every time.

I sensed a lot of frustration; our conversation was definitely centered on what Annie perceived as her problems, and Annie’s comments were quite negative and condemning. I felt the need to change the tone of our conversation by shifting our gaze to something more positive. Since Annie mentioned that the only time she felt confident on stage was when she over-practised, I assumed that she had experienced being confident on stage at least once and asked Annie when the last time that she felt good on stage was even if it took a bit of over-practising.

B: Let me ask you. When was this time you over-prepared but at least felt confident on stage?
A: So this was last term and it was chamber music performance. When we were playing and rehearsing, I just couldn’t play. It would be my part and I would just be like, I don’t know… maybe anxiety.

B: Was the music in front of you?

A: Yeah, the music was in front of me. I started to play and then I just played something wrong. And I know I played this a million and ten times correctly at home. But for me to do everything correctly in that split second, [I guess] it meant I needed to play it more on my own.

B: Perhaps, but perhaps not. What was different about that surrounding? Wherever you played your chamber music, what’s different about that place compared to the place you practise?

A: For one, it’s with others. And so it never stops.

B: Right, you can’t fix it [as you go.]

A: No, you can’t fix it. And you are blending with others. And that always is another feeling for me. Maybe this comes very easy to other people but as soon as I hear others, I’m tentative to what they are playing. I want my music to blend with what they are playing. So I cannot just play my part without listening to them. So I’m listening to others.

B: So while you are listening, you lose yourself?

A: Exactly! I lose myself, my own… ummm (pause)

B: Ok. Alright.

A: So this is what I found out: I should probably play half an hour to an hour on my own, with the recording of other people’s playing.

B: Awesome! That’s a great idea!

A: I’ve been doing that.

B: (surprised) You’ve been doing it?

A: I started doing that, but not at the beginning. I had already spent like ten hours on my own, and thought this is not working. So I started listening to recordings and playing with recordings. So that helped a lot.

B: Wow.

A: And when I had rehearsals with others, I recorded that and played with that recording.

B: So recording your own rehearsals? Then you get to listen to what you are playing as well as what others are playing.
A: Yes, yes. And you know, I can hear myself coming in a bar late, and I can figure out where I’m coming in late.

Initially, I found it interesting as well as confusing that Annie’s responses to my probing of past successes were still centered around the negatives: things that she struggled with. But as Annie continued to describe the challenges of playing in a chamber ensemble, she seemed to remember what she did to cope with such difficulties: to listen to and practise with recordings, both professional and of her own rehearsals. I complimented her on her strategy. Annie exclaimed chuckling, “but that should be in my planning!”

The planning part of our first meeting ended with a decision that Annie was going to start each week by creating a weekly plan based on her teacher’s comments in her lesson on Mondays. This plan would be a guideline that she could follow to ensure her practice would be focused and deliberate, without mindlessly repeating whatever she played. The plan would set a maximum amount of time for each piece or a task, so she could cover multiple pieces of repertoire and assignments everyday. Annie had three pieces to play in the jury, two of which she had learned in the first semester. While she had planned to focus on her new repertoire this semester, she wanted to maintain a certain level of playing for her old pieces. After discussing the debt snowball strategy – a proven strategy to reduce and pay off multiple loans by focusing on paying off the smallest loan while paying the minimum payments for the other loans - in our meeting, Annie decided that she was going to dedicate a small portion of her practice to work on the difficult passages from the two repertoires she learned in the first semester while devoting most of practice to learning the new repertoire.

Annie found our first meeting very helpful because it gave her a chance to reflect back on her planning strategies she had used in engineering. She thought our session would be more productive if she came more prepared. She was looking forward to group meetings because she wanted to get feedback from her colleagues to see if what she was doing was realistic in the eyes of her peers.
6.3 Sharpening the Ax

Annie came back a week later and she seemed to have kept her word; she came prepared to the meeting, having experimented with what we had talked about in our previous session.

A: Things are good. I started making plans for myself, weekly. I actually have a very detailed schedule.

B: Oh? May I see?

A: It’s kind of just ‘do half an hour of this, do half an hour of that.’ I haven’t been able to stick to the idea of snowball, just because of promises I made. For example, I told my teacher that I’m going to play this piece this week, and I just had to do it. So I think next week, it’s going to go better in terms of scheduling because these things will be out of the way. (looking for her schedule on her iPad) It’s very simple. So there, I have an email sent to myself. This is week 3, week 3 of school.

Annie had started sending herself an email at the beginning of the week with a detailed schedule for her practice; she had divided her tasks into half an hour segments. She used her iPad, which automatically synchronized her practice schedule with her calendar that contained all the activities and deadlines for school. Annie knew her priorities for each day. When she scanned the agenda for the day in the morning, she claimed she didn’t feel as overwhelmed as she used to feel. Annie regretted not having written a summary of what she did manage to practise everyday because she sometimes fell behind her schedule and she wanted to know how much work she was actually getting done. For example, she would plan to practise a piece for half an hour, but after having spent 30 minutes, she realized she either wanted or needed to work on the same piece for another 10-15 minutes. If she worked for an extra 10-15 minutes, she inevitably ran out of time and couldn’t finish everything on her practice list.

“Maybe it’s a little too detailed,” Annie wondered. I wondered if she needed a buffer in between pieces. How would Annie feel about inserting a constructive buffer in her plan? I shared the
Irish legend of two lumberjacks to demonstrate the positive effects of taking small breaks strategically.

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*The Tale of Two Lumberjacks*¹⁶

Once upon a time there were two lumberjacks, Lars and Sven. Each of them was the best lumberjack in their camp and every year, the two camps would meet and challenge one another to determine who was the best lumberjack of all.

For the past several years, the contest came down to the two finalists, Lars and Sven. As in past contests, this year, their score was tied after the tree-climbing and log-rolling. All that was left was the wood-chopping contest.

Lars was young and strong. His blond hair flowed past his shoulders and his muscles bulged from his flannel shirt. Sven, the 10-year undefeated champion, was in stark contrast to Lars. His hair was gray now and his flannel shirt hung loosely over his once-proud physique. Lars was certain it was his time to win. “The champion has grown old and weak,” he said to himself, “and I have trained all year. I am younger, much stronger and I can chop for hours.”

And so the chopping began. Sure enough, Lars chopped and chopped and chopped. Sven was chopping, too, but every half hour or so he would go and sit on a tree stump with his axe across his lap, sweating profusely and breathing heavily.

“Ah-hah!!” Lars exclaimed, “I was right. He is old and tired and weak.” His excitement gave him even more energy and he chopped even faster.

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¹⁶ This version was taken from [https://www.facebook.com/notes/the-mankind-project/a-tale-of-two-lumberjacks/475953171562](https://www.facebook.com/notes/the-mankind-project/a-tale-of-two-lumberjacks/475953171562) on Sept. 13th, 2013.
Finally, the time elapsed and Lars gleefully threw his arms up into the air in victory. The announcer then said, “And the winner is …. SVEN, our still-undefeated champion!”

Lars was stunned and looked in disbelief at the pile of wood Sven had chopped. Sure enough, Sven’s woodpile was much higher.

“But how did you do it?” Lars asked Sven, “Every time I looked over, you were sitting on the stump, resting.”

“I wasn’t resting,” replied Sven.

“What, then, were you doing?” asked Lars, exasperated.

“I was sharpening my axe.

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“What would be sharpening ax for you?” I asked. If Annie could schedule small pockets of time in between her pieces, she could use this time to recharge herself or practise for extra few minutes without jeopardizing the next practice segment. “Working on my sound, I think,” said Annie after pondering for a little. Annie found playing long tones - holding a note for a long time – to be very meditative and relaxing, claiming it to be the most enjoyable part of her day. She felt that the long tone exercises had similar effects to breathing in yoga; it cleared your mind, and it helped with focus. In addition, working on her tone would have long term benefits to her playing.

Annie used to work on the long tone exercises daily before she came to school but had not been able to keep up with them lately. The challenge was to find time for everything. Annie complained that the majority of her time was spent in various classes and rehearsals; this was not going to change. How, then, did Annie manage to practise last week despite her busy schedule?
B: um, on your schedule for last week, when did it work the best? Was there a day when you thought to yourself, “If I could do this everyday, I’d be happy.” Was there a day like that?

A: hmm.. I think the days that I have more time to practise, it worked better. So Monday and Wednesday. And today ..

B: Friday?

A: Yeah. Friday is typically when I have an easier load. Generally I have less (sic) things to do. I have a three-hour window to play the clarinet so even if I play for an hour and half and take a break, I’m not falling behind the schedule. So I have a bigger buffer. On Tuesdays and Thursdays, I really don’t have that much time. From the morning, I’m stressed and I have limited chunks of time to practise.

B: I see. You have less time on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

A: Another problem I have is three-hour rehearsals. Then I get tired and I wouldn’t able to practice.

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Annie did not have an orchestra rehearsal, but instead had a three-hour window for her practice; she definitely could afford to take breaks. On Tuesdays and Thursdays when she had orchestra rehearsals for three hours each time, she lacked time as well as mental and physical energy to practise her solo repertoire. “It ruins two days out of the week,” Annie explained how intense orchestra rehearsals were. At the beginning of the year when she wasn’t used to playing in a rehearsal for three hours, she had to go home and nap after the rehearsal because she felt too exhausted to do anything else at school. Since then, she had learned to pace herself through the rehearsal, but it was still difficult to manage a productive and satisfying practice session for her own repertoire on Tuesdays and Thursdays. If she practised before the rehearsal, her stamina would be jeopardized and she would not be able to play through the entire three hours at the rehearsal. If she waited until after the rehearsal, she had no time or energy left to work on her solo repertoires.

B: So, what can we do on Tuesdays and Thursdays?

A: If I normally work on a piece for an hour, I do half an hour on those days. But the ideal scenario would be for me to get to school by seven am when it opens, so I can practise
early in the morning and have at least two hours of break before the rehearsal. Even if I have free time, I should just do other homework and not play.

B: Wow, what does it mean for you?
A: Getting Up? I need to be up by 6:15.

Getting up at 6:15 didn’t seem to be a big challenge for Annie since she considered herself a morning person and her alarm was already set to go off at 6:15 am. She hasn’t been getting up when the alarm went off on Tuesdays, however, because she wasn’t as strict about her bedtime on Monday nights; Annie had an evening class on Mondays which ended at 9 pm, and she consequently came home very late. An evening class also meant that Annie couldn’t have dinner at proper dinnertime. So when she came home around 9:30, she would often have a late night snack and watch TV to wind down before she headed for bed. Annie also had a habit of reading in bed for about half an hour before falling asleep.

“How can you make waking up early on Tuesday easier for you?” I asked. Annie thought she would be more likely to get up early if she was excited about getting up; for example, getting up at 5 am to catch an early flight for vacation was never a trouble for her.

A: I think I’m going to save the exciting pieces, pieces I like, to work on Tuesday and Thursday mornings.
B: Great. What else?
A: I think it would be easier for me to get up if my husband gets up with me. But he’s lazy. Well, he might do it if I ask him.
B: What would help you to physically get up?
A: Coffee. The smell of coffee. But unfortunately my coffee maker does not have an automatic timer, so it won’t go off on its own to start brewing at a preset time. But I guess I can treat myself to coffee from my favorite coffee shop on the way to school. That would be my reward.
B: Ok. It sounds great. What’s the minimum amount of sleep you need in order for you to have a productive day?
A: I think seven. Eight would be ideal but I can manage with seven.
B: Ok. Then what time do you need to be in bed so you can get up at 6:15?

A: Well, I don’t fall asleep right away. I usually toss and turn a bit. So I read for about half an hour. I guess I need to be in bed by 10:30 so I can fall asleep by 11. Then I would get at least seven hours of sleep.

Sending herself an email with the weekly plan worked well and Annie wanted to continue sending herself regular emails. We discussed the possibility of inserting a buffer in her plan that would be a beneficial impact to her playing as well as overall time management. Annie also crystalized a few action steps she needed to take in order to be productive the way she wanted to be, especially when her schedule was more demanding. She left the session eager to try the new strategies to make her practice more realistic and productive.

6.4 The Mythical Slow Practice

A massive snowstorm hit the city of Toronto on the day we had our third meeting. The streets were buried under the white fluff and most schools were closed. Annie, however, plowed through the snow and showed up at our meeting on time.

B: Wow. You made it! Thanks for coming.

A: (smiling) I didn’t want to miss it and I also didn’t want to be a no-show in case you were here waiting for me.

B: Thanks again for coming. So, what’s better this week?

A: I think it’s the same thing as the last week. I have a better vision of what’s going to happen.

B: Oh?

A: I know what’s coming up and I’m not so stressed about everyday doing a certain amount of practice. That was my biggest problem. Everyday, I was like, “oh my god, I need to practise five hours,” but now I’m like, “ok, I didn’t practise five hours today but tomorrow I have a lot of time to practise, and it’s ok because I’m ready for whatever is coming up.”

B: That’s great. Sounds like you are not as stressed.
A: Yes, the stress level is definitely low. I wanted to tell you that planning is working. But I still have the problem that it’s never ready.

Similar to the previous meeting, Annie said she didn’t feel as stressed as she used to because she had a clearer idea of what was happening each week and what was projected for the whole month. Annie did not panic when she was given a new project or when she realized an approaching deadline. Even when she couldn’t practise as much as she wanted to, she didn’t get anxious because she knew when she could schedule a make-up practice. She described her planning strategy as dynamic as opposed to rigid. Annie didn’t send herself the email with her practice schedule for this week because it was the midterm week and she was too busy. But she still managed to complete all the work assigned for the week; she planned to go back to sending herself the email the following week.

Nevertheless, Annie was still struggling with the feeling that her pieces were never ready.

The feelings of perpetual unpreparedness would emerge especially when she began to play her pieces at faster tempi. She would always start working on her piece slowly and gradually increase the tempo when she felt she was comfortable with executing the details in the piece. Whenever she played at a faster tempo in her lesson, however, her teacher would often say that her playing was rushed and was missing articulations and other details. His remedy was always the same; go back and practise it slowly.

B: So what needs to happen in our conversation today?

A: I want to have a plan, and a way of measuring that it (slow practice) worked. I know it’s not quantifiable. It’s not like I run five minutes today and ten minutes tomorrow. I cannot say I play this at hundred and ten today, and so I’m going to play it at hundred and forty tomorrow. That’s still what I’m trying to get ahold of. What can be done that can be achieved? Everybody says go back and do a slow practice. But you know, at the end of the day, you have to get on stage and be able to play it fast.
Annie expressed her frustration about slow practice because she didn’t feel she knew how or when to make the transition from slow practice to tempo practice. Annie wanted to have a plan that would somehow help her measure and examine the effectiveness of her slow practice. I was curious about Annie’s understanding of the value and purpose of slow practice. Why did people recommend slow practice?

B: Why do people recommend slow practice?
A: Uh, they recommend it because, I think one of the reasons is your muscle memory. Your hands learn the position.
B: You mean physical coordination?
A: Yes. And of course, accuracy. That’s another thing that I struggle with.
B: So if you play faster, you are not as accurate?
A: What I mean by accuracy is articulation, not just notes. Articulations, dynamics, the lengths of the notes… Sometimes when I think I’m playing for the full quarter [note.] I’m actually shrinking it.
B: Rhythm?
A: Yeah, sometimes I even screw up the rhythm.

Annie also mentioned that she was able to better concentrate on voicing and support when she practised slowly. According to Annie, voicing was a technique that helped playing notes at the right pitch by forming the inside of her mouth in particular ways, and support was a technique that controlled the airflow. While talking, Annie remembered that she used to be more conscious about both voicing and technique in her practice. She admitted that she hasn’t been thinking about them lately.

B: How can you think about all these things when you play fast?
A: My teacher will tell me, “play this passage and play it fast, and say to yourself ‘I’m only going to be thinking about support. I’m not going to be thinking about dynamics which may
or may not happen; but my focus is going to be on support.’ And play it another time and this
time, focus on your fingers. Make sure your fingers are (gesturing fingering)…” You are
focused on it. And so on. So, play once and think about only this one aspect and play it again
and focus on another aspect, so you can slowly build up.

B: Have you tried it?

A: Mmm. No. (giggles sheepishly) It’s kind of funny. You go through these lessons and
your teacher gives you a long lecture about what you should do. And when you go back to
practising, you just forget about it. This happened years and years ago.

B: This talk?

A: Yeah, this talk. Maybe five years ago? I’m just remembering it now.

As she spoke about her teachers’ recommendation – which she had dismissed unintentionally,
she began to recognize that she had been playing slowly for the sake of slow tempo and had not
focused on any specific intentions. Annie wanted to try following her teacher’s advice so that
her practice would become more intentional and purposeful. She thought of writing up a
checklist for her to follow when she practised to help her remain focused throughout her slow
practice. “I think I need to have a questionnaire,” Annie said in a serious tone. “Something to
check whether I’ve been doing what I was supposed to be doing every ten minutes or so.” I was
thrilled that Annie came up with the idea herself. “What would you ask yourself?” I asked
Annie; I believed the questions constructed in Annie’s own words would be most effective for
Annie. The following is the list of questions Annie came up with in the meeting.

• Did I read the music?
• Was it really slow?
• Were the notes correct?
• Was the rhythm correct?
• Was the articulation correct?
• How was the voicing?
• Did I support?
Annie was going to answer these questions with elaborate details, focusing on what worked and how she managed to make it work. For example, if she was asking herself about the support, she was going to answer herself with specific measure numbers of where she did play with good support and study how she could replicate it elsewhere. She also thought she needed a similar procedure for fast practice; a checklist to help her remain focused. She was going to play fast while thinking about support first, then play fast thinking about articulation, and play fast again while focusing on voicing. The session ended with a note that an hour of practice would consist of half an hour of slow practice and half an hour of fast practice.

6.5 Slow to Fast

Our fourth meeting began with what had now become the usual opener for our meetings: what’s better?

B: What’s better?

A: Hmm. What’s better? (pause) I have many ideas. Many good ideas. I’m looking forward to implementing some of them over the break.

B: What are some of these ideas?

A: So the slow practice, I haven’t played that piece since last Friday. I haven’t gone back and I wanted to give it a break before the reading week because I have to prepare for master class. So that’s what I’ll be doing next week, preparing the same piece I played. I want to be very solid with my hands and technique.

Annie seemed to believe that slow practice was fundamental to developing ‘solid hands and technique.’ Annie, however, had not tried working with the slow practice card because she decided to give it a break until the reading week. Even though this was not the plan from our previous meeting, I decided to believe that Annie must have a good reason for making changes to our original plan and did not ask more about it.
B: So what would be useful for us to do today?

A: Well, I’m happy because I have ideas to implement in slow practice next week, but I also want to come up with a strategy for learning a new piece quickly, especially a fast piece.

Annie explained that she had just gotten a new piece for the next orchestra concert, and she identified this as one of her weaknesses. She found learning a new piece in a short amount of time rather challenging, especially if the piece was fast in tempo. She viewed the upcoming reading week to be an opportunity to try new approaches to improve her learning strategies; since she already had a tool for slow practice, she wanted to have one for learning a new piece efficiently. To continue in the direction Annie wanted, I asked her an exception question.

B: When was the last time you learned a new piece rather quickly?

A: (bursting into laughter) I knew you were going to ask me that question! So I was thinking about that on the way [here.]

I was glad to hear that Annie could predict my question. Perhaps this was an indication that Annie was now getting comfortable thinking and viewing things with a solution-focused perspective. Annie paused for a second and continued.

A: I mean, if I learn anything fast, it’s never good enough for performance.

B: Ok.

A: Well, there’s something I learned a couple of years ago and went back to a couple of years later. And I got the original things back very quickly.

B: So, if you are re-learning..

A: Yeah. Re-learning is quick. In a week or two, I can get it to performance.
As I looked over the transcription of our meeting later, I realized I should have at this point explored what made re-learning easier than learning a brand new piece: ‘how are you able to manage it to re-learn so quickly?’ Our conversation, however, went on to discuss her current learning strategies for new pieces.

B: But if it’s a brand new piece,
A: If it’s a brand new piece, it takes a long time.
B: What do you do with a brand new piece?
A: I listen to it first then I try to play it very slowly. My teacher told me to mark all the difficult places, the parts that I cannot sight read, and practise them separately. There is no need to practise the parts that I can play at sight without much trouble.

Annie found this advice very helpful in learning her previous repertoire. The new repertoire she had on her hands to learn, however, had too many parts that were not immediately sight-readable. One of them in particular was very long: nine pages in length. And it was very fast in tempo and had several repeats. In addition, this piece had many parts that were high in register. Even though Annie said that it wasn’t necessarily more difficult to play the high register fast, she didn’t feel comfortable with the high register because she was not as familiar with the fingerings. Annie explained that the fingerings changed for every octave on the clarinet. Annie noticed that most pieces she played were written within a two-octave range; this was her comfort zone.

Annie confessed that she faked her way through the first term by not playing the difficult parts. However, she was one of three people playing the first clarinet this term and couldn’t risk not playing her part. Plus she really wanted to face the challenge and to be able to play her part well. She said this was why she came back to school: to play.

In order to gather our thoughts, I recapped what she had said so far, enumerating all the issues and challenges. To my surprise, she maintained a positive perspective on the entire situation, saying, “well, the good news is that I have time.” While this new orchestra piece posed many
difficulties, other new pieces were sight-readable, and her old repertoire had improved since the beginning of the year and she didn’t feel anxious about her progress.

B: What would your teacher suggest for learning such piece?

A: I think he would suggest slow practice, [in order] to be very secure about the fingerings. [He would suggest] almost to stabbing it, exaggerating each movements (sic).

B: What else would he suggest?

A: Maybe he’ll give me some other fingerings.

Annie explained that the art of fingerings for notes in higher registers. First of all, there were many options with different advantages and disadvantages. For example, some are easier to maintain pitch, some tend to be a little sharp or flat, some are physically easier to execute, etc.. Annie admitted that she was supposed to experiment with different fingering options in her practice but had not spent much time with it. She argued that she would have to spend half an hour trying to figure out the most appropriate fingering for one note while her teacher who was far more experienced would be able to decide on the best fingering option with just one look at the score. Clearly, Annie preferred that her teacher tell her which fingerings to use.

Since Annie seemed preoccupied with being able to play fast, I asked if there was a way to simulate the fast action in slow playing; I was reminded of how I used to play staccato in slow practice to simulate the finger movements in fast tempo. Annie replied practising just the finger action separate from breathing would not be an effective practice. She needed to hear her tone to know whether or not she supported every note. With that comment, Annie remembered an interesting incident, which gave her an unexpected insight about what she needed to do in her practice.
A: This is really interesting. I just had a midterm in sight singing and I realized that moving my fingers on the piano to where the notes helped me sing the notes even if I wasn’t actually playing the piano and making sound. So the intervals, even the small ones like semitones, if I’m sitting at the piano and moving my fingers along the keys, I sing better.

B: Wow

A: So the TA asked me if I was a pianist. I said no. That’s so weird.

B: I wonder if there is a way to connect singing in your head and what you are doing on the clarinet.

A: Maybe. It definitely helps to be familiar with the piece. In the lower register, I can look at the piece and hear it in my head. But in the higher register, I don’t have that connection. But I think it may very well work with the higher register as well. I should be able to imagine the sound and connect the sound in my inner ear and my instrument.

Annie seemed fascinated with the concept of audiation. I shared with her a book\(^\text{17}\) I had taken out of the library on practising technique: a collection of personal accounts and reflection of how four different performing musicians approached learning a new piece. To encounter performing musicians’ personal accounts of the way they learn new music seemed to inspire Annie. She noticed that one of the performers in the book had targeted a specific section of the piece with a specific topic for each of her practice sessions. Annie decided to adapt and implement a similar approach in her own practice.

B: So how can we make it realistic and manageable for you to try this approach?

A: That’s a good question. I don’t know.

B: Did you want to follow this woman’s (one of the artists in the book) approach and work one section at a time but for all the topics, or one topic for all the sections?

A: I think I would start with the fingerings. Maybe I’ll email my teacher today and ask if he has any suggestions. That’s faster. And I’m going to get that secure first. That would be my goal number one. I think for the first couple of days, that’s the only thing I’m going to work on.

B: Ok. What would be the next step after that?

A: The next step after that would be the rhythm. The rhythm in orchestra playing is a funny thing. Whatever rhythm someone else is playing, you end up playing with them. It’s funny. You just move with everyone and you play with everyone. So usually it’s not a problem.

B: So the rhythm is ok?

A: Rhythm is ok. But I have a lot of entries.

B: Oh, you are the one starting?

A: I have to make the entry. Hmm. Am I starting? I’m not necessarily starting. I’m starting with others. But when you have to make an entry on a high note, it’s a frightening thing. I have to practise that probably with a recording to make sure that I understand cognitively where I come in. I can count but I’m just so bad at it. Even if I count and I know I have to come in, if I don’t feel the music, I can’t come in.

B: How can you feel the music?

A: I just need to hear it, know it at another level, outside of just 1, 2, 3, 4.

Annie wanted to secure her entries by practising them with a recording: walking to the recording to feel the pulse in her body, saying “now” at her entries, or actually playing her entries. Annie claimed that she sometimes panicked and missed her entries. Annie wanted instead to be able to maintain a calm meditative state where she was aware of the rests leading up to her entries. She found subdividing the rests before her entries to be helpful. She also noticed that counting aloud in her practice sessions gave her a stronger sense of pulse and rhythm as well as confidence. Lastly, Annie wanted to briefly study the intervals in the piece. She claimed that just knowing the intervals helped with voicing when playing. Overall, Annie claimed her practice sessions were much more intentional than they had been in the first term. Annie wanted to start collecting data on how she practised and how much she practised to learn a new piece. Was she really slow in learning new pieces as she claimed? She admitted that she couldn’t make an accurate evaluation because she didn’t know what was normal and expected; Annie would frequently ask what “the industry standard” was for completing certain tasks and learning new repertoires. I wasn’t sure if there was such a thing for students studying music, but Annie, nevertheless, seemed to want to create her own “industry standard” for the time being. The
meeting concluded as Annie decided to keep a practice log to start collecting data on her practice sessions during the reading week.

### 6.6 Norming and Performing

The fifth meeting with Annie, which took place right after the reading week, was quite different from our previous meetings in several ways. Annie was now talking most of the time and even leading our conversation. We also spent more time talking about the progress she made in the research thus far than planning for upcoming events.

Annie mentioned that she was exhausted from spending a week at home for she had spent the majority of her time practising, reading, and writing. I assumed that meant she had a productive week. I asked the usual “what’s better?” question to start our discussion; I was pleasantly surprised when she said she had thought about this question before coming to the meeting. As always, she first tried to give me the context of her situation by explaining her ‘problem.’

A: I’ve been having setbacks since the beginning of the term, well since the time I first came here. I think I had more technical abilities and confidence before I came to university. And I am kind of going through this phase where it feels like I am getting worse.

B: Ah.

A: I am just losing my confidence, and having a hard time adjusting to it, and as a result, I think my playing has been suffering.

B: Mm hmm.

A: But I’ve been going to a bunch of master-classes the last couple of days. I was listening to other people play, which was good. We don’t get to hear each other play often.

B: You don’t?

A: You hear each other in the band but you don’t otherwise. I mean the only people you hear play their solo pieces are in their fourth year or doing concerto competitions, or you know…

B: I see.
A: I almost never get to hear my peers play as much as I would like to. And so, going to these master-classes, I found myself in terms of where I am. Also, the guys were giving amazingly brilliant advice. So, I think I’m getting... I have a lot of hope... to get back my confidence and my ease of playing [that I had] before coming here. I feel like I lost two things. One is my confidence and the other is my ease of playing. And they are related.

B: Yeah. I can see that.

A: So I think that’s definitely something better.

Annie had recently attended a master-class where she observed one of her peers playing a piece she played in the first term. When Annie performed the piece in a master-class in the first term, Annie had been extremely disappointed about her performance, claiming that it was well below her average playing. Annie explained how she had been frustrated with herself and the progress she was making in school. Attending the master-class and listening to another student play the same piece, and noticing that they both struggled with the same technical difficulties made Annie realize that it was normal to have these problems. The realization seemed to somehow dissolve the frustration she had for herself. Instead, Annie appeared to have a renewed sense of hope and enthusiasm for music. Annie was also beginning to find herself to be normal in orchestra as well.

A: The other thing that kind of helped with my confidence is the fast piece. Do you remember?

B: Yeah, the Schumann?

A: No, the one from the orchestra. The one that’s high and fast.

B: Oh yes, yes.

A: I was going all crazy about it. I did exactly what we talked about. I divided it into sections, and I practised the beginning of those sections, and I couldn’t get up to speed. The speed was one forty four. And I just couldn’t get up there. But then, I had the first rehearsal and the conductor was like, “the practice tempo for this piece is going to be one hundred.” And I thought, ‘I can do that.’ And everybody else was in the same boat as I was. It just turned out to be the hardest piece in the orchestra and everybody’s struggling with it. And the conductor said this was where we were going to start at (sic). So it wasn’t like other pieces where I felt like sitting in the first rehearsal where everybody else is playing perfectly.
Annie exhibited increased confidence in the way she handled situations that used to be stressful. Annie described this as ‘getting rid of anxiety.’

A: There’s something about the orchestra that’s happening.
B: What do you mean?
A: I don’t need to practise as much for these pieces. I think I’m getting better at sight playing. Maybe I’m not losing myself so much when other people are playing, and I’m more focused. I stopped caring about what other people are playing, and I’m not distracted. I count very loudly in my head and just go with it. I think I’m starting to get the flow of orchestra playing.
B: That’s great!
A: Yeah. So all those things I told you about ensemble playing, about how I lose myself while playing and I can’t focus on my part, all of those things are slowly going away.
B: So it’s not just orchestra but in ensemble playing as well?
A: Yes, in ensemble as well.
B: Oh wow.

Annie had come up with her own strategies to deal with what used to be stressful situations. For example, Annie was now comfortable skipping a few measures if she felt unsure about playing them correctly. Instead of fretting and getting anxious, she would take this time to quickly mark her music for her to practise separately on her own later. In the orchestra rehearsals, this strategy worked splendidly; the conductor did not yell at her for playing wrong notes, and thus the rehearsals were becoming increasingly less anxiety provoking for Annie. As Annie gained more confidence in herself to learn music quickly and play well in the rehearsals, Annie found that she had more time to practise her own materials. Annie wanted to invest the extra time she had to work on technique and tone production; she was especially inspired after having played in a master class for one of Canada’s most celebrated clarinetists - James Campbell. One of the things Mr. Campbell has said that Annie found illuminating was the “30% rule.”
A: So I played for this gentleman. And I was like, “I played this much better ten minutes ago. I don’t understand what happened.” And he said there’s a 30% rule. If you are not good, if you are still learning and you are still a student, when you get on stage, you have that anxiety for performance, and you play 30% worse than before. But when you are a professional and go on stage, you get the vibe of being on stage, and you actually play 30% better than how you were playing in the practice room. I was thinking since I’m old enough, I should be able not to lose that 30%. I want to capitalize and at least play as well as I played in the practice room. 30% is a lot, right? I understand when you are young, there’s a lot you go through, it can happen. But I should be comfortable with this. I’ve done public speaking, I’ve conducted meetings, you know. I’ve dealt with high stress situations. I should not be losing those 30%. So that’s another motivator.

B: To minimize the loss?

A: Yes! Minimize the loss. (conversation shortened) But you know, he ignored all my mistakes. And he just wanted to talk about my tone production. And this is exactly the thing I felt I was losing in my playing as I was telling you about it earlier; as soon as I came to school, I was doing less and less technical work.

B: I see.

A: He just talked to me about tone production, and it’s crazy. I heard of doing this maybe about a million and ten times. But you keep forgetting. Somehow you are not conscious of it all the time when you practise.

B: Is this something you can do on your own?

A: Yes, yes. You just play one note and think, ‘is this what I want? What’s wrong with it?” It’s just very explorative, slow practice.

B: Hmm. Reflective and examining.

A: Yes. Reflective and examining. He said to play a note, and listen to it, then memorize the sound, play it again and make sure it’s the same. I did this when I had all day of nothing.

B: (laughing) That was the only thing you needed to do.

A: Exactly. I’d wake up in the morning and for two hours, and I could take my time and experiment. It’s just hard to fit that into a busy schedule in university.

B: Yeah. You have so many classes and rehearsals.

A: Exactly. And you think this is not important. But it turns out not the case because if you don’t have that, then you don’t have good sound. Then you don’t have good music, and that’s the end of it.
Annie seemed determined not to lose the 30% of her performance potential on stage and stressed the importance of taking more explorative approach to work on her tone in her practice. Surprisingly, she had already come up with a strategy on her own to deal with this issue.

A: So now I have, from our sessions, two cards. One of them is for fast playing and one of them is for slow playing. Since I’ve been going to master classes, I’ve started to put together another card, for tips on how to make your music better. I’m writing down everything I’m learning from these master classes.

Annie continued to describe some of the pointers she wrote on her card: playing to the downbeat, voicing technique, playing with firmer hand, etc.

A: So rather than to play mindlessly from beginning to the end, I think, “well, that went well,” or, “that didn’t go so well.” Then I would look at the card and ask myself, “what can I do? What can someone suggest to me? What would be better here?”

B: I like that. That’s very solution-focused: what would somebody else say?

A: (Laughing) Yes, so I’m definitely exploring new avenues.

B: That’s great!

A: And because now I have that practice brochure of yours, I ask myself, “how did it go? How did that half an hour of practice go? What can I do to make my practice better?” And I noticed that because I have these cards, I am less distracted. I’m totally involved in it, and I don’t have the urge to check my email or go on Facebook. I’m just so into it that I don’t get up. I’m totally focused on it.

B: Wow.

Annie exhibited a lot of joy as she spoke; she was laughing a lot and giggling a lot all the while being really serious about her new practice strategies and tools. I suspected her confidence had increased significantly for when I asked what she wanted to do next, she answered that she would like to plan the rest of the month so that she could perform her best at the jury.
(performance exam). Annie, however, did not think she needed to do this with me; “I think I can do it on my own.”

6.7 Interlude

I had not communicated with Annie for a few months after the research interview period ended. Then I received an email from her when school started in the following September. To my surprise and delight, she had some exciting news to share. At the faculty of music, all the students studying an orchestral instrument played a placement audition at the beginning of each academic year. Based on the performance of the audition, students were placed in various ensembles and orchestras. Annie had been part of the entry-level band in her first year when she participated in the study. This fall, Annie played a stellar audition and was placed in the highest level orchestra at the faculty of music, University of Toronto Symphonic Orchestra. Annie had effectively skipped the mid-level orchestras even though she was only in her second year. The news became even more meaningful when I learned that there were only four positions available for clarinetists in the UTSO and three of the four positions were given to students who had participated in the research. The following excerpts were taken from emails sent by two of the research participants whose stories I have chosen to share in this paper.

“By the way, something interesting... this year all three of us Julian, Peggy, and I made it to the UTSO. It probably had something to do with all your help to think constructively and methodically about how we approach our performances!” ~ from Annie, dated September 10th, 2013.

“And funny that all the clarinetists that took part in the solution-focused study are in UTSO. Some evidence for you! :”) ~ from Julian, dated September 11th, 2013.
Chapter 7

7 Portrait of a Juggler

7.1 Meet Julian

Julian was in his third year of the undergraduate performance program. He was a self-proclaimed ‘musical kid’ who used to bang on laundry detergent buckets with chopsticks for hours when he was still in diapers. He claimed that the ‘noise’ he produced was music to his ears. Playing in the school band in grade six opened the doors to the world of classical music and especially that of the clarinet. Julian clearly remembered attending a Toronto Symphony Orchestra school concert as part of the band. The experience was illuminating and he knew immediately he wanted to play the clarinet professionally. When I asked what drew him to clarinet among other instruments, Julian answered, “well, one of the characters in the SpongeBob Square Pants played the clarinet and I thought it was cool.” While he didn’t know much about the instrument at all, Julian had played the recorder before, and thought the two instruments were similar in shape.

Julian was soft spoken, but nevertheless a serious student who was very clear about his future goals, and he seemed very dedicated to his studies. Julian’s parents, he claimed, had taught him the value of hard work, and as such Julian considered them to be his biggest source of support and motivation. His parents made it possible for him to develop his musical talents through private lessons and numerous extracurricular activities outside of school, most notably the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra. They were one hundred percent behind all of his decisions leading towards his career in music.

Julian’s teachers readily went out of their way to help Julian pursue many endeavours that Julian didn’t think were possible. For example, Julian wanted to play in an ensemble with string players because there was a large volume of repertoire written for this setting. Julian, however, didn't know how he could form a chamber ensemble with a clarinet and a string instrument when
the string and wind departments were separate departments, which operated on their own. When his clarinet teacher found out about Julian’s desire to play with string players, he approached the coordinator of the strings chamber music class, and helped assemble an ensemble for Julian. With his teacher’s help, Julian was able to play in a trio with a pianist and a cellist the following year.

Julian’s dedication to music spoke for itself in his previous achievements as well as in many performance engagements he managed. In grade eleven, Julian was accepted to one of the most prestigious youth orchestras in the country – the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra. Last year, Julian also won a prestigious competition which was open to both bachelor’s and master’s level students even though he was only in the second year of his undergraduate studies. At the time of the research, Julian was involved in several different chamber music groups and orchestras both in and out of school, and was actively performing as often as opportunities presented themselves.

Julian chose the Toronto Symphony Youth Orchestra experience as one of the memorable experiences that taught him invaluable lessons, on music as well as the art beyond music-making. Julian always thought that he would probably be able to make the orchestra in his first year of university. To have been accepted in grade eleven was a pleasant surprise to him, and definitely a confidence booster. The many hours he had spent in intense practice seemed to pay off. Julian, however, claimed that his audition – which he felt was very solid and impressive - was probably not the only reason he was accepted to the orchestra. Julian was purposely very vocal and articulate at the audition; he took the initiative to ask questions to show his interest in joining the orchestra and also informed the audition panel that he played the bass clarinet as well. According to Julian, not every clarinetist plays the bass clarinet. When Julian received his acceptance letter, he learned that the audition committee had assigned him the bass clarinet part. Julian wondered if he would have been accepted had he not mentioned that he played the bass clarinet and was glad to have been forthcoming about his skills.
The competition experience was extremely valuable for Julian because it was the first time he had ever memorized the music he played. The experience somehow forced Julian to surpass his mental block that he couldn’t be a soloist. He had always been intimidated by the virtuosity of other instrumentalists, especially those who played string instruments, and didn't see himself winning a competition of this caliber as a clarinetist. Julian said it took him months before the competition to change his mentality, but he was soon doing everything he could to put his best foot forward. Julian arranged to have 6 or 7 mock auditions during the week of the competition, so he could practise performing while being nervous. He also wanted to study and iron out all the possible areas that he could fumble or have a memory lapse by doing the mock auditions. Evidently, he had no memory lapses and played his best at the competition and won.

7.2 Juggling Time

Julian seemed like a very capable student who had already accessed his strengths many times as evident in his previous achievements. I wondered what expectations he had about joining the research; “I think effective time management is definitely one of them. I think also just knowing what I can do with a plan will help me get more confidence,” answered Julian to my question about what he hoped to gain from the research. He was working towards several different performances and wanted to get something that would help him to manage many projects to which he had committed himself. An audition in New York City for a prestigious summer music festival, his first credit recital at school, a premier concert of a student composer’s sonata, as well as an orchestra performance in which he would play a huge clarinet obligato part were some of his upcoming ‘commitments.’ In addition, he still had to manage academic courses and other school related performance activities such as chamber music and orchestra rehearsals. I thought that Julian must be doing something right if he was able to manage his multiple ‘commitments’ so far in his academic career, and some even to a high level of success. I decided to inquire about his current time management strategies.

B: Ok. So based on this morning, on the scale of zero to ten, where at ten, you are able to manage your time effectively whether you have one thing, two things, or ten things, and at zero, you have never even heard of time management,
J: (laughs)

B: Where are you today?

J: I’d say probably like six and half, possibly seven on a good day.

B: Great. Why six and half or seven, and not five?

J: Um, I think I have a vague, or general idea. But it’s not to the point where I feel super confident. So that’s why I would not say like eight.

B: Ok. What is your general idea?

J: I usually prioritize. I see what’s coming up and say, well this is coming up in two days, so I should focus on that more than something that’s coming up in a week. Something like that.

B: Mm hmm.

J: I’ll kind of make a general deadline of when I want to get things polished or completed. So what I did for myself because of my recital in March, is I made a personal deadline where I wanted to have everything, basically learned to the point where I can play with my music so that in February I can spend that time memorizing.

B: Is that a requirement?

J: It’s not, but I like to do it because I think it helps to project my ideas and stuff.

B: You can focus differently.

J: Yeah.

He felt that he had a general idea of how to manage his time but it was not specific enough for him to feel confident yet. His current strategy was to prioritize by focusing on the next upcoming project, and by setting general deadlines for himself, such as to learn music, to have his pieces polished, or completed. For his recital in March, he had two personal deadlines prior to the event: a deadline to have music learned where he could play comfortably with the score, and a deadline to have music memorized so he could concentrate on projecting his musical ideas while playing, even though the memorization was not a requirement for his recital. He had planned to have his repertoire learned in its entirety by February 1st, but as time was approaching, he realized that he needed more time.
B: How do you practise? I mean, how much do you practise and how do you structure your practice when you have so many different pieces to work on?

J: For me, I usually spend the first half hour to forty-five minutes warming up doing my fundamental things. After that, I start to work on my solo pieces: things that I’m working on [sic] my lessons. And ensemble pieces usually come after that because I find that my private lessons are more of a priority to me. So I’ll do that after. If there’s anything I didn’t get to, then I’ll try and get to it the next day. So it’s kind of a balancing act because sometimes I don’t get to certain pieces. But sometimes I think that suffers a bit because if I take a day or two off and don’t look at it, then it takes a while to remember the things I thought of a few days before.

B: Ok.

J: So I think that’s one of the things I can do better. But generally I don’t go more than 2 to 3 hours [a day] because I had an injury a few years ago. So I have learned that I can practise more visually, more mentally. It was kind of funny because I had just played the Copland concerto in my lesson yesterday and I had no time to physically get the notes in the practice room. So when I was in [orchestra] rehearsals and when the conductor wasn’t working on us, I would just take out the music and finger along. Actually I think I learned eighty percent of the music just by doing that.

B: Oh wow. That’s awesome.

J: Yeah.

B: So you’d play physically two to three hours max. But you can practise mentally or visually aside from that. Do you have time to do that? Does that fit into your schedule?

J: Yeah. I have time especially if I need just some down time and I don’t feel like actually practising. I find that it helps.

B: That’s awesome.

I was astonished that Julian was not only aware of the visualization technique but was using it in his practice. Since his main goal for the meeting was to come up with a plan to manage all of his upcoming performances, I continued to inquire about different ways to do more of what he was already doing well to manage his time effectively. The first step was to determine priority. We created a timeline chart for all the upcoming events and rated them on the level of importance.
The first upcoming event was the orchestra concert where he was playing a solo. However, Julian considered this event to be at the bottom of his priority list since he had worked on it in orchestra rehearsals and felt confident about his playing. Being mindful about what can happen if he didn’t continue to work on the orchestra solo piece, however, Julian decided to practise the piece twice a week for about fifteen to twenty minutes. The most important commitment was his Verbier Festival Orchestra audition in New York City. Julian really wanted to attend the Verbier Summer Festival this year, and he was making a big investment to travel in order for him to audition in person in New York. For this reason, he decided to dedicate at least forty-five minutes everyday to practising the audition requirements.

For the Verbier audition, Julian had to prepare four orchestral excerpts and two short solo pieces. Julian wanted to make sure both the solo pieces and the excerpts were strong at the audition, but soon realized that forty-five minutes of practice wouldn’t be enough to cover all of the audition requirements. “I think I can rotate,” Julian said in a thoughtful manner. He went on to describe the status of each piece; to my surprise, he had played all four excerpts in the past, and had also played one of the solo pieces recently. The other solo piece was actually the piece Julian played at the concerto competition the previous year and won. However, Julian was still concerned about it because he hadn’t played it in a year.

I was really impressed with the level of dedication and seriousness in such a young person. I shared two concepts for him to consider when planning or structuring his practice. One was the debt-snowball, a system designed to increase the probability of paying off loans and debt by paying off the smallest loans first, regardless of its interest rate, while keeping the minimum payments on the rest of the loans. The second was the idea of creating a ‘SMART’ goal: a goal that is specific or simple, measurable, action-based, realistic or relevant, and time-referenced. I wondered if these concepts and tools would help with clarifying priorities and tasks when balancing between multiple pieces and projects.
Our conversation about how to manage his time more effectively concluded with a note on accountability. When asked what would help him to be accountable to his plan, he answered that he was going to write down specifically what he was going to work on at the beginning of his practice and assess how much he followed his plan at the end of the practice. We both agreed that using a scaling question would be useful in both planning and evaluation; it would help him to articulate success factors as well as small areas that require improvements as possible next steps. The idea of focusing on what’s working seemed to strike a chord with Julian; he wanted to apply the concept to his solo pieces as well. Julian mentioned a difficult contemporary piece on his recital program which he had been avoiding, claiming he felt unmotivated to work on the piece because of its challenging rhythm; he claimed he had a difficult time reading “the irrational rhythm” and also didn’t know how to “feel” the frequently and unexpectedly changing pulses. He left the meeting saying, “maybe this plan will help me to take small steps so that it doesn’t look so daunting to work on the whole piece.”

7.3 Juggling Confidence

The subsequent meetings with Julian explored how he used his time in greater detail. He still wanted to be more efficient with his time, but he seemed generally satisfied with how he managed his projects.

B: What’s better Julian?

J: I think just general getting to every commitment I have has been a really good thing, because it just means that I am at the basic level of preparedness that I can manage in my commitments. I think it’s a good thing because I’m not leaving things to the last minute to cram. So I’m less stressed in general.

B: So you are more planned?

J: Yeah, I think, in general. Part of it is just looking ahead in my commitments and I really prioritize. ‘Ok, I have this in 3 days as opposed to I have this in a master class in a week.’ So I really need to [focus on] whatever I have sooner, [and] still practise whatever I have later on, but not as intensely.

B: How do you prioritize?
J: It’s kind of like making a list of my commitments. What I did was I put “w” beside every commitment I had this week, and then I put a number beside it, 1 being the top of my priority and following that not so much. From there, I followed the pages of the pamphlet on the practice planning. I find that really helps just to validate where I am right now. It helped me this weekend to have when I created a plan. I really wanted to have mock auditions from Monday to Friday. And creating that plan really helped because I just was really focused on what I thought I needed more work.

I liked the visual cues Julian put on his list of commitments. I also appreciated the fact that he tried using the practice pamphlet\(^{18}\) I created for the participants in the research; the practice pamphlet contained solution-focused questions for different stages of practising such as goal setting, planning, and evaluation. I had designed the pamphlet hoping it would help students to articulate their thoughts while acknowledging the positive aspects of their practice and progress. I, however, did not insist that the students use the pamphlet because I wanted to minimize creating feelings of obligation for the students while participating in the research. I was more interested in providing the students with tools that would facilitate the sense of self-efficacy if students chose to transition from being rather passive to more independent in their learning; self-motivation was one of the key elements of my investigation.

Julian was flying to New York City that weekend to play the audition for the Verbier Summer Music Festival. Julian obviously wanted to focus on working on the audition requirements to ensure he played his best at the audition, and had set up several mock auditions to help him prepare mentally as well as practise playing the audition. However, Julian felt he wasn’t balancing his time well for his other commitments, his recital in particular. Julian was concerned that he wasn’t spending enough time to work on his recital repertoire even though it was not his intention to ignore them.

B: When is your recital?

\(^{18}\) See Appendix E.
J: Mar. 8th at the Father Madden Hall.

B: What time?

J: 7:30. And right now I feel like I’m trying to put things on hold because I feel this audition is my top priority, [especially] because I’m spending a lot of money to travel. It’s a big thing for me. So I’m kind of putting other things on the line. But I know if I do that for too long, I’ll be in a bit of trouble.

B: I see.

J: I mean the reading week is going to fly by and my recital is going to be two weeks after that. So I’m wondering if there’s a way that I can still maintain my other commitments, but still be fresh for Saturday [in New York], because I don’t want to burn myself out for my audition, especially when there’s so many other things to practise.

I wasn’t sure if he was asking me for a definitive answer, and I clearly didn’t have an answer that would either be infallible or guarantee certain results. However, I knew looking at his current strategies and preferred future closely would be helpful in constructing a suitable answer to his question.

B: On the scale of zero to ten, at ten, you have the perfect balance between working on your audition rep and recital rep, and zero is the opposite, where are you today?

J: It’s maybe, seven?

B: Great. What makes it seven and not six?

J: I think it’s more or less seven and not six because at six, I would say I’m really not working totally on my recital. I’m working on two out of three pieces for my recital consistently.

B: I see.

J: I have already learned one out of the two I’m working on. It’s just the matter of refreshing. So in that case, I think I know more than a six. But I wouldn’t say that’s it’s perfect balance or eight, because I don’t think I revisit pieces often enough.

B: So would it be an eight if you visit your recital pieces more often?

J: I would say, out of seven days of a week, my recital reps are maybe about three to four times max.
B: For now, you mean? What would you like to see instead?

J: I would like more towards five.

As it is often the case with solution focused conversations, Julian was not completely ignoring his recital repertoire even though that was the impression he gave at the beginning of our meeting. As he continued to explain, we were able to draw a clearer picture of what was happening in his practice now and what he wanted to do differently. Since the audition was just a few days away, it was important to make sure his practice regime still revolved around getting ready for the audition.

B: If ten on a scale is where you want to be at your audition, where are you now?

J: I’d say nine.

B: Great. I’m going to take an unusual turn here and ask you if it’s good enough for you to maintain nine [sic] for the next three days or if you still want to make a move up.

J: I still want to make a move up.

B: Ok. So in order for you to make a step forward even from where you are, what needs to happen? What do you need to see in your playing? And how does that translate to how much you practise and how you practise?

J: I feel like my technique is there. But I just want to make sure that I know how to play exactly the way I want the first time. And for some excerpts, it takes me the second try to get it to where I want. So I would say I would spend twenty minutes a day just focusing on the two excerpts that have technical difficulties. And after that, I would probably take ten minutes to mock audition right after. Then I’ll spend another twenty minutes just to listen back to a recording. And go back and practise some stuff I heard on the tape for quick fixes. Maybe at the end, I’ll spend ten minutes doing another mock audition. Is that an hour?

B: Yes, that’s an hour. So, would an hour be good enough?

J: Yes, I think so.

Redefining what Julian wanted to accomplish in the practice room helped us realize that he was only left with finishing touches on a couple of excerpts. Likewise, breaking down how Julian
would use his time was useful in realizing that he didn’t need to spend a lot of time to work on
the audition materials. Even though we hadn’t discussed when he would be able to work on his
recital repertoire, the idea of managing both the audition and recital repertoire suddenly did not
seem unrealistic. I hoped this helped Julian to see the big picture and feel more confident. I
wanted to explore more about when Julian was able to ‘get it right’ the first time because I
believed that knowing he had done it before would add another layer of confidence for him.

B: I have a question. When in the past have you been able to play the technical things the
way you want the first time?

J: That’s a really good question because that’s really rare. I would say my U of T
placement audition.

B: Which year?

J: For this year. For the ensemble.

B: What was different about then?

J: I felt like because the excerpts were well below my maximum technical potential or
ability.

B: It was within your grasp?

J: It was well within my grasp. (laughs) That was a really pretentious way of putting it.
(laughs)

B: (laughs)

J: I’m just really analytically thinking right now. I’m using that side of my brain.

B: Ok.

J: I felt confident because of that. Maybe it wasn’t even technique, [condensed] I guess a
part of it was knowing that I had been really successful in the past in my placement auditions.
So I knew what to expect to some degree. And I [also] knew I had been getting it the first time
prior to that. Generally I think that’s what it is.

At a first glance, Julian seemed to contradict himself; Julian said ‘getting it right the first time’
was a rare phenomenon, but only a few seconds later, he realized other previous occasions when
he managed to get it right the first time. Julian seemed simply to be experiencing a shift in perspectives. I enjoyed seeing his mental horizon widen and positive memories from the past arise to consciousness with clarity, for I believed that he now had a concrete foundation from which he could draw confidence. Further exploration of details in these previous successes ensued, and we were both left with feelings of relief and hopefulness.

7.4 Juggling Artistry

I personally believe that self-awareness is one of the first steps to achieving artistic excellence. Julian was clearly honing his artistic craft with self-discoveries and awareness. He was definitely becoming more and more conscious of his actions, thoughts, and decisions. He also seemed to use solution-focused questions with comfort and ease in his practice.

B: What’s better, Julian?

J: I think creating a plan for myself before I practise has been working really well. I’m using a few basic questions that I’ve been saying to myself, like, “what is this for?” and “what’s my next stepping stone?”

B: I see.

J: Today was one of them because I wanted to play one of my pieces for you guys on Tuesday in class. And then I’ll say, “what do I want it to ideally sound like and feel like?” I have this idea how I want to feel when I’m performing it. And I said “where am I to that idea?” And then I’ll prepare. I’ll do the scaling under and scaling above. And I come up with a game plan for myself of what I need to do to get there. And surprisingly I have a lot of the answers. I just need one minute to ask [these questions.]

B: You are doing everything that we had been doing. You are articulating your goals, you are articulating what’s working, and also you are articulating how you can make the next step up.

J: If I remember I’ll actually see if it worked.

B: So you evaluate also.

J: Yeah, only sometimes. Not all the time. But I remember, maybe I told you a while ago, this little solo with the orchestra. This was like the Mozart obligato solo. It was a second piece of evidence that now I’m not going to do [this] anymore in my plan. I remember doing this
in my Verbier audition the night before. It was so close to the audition time and I was still practising. I really gave myself a rule that I’m not going to be practising 12 hours before [the performance.] Because at that point, I’m really practising for my anxiety and comfort, [rather] than actual necessity. So what I was doing this Saturday was…(pause) I felt so stupid about it because I’ve never made that mistake before. And I’m positive it’s because I was just trying to create a progress on something that wasn’t [even] a problem before. I have experienced [this] the last term [when] we played Stravinsky’s Firebird, and I felt really bad about it right up until the performance. “I actually haven’t been practising it since yesterday.” I just warmed up maybe half an hour before the concert. And surprisingly it went really well. I feel like if I had practised it right before [the performance], I’m not sure if it would have gone so well.

Julian recognized that he may have exhausted himself mentally and physically by driving himself to practise until the very last minute before his performances. He realized that while last minute practice had served a purpose in relieving pre-performance anxiety, it did not necessarily result in a flawless performance. Based on this newly gained insight, Julian had decided that he would only practise intensely until Wednesday and spend Thursday doing simple and short check-ups for his recital on Friday.

With regards to his upcoming recital, Julian had a few performance related concerns: two of them seemed to be technical issues and one was an artistic dilemma. He wanted to talk about them in our session primarily because he believed getting a better perspective on the matters would help him solve his problems.

J: How could it (his playing) be more calm in very technical spots because I tend to want to just plow through them and I listen back to the recordings and it’s not really the rhythm that’s there. I tend to just go faster and it’s not really what’s written.

B: So tempo-wise, it’s getting faster?

J: I guess you can say that, yeah.

B: Mmm..

J: It’s just like in those spots. Not in any other spots, just those. I tried to come up with some solutions but I don’t know if there are any better solutions.
B: What’s your solution?

J: My solution was to practise them with the feeling of space, feeling that it’s comfortable. But it’s weird because when I practise them in isolation, it’s comfortable. And when I piece it all together in one whole run-through, it just goes back to how it used to be.

B: Hmm. Interesting.

J: I’ve noticed it consistently when I played for people.

B: Hmm. Does it happen when you play through by yourself also?

J: Yeah. It’s whenever I do run-throughs that it starts to rush ahead. It’s not when I do them in isolation.

B: So sections are ok. Interesting.

J: I thought I will go through my other goals (topics for the session)?

B: Yeah. Let’s see what you’ve thought about.

J: The other one is in the Copland concerto I’m playing. There is a lot of high notes, and in the past… (pondering) Maybe it’s still haunting me till this day but I’ve gotten better at it. But I’m still feeling worried about a lot of those high notes. So I’m just… maybe …

B: You don’t want to worry about them?

J: Yeah. I’m definitely better at them now. Maybe if I figure out what’s inhibiting me from doing them as well. I’m wondering if it’s the past experience that’s still making me feel that I can’t do it. But really I can do it a lot better now.

B: Mm hmm. I see. That’s very interesting.

J: I don’t know if you had that experience where you go back to pieces from before, and you still have these haunting memories of what happened. (laughs)

B: (laughs) So you’re playing this Copland concerto that has a lot of high notes. And in the past you had worried about the high notes. But you know that you are better with them now. Still, you don’t feel mentally as free?

J: I think that’s a more accurate way of saying.

B: So you’d like to be free from this…(looking for a word).. not anxiety, but …

J: Just the way of feeling

B: (nods)

J: And my other one is that I have this fear that I’m going to be boring (laughs) because maybe it’s this thing I’m going through too. I used to have this thing that I felt like I wasn’t
genuinely musical. I felt like I was sort of being artificial. So I’m doing this thing where I don’t try to be musical at all. I just try this “oh wow” to come out rather than trying to be interesting or to entertain people. But I’m thinking what if I don’t? And that’s also causing me to unnerve before performance [because] if I don’t do anything…. I’m afraid I’m a complicated person

(laughs)

B: (laughs) I see. So you are afraid that if you try too hard, it’ll come out sounding too artificial?

J: Yeah.

B: But you are also concerned that if you don’t try and let the music come out itself, then it might have danger to be boring?

J: Exactly.

I was really impressed at the level of seriousness in Julian’s approach to his music. It seemed as though he was struggling with some issues but I sensed that this process was a part of refining his artistry. I asked Julian what would be one topic he wanted to focus on in our meeting as our time was limited. Julian couldn’t decide on any one topic as they were all very important to him. So we decided to explore as much as we could within the hour.

Since the rhythmically challenging spot worked well in isolation, I asked if there was a way to gradually expand the isolated section, so to merge the previous section into the difficult section seamlessly. The idea was to enlarge the section that worked until the entire piece flowed effortlessly.

Julian seemed to like the idea. Julian quickly realized that he was not struggling with the irrational rhythm in the difficult section, since he played it well in isolation, but the transition from different rhythmic patterns and pulses in between sections. Julian wanted to feel comfortable when he had to change the way he felt the rhythms.
B: [It sounds like] it’s the switch between different rhythm that’s challenging, right? So is there anything you can do to apply your previous knowledge to make this work?

J: What I’ve been doing was just, in general, saying the rhythm to myself, and conducting them for myself.

B: That works.

J: But maybe I can spend more time in those sections, just linking one to another.

B: So far, you’ve been working saying the rhythm and conducting. It’s been about those spots, right? Within the isolation?

J: Yeah, yeah.

B: You want to try the same where the sections meet. What else? What else can you do?

J: It’s challenging because there’s really no common pulse that’s steady. Umm, maybe I can lock onto one of the patterns when it changes from duple to triple, or maybe I can do the other way around, from triple to duple.

B: Ok. So what would you exactly be doing?

J: (takes out his score, and looks) So around this section, (showing the score) it starts in the 4/16.

B: (surprised) How do you even read this?

J: (laughs)

B: Wow

J: So this is duple. da da da da (sings to demonstrate) Maybe just before I get to 4/16, I can really hold on to that triple, kind of gather myself within that little space of time. [condensed] Maybe it’s a good thing to imaginatively take a second to focus and prepare because I feel like I couldn’t get into it and I just slide down this mountain. (laughs)

B: Ok.

J: So maybe I can write something on my music, [like] “focus” for that split second.

B: What would you focus on?

J: That’s a good question. Maybe I can focus on feeling grounded and solid so I’m not running forward and get faster and faster.

B: What helps you to feel more grounded?

J: Mm maybe if I just felt like I was really feeling every single note, and listening for every note, so that it’s not like I want to roll forward and make it increasingly difficult. It’s
ironic because for some reason, my brain just wants to move forward. But it’s not ideal for what I can actually do. So what happens is it comes out as a big mess. I don’t know if that makes sense.

B: It does. Is there other sections in the piece where you feel grounded and solid?

J: Ah yeah, there is. A lot of this piece is kind of like this conversation. It’s like a heartbeat. There’s a lot of repeated B flats here that are very (inaudible) and all of sudden it goes into this outburst, so it’s kind of these two multiple personalities. So whenever I have the quiet ddo ddo ddo, that’s when I feel solid because it’s just these repeated notes. And then when the outbursts come, I have to focus again.

Julian seemed satisfied that he had developed a heightened awareness of the changing rhythms and pulses, and that he now had a few different ways to tackle the issue of rushing through the difficult section in run-through performances.

The second performance related issue was about playing high notes softly. According to Julian, playing high notes was difficult, but it was even trickier when it had to be done quietly. “You really have to have everything placed a lot more accurately. When you play loudly, it’s a lot easier. It’s more forgiving even if it’s not quite right in your tongue. As soon as it gets quiet, the test comes,” explained Julian.

I remembered Julian had mentioned earlier in the session that he now had a better control of high notes than he had in the past. The problem was that Julian, for some reason, still doubted himself, and this may unfortunately result in a performance below his abilities or expectations. I decided to inquire about how he managed to improve on playing high notes.

B: But you said you are a lot better [with playing the high notes]?

J: I think I’m a lot better at it partly because of the lesson I had in New York. I feel like I was doing something with the reed that was not allowing the notes to come out as good as it can.

B: So what do you do?
J: Well, I used to play off balance. I didn’t realize that until he told me “you know your mouth piece is actually crooked.”

B: Oh.

J: He told me to place my clarinet in center, and it felt so weird. But…

B: Centered as in within the instrument or in the way you hold it?

J: In the instrument. And then actually it’s funny because you know what? Later when I was looking in the mirror, I also noticed that I held it sort of to my right. So every time I noticed, I moved to [correct it] (gesturing, laughing, inaudible) I think those actually helped.

B: Mm hmm.

J: Also I just went to a master-class. I was just auditing a class at the RCM and I took a few hints from someone who was playing these high notes. It was this excerpt and yeah, I figured some things out. That made it easier. It’s still challenging. At least I have a better chance at it.

B: What were those tips?

J: One of them was just kind of to push the clarinet up so it releases the reed a bit in the lower lip, because we all want to clamp up on the reed once it gets to that area. So if you push out, it kind of frees the reed a bit?

B: Hmm.

J: And I noticed myself that if I keep back of my tongue to my soft pallet, it helps. And I kind of think of “kuh,” or “guh” to articulate. And it actually helps. I’ve been taking a linguistic course out of purely trying to get an arts and science credit. But I’m actually interested in it. I don’t think I’ll get an exciting career out of it, but for my own general well-being of well rounded human being, I decided to take it. And I realized that having better knowledge of consonants and where vowels are in your mouth helps me realize that on the clarinet. So, I realize that if I keep it closer to my soft pallet, then it makes it a bit easier.

B: Wow. Is that something you were taught in lesson at all?

J: No.

B: You just figured it out?

J: Yeah.

B: Wow.

(condensed)

J: One thing led to another. The guy in NY said “I think your voicing is good but you need to have more K sound to your [playing] when you voice the clarinet in general” and I kind
of took a hint from that. K, that’s actually very different from what I was doing before. “Kuh” or “Guh,” that’s more velar sound, consonance that articulates a bit of soft pallet, the back of the tongue goes up. I took that from linguistics and I thought maybe that’s what I need to do on the clarinet.

B: That’s helped you with high notes?

J: I think it helped with in general.

B: In general.

J: But also in high notes.

I was fascinated with everything Julian was telling me. As Julian shared his expertise, both new and old, I was hoping that Julian would realize the extent of his knowledge in regards to playing high notes. I also wanted him to remember that he had played the high notes well in performances. When I asked him about a previous performance where he played the high notes the way he wanted to play them, Julian named playing the Mahler symphony no. 1 last spring. “It goes really high, and I played them really well,” said Julian proudly. I couldn’t pass up on the opportunity to investigate a previous success, so I inquired.

B: And how did you manage that?

J: Umm.

B: Was there anything in particular you did in you practice that helped?

J: I think it was just a lot of repetition. Well, it goes against how I feel about practising now but I was just repeating like 50 times in a row. It was completely an inefficient way of practising. But I think there is something to be said about you knowing you repeated it. Maybe not me personally, but my tongue doesn’t know that area of clarinet that well. So maybe just at the beginning, just repeating it reinforces, ‘this is where you have to go to get the note.’ When I was going through my plan for my concerto, I actually realized that maybe I need to do more exercises as part of my solution [for the high note problem.] So I remembered that one of the first things we got in my clarinet pattern class was this big long exercise on high notes. So I went back and started doing some of those and it kind of helped.

B: So you’ve already done them.

J: Yeah.
B: Good. Going back to Mahler, how did you manage it on stage?

J: I don’t think I was really thinking about them.

B: You weren’t really thinking about them.

J: No.

B: Can you not think about it in your Copland? Is that possible? (laughs)

J: Yeah. I definitely do think about them. Like right before is like, “ok. Here we go.”

B: If you are going to think about them, what would be helpful for you to think about?

J: You know what? That’s a good idea. Maybe I do need to replace that thought with something.

B: If your thought inevitably goes to this high note and it often needs to be, instead of thinking “ahh here comes the high note”, “I’m ready for this”, what can you do to still think about it but allow it to …

J: Exactly.

B: What can you think about that would be more positive?

J: I can think about it more singing rather than just screeching. (laughs)

B: (laughs) Think of it as singing. Ok.

J: Think of it as a different instrument. I can feel like I’m a flute player. It’s effortless for them to play those notes.

Julian said his playing would become a lot more musical if he freed himself from negative thoughts and doubts. He also claimed that he would feel a lot more comfortable in his body and there would be no clenching or discomfort in his face. Inversely, Julian thought it may even be helpful for him to project what’s to come in his body, so to have a leading effect on how he feels and thinks about the music.

The talk about physical movements and gestures and its impact on playing led our conversation smoothly to the third topic: artistic expressions. Julian had videotaped his concerto performance and noticed that he moved excessively while he played. The physical gestures definitely helped
with engaging the audience as well as for Julian to be completely immersed in his music. However, Julian became aware that excessive gesture exhausted him. It made sense that excessive movements would interfere with his breathing. So he consciously made a decision to move less while he played his jury. Julian thought he might have still moved considerably compared to other performers, but he had definitely restrained himself and found it easier to execute a lot of the technique. Julian wondered if he had an easier time balancing his instrument because he was moving less.

Julian clearly seemed to have experienced the benefits of moving less while playing. He seemed apprehensive, however, to give up on physical expressions because he believed it was a sure way to engage the audience. I suggested that perhaps we could ask the audience directly how they felt about his performance; if Julian moves less, would the audience find his playing boring as he feared? Since Julian had planned to play in the group class, we decided to ask for feedback from the students.

7.5 Juggling Collaboration

At our following meeting, Julian exhibited great enthusiasm for the heightened awareness he noticed in his work. He seemed to notice some of the improvements he had made since he joined the study and seemed genuinely happy about the overall progress.

B: What’s better?

J: I think in general, I feel like I’ve been improving really quickly since January because I’ve been really making notes [on] what has been working really well. I think the difference is that, it’s not like I haven’t been doing these things, it’s not like I’m miraculously learning whole bunch of different techniques. I think it’s just being aware of these things. For instance, I discovered something about when I play high notes that I need to use more upper lip support in my embouchure, and it was just something I tried once and ended up working really well. And I continued to test whether or not it was actually a good thing to do, so I kept doing it, and it kept working. So I said “ok, I need to keep doing this.” So it was little things like that. I am actually impressed that I’m able to notice [these things] and continue doing [them.] I think I’m at a
different level than where I was in January because of that. I feel like noticing and making conscious decisions to continue the good things has been really helping me.

B: Great. What helps you to notice these things?

J: If it happens once, and obviously it might just be a fluke, so I try again to test it for a day or two, and if I notice that it’s consistently proving itself to be helpful, it’s just a matter of testing it out a bunch of times to see if it’s working.

B: So you are consciously looking out for these things.

J: I guess you can say that. Yeah. Sometimes I consciously and sometimes unconsciously ask myself “well, is there anything I can do to make this more effortless?” Sometimes it’s also one of those things you’ve heard before, like your teacher telling you, and for some reason I’ve never taken them at face value. It’s kind of like that exercise we did in the group where we asked each other about what our teachers would say about this. And I guess I’ve kind been doing that. “If I took this to Mark or Brian, is there something that you know for a fact they would probably suggest?” and I’ll think about it. And usually I remember, “you know what? He actually did say something like that maybe like a month ago.” And I’d try it, and he was right.

I was really impressed that not only did Julian notice what he was doing in his practice with acute awareness, he was also asking a lot of relationship questions. In essence, Julian was teaching himself through his imagination of what his teachers would suggest.

B: That’s awesome! I’m so glad. OK. What can we talk about today so that at the end of our session, you would feel that this was more or less useful?

J: Yeah, I wanted to talk about working with people who are obsessive with control.

As per the nature of a school environment, Julian was constantly in interaction with many different people: classmates, colleagues, and teachers, among others. Inevitably, some of these relationships experienced tension under certain circumstances. The first relationship issue Julian brought to our meeting was the case of working with difficult colleagues.
Julian was involved with a chamber group, a wind quintet, which had formed prior to his university entrance. The fact that all the members of the quintet were alumni of the Toronto Youth Orchestra indicated a certain level of dedication and competence even though some of them had decided to pursue non-music studies at the university. Despite the switch in academic focus in some members of the group, everyone had agreed to continue performing as an ensemble in addition to their primary academic pursuits. Since the quintet was an extracurricular activity, the group, however, was not able to work on a consistent basis. Rehearsals were scheduled whenever they had a performance.

They had recently started rehearsing together again because they were scheduled to play a children’s outreach concert in May. Unfortunately, rehearsals had been rather stressful for Julian mainly because of a very demanding member in the group, Karla. Julian claimed she was overbearing with control. Karla demanded that everyone played her way, and she wasn’t open to other people’s ideas or suggestions. Julian understood her level of attention to detail and control to be related to her field of study.

J: That’s the way she is because she is coming from science background. She’s a life science student. I was that type of person before too, but as I grew and developed and I turned into a very conceptual person. I’m very like, “I allow things to happen. I don’t try to control things.” What’s slightly unsettled and uncomfortable is that we are preparing for this children’s outreach concert in May. [condensed] I feel uncomfortable that every time I suggest something, whenever I make some sort of comments to state my opinions, I always feel like they are somewhat marginalized.

B: I see.

J: And I don’t feel like things are really taken into considerations. And there have been times where, [because] I am not the one to start or initiate a conflict or argument, I’ll kind of allow things to take place. So every time, she’ll just instantly throw down what I just said and put her own opinion.

B: Ok.

J: And it definitely affects the way that I play because I feel in general… I don’t know. I feel tense in the way I play, and also there is not this sense of teamwork that we could have because of it. And maybe because of that I don’t say as much, because I’ve already filtered what I think she’s going to say before it comes out of my mouth. It feels a little uncomfortable.
I could sense great frustration in Julian’s usually calm voice. It obviously mattered enough for him to bring it to our meeting.

B: What do you want instead?

J: I want instead that we would at least try things, because I feel like, before we even get to the point of trying something out, she would already want to make a decision. I feel like it’s important to just take options into serious consideration before completely, making a bunch of assumptions and deciding on one. And I feel like definitely that there is lack of trust too. And I just want her to trust more that things will work out if you just allow them too. It’s not even specifically with rehearsing. It’s like I will meet her for coffee, for instance. She’ll constantly be texting me if I’m like one minute late. (laughs) And she’ll just kind of always want to be on the safe side of things.

Julian couldn’t remember a recent time when she had been more trusting and open to ideas since the group had a hiatus from rehearsing with each other during the school year. Julian believed, however, that she had been more accommodating in the past. When I inquired about what would be different for him when she became more open and trusting, Julian answered it would make a big difference. First of all, he suspected that he would have a lot more ideas because they would be working as a team. He also thought he would personally have a lot of fun playing in the group. On a personal level, Julian thought that Karla and he would be closer as friends despite the difference in their personality and leadership style.

B: What do you need to see Karla say or do for you to feel that she understands your needs and passion?

J: I think I would just like to see a lot more spontaneity. I just feel like things are just very rigid. And maybe those are also just my assumptions. But I also feel that things tend to fit into stone and I want to see a bit more, in our music, risk taking. Like not being afraid to play harder repertoire, not being afraid to take things fast because of the music wants to be at a certain tempo and not because we are scared of making mistakes.

B: I see.
J: I do like the fact that she’s involved. She’ll definitely help plan things. But there would be times when she’ll leave something up to me but it’s not quite like she completely gives me freedom. She’ll pester me and be like, “how’s it going? Are you still on track with that?” (laughs) She’s not a bad person. I don’t want to say that. I just wish that she would give a lot more trust and a lot more freedom to other people in the team.

B: What does she need to see you do or hear you say for her to feel that she can give you more freedom and she can trust you with your parts?

J: Hmm. I’m not sure. Maybe it’s also because, a few years ago, I was a bit more proactive on things, and I was probably a lot more deadline-oriented. The fact is that I’ve changed as a person, and I’m more lax. Maybe I can be considerate of the fact that she likes to be very prompt with things. Maybe I could also be a bit more prompt. I don’t mean prompt as in showing up to rehearsals late. I’m always on time. I mean just like, say if I were to email someone this program on this day, I’d get it done but I might not necessarily start working on it right away. And I’ll probably leave it until when it’s convenient for me. (laughs) When I do things like that, it leaves her feeling a little uncomfortable. So maybe I can be more considerate and give her assurance that this is something I’m working on.

B: Great. That’s a good idea. Maybe you can cc her at the same time so it saves her from calling you up and checking up on you.

J: Yes.

Julian came to the meeting hoping something would change about the rehearsal environment and working relationship with Karla in his wind quintet. With just a few questions, Julian was looking for ways to make changes within himself to make the situation better for everyone, rather than hoping that the other person would make changes to improve the situation for him. Regardless, he was still frustrated because his ideas were only considered as a last resort.

J: It’s funny because I might suggest something, and it’s not until we exhaust all the other options that she’ll take my suggestion.

B: Oh I see. If you’ve exhausted all the options, then she listens and tries your idea.

J: It’s funny because then after all that, she’ll kind of rephrase what I said so it doesn’t appear that it was my opinion.

B: What can you do when you make suggestion to make it seem like it’s her idea?

J: That’s a really good idea. I can be like, so you were saying this. But she can say “I wasn’t saying that”.

B: (laughs)

J: I think someone told me that when you use the word “you”, it seems really aggressive to some people. And when you make suggestions, you should always put it in the “I” form. “I think…”, “I feel…”

B: Right. It’s less confrontational.

Julian and I continued to brainstorm ideas for making gentle suggestions in a way that would be more receptive to Karla. Julian immediately made connections to how critiques were given in master-classes: always offering a positive comment or compliment before the constructive criticism.

J: I could connect my suggestions to something she’s doing already.

B: Yeah.

J: Ok. That could work. I can start with, “I really think you and the oboe player are blending really well over there. And I was wondering if I could also blend in with you guys more so we don’t sound like we are different instruments.” Something like that. Yeah.

B: Great. So that’s one way [of making suggestions.]

J: Connecting my suggestion to what’s already being done. And I could also fit in my suggestion to compliment something positive.

B: Yeah. Like, “when you play the downbeat with a bit of emphasis, it makes it easier for me to do….” You encourage them.

J: Yeah. And I was just thinking also that when I watch and listen to a lot of professional chamber music players rehearse, they always put in a little bit of humour in when they make suggestions.

B: Right.

J: I know someone said along the lines of, “I know it’s a nerdy clarinet thing, but could we just go over this measure for me?”

B: Right. They say things like, “for me”, “for security”, “for good luck”, things like that.

J: Maybe I can have a lot more fun with the way I state my suggestions and opinions.
B: Great. You were looking to get more fun out of rehearsals. You could have more fun in your verbal communication.

J: Yeah.

Julian recognized that it was important for Karla to feel secure and confident about their playing; Karla liked to work in sections whereas Julian liked to do run-throughs. Julian suspected that Karla always came to rehearsals with a clear agenda and she seemed most comfortable when rehearsals went according to her plans. Julian realized that if he could present his suggestions and have Karla believe they were getting work done, Karla may be more receptive to his suggestions.

J: If I make musical suggestion, I can add that, “if we all phrase in a certain way, it will help us stay together because we have the same way of ending or softening phrases and etcetera. Maybe instead of just saying, ‘let’s think of phrasing in a same way’ and leaving it at that, I can say, ‘let’s phrase it in the same way so that it will be more secure.”

B: Wow. That sounds great.

I wondered if recording the rehearsals and listening to the tape together would bring everyone on the same page, so I suggested they record their rehearsals and listen to the recording together. Julian thought it was an excellent idea especially because Karla loved paying attention to details. He also thought it was a clever way of allowing everyone to make objective observations on their own playing.

B: What else can you do so that you would get more out of rehearsals than you are currently getting?

J: I think, for me, the easiest way for that to happen is to have more fun, and just take things a lot easier on myself. And maybe that’ll influence other’s people thinking. Ironically, I know I have been saying I’m more of a relaxed person when it comes to these things, but I also feel like I’m making assumptions about rehearsals being really rigid. Maybe I am projecting that
in the way that I act as well. I need to just remove all the [negative] assumptions and assume that she trusts me and maybe that will somehow [improve things.]

B: What do your group members see you do for them to get an idea that you are having a great time, a lot of fun?

J: I could definitely use more humour. (giggles)

B: Ok.

J: Having fun isn’t just about hahaha. You can also have one when you are being really productive.

B: Of course. The sense of achievement and accomplishment. I wonder if that’s something that Karla will tune into, especially if she is this highly effective, efficient type of person. Would she feel great about having an intense, serious rehearsal without killing each other?

J: Yeah. I also feel like I’m definitely low of energy, so maybe I can set a goal for the next time for maintaining higher energy level. I think when people see that, it’s hard not to feel high energy.

B: Yeah. Some people just radiate that energy and you can get warped into it just by being near them.

J: Yeah. Maybe we can bond outside of rehearsals too. We haven’t done that for a while. We have a rehearsal this Saturday morning. Maybe we can go for lunch or something afterwards.

B: Is this good enough?

J: Yes, I think I have more than enough good ideas. I’m really excited for our rehearsal on Saturday.

More and more, Julian seemed to be looking internally and experiencing paradigm shift. It was fascinating to witness such drastic change from the beginning of the session in a relatively short amount of time. Julian’s story brought back my memories of working with a choir; every time I had a solution building conversation about how to work with challenging people, I couldn’t wait to try my new approach with them. I wondered if Julian was feeling what I had felt: a sense of hope.
7.6 Interlude

As per my request to update me with the progress on the working relationship in his quintet, Julian sent me an enthusiastic email.

Hi Bo Yon!
I've been meaning to get back to you forever! Last time we spoke about my conflict with one of the members of my wind quintet. We have a concert tomorrow, and I think I've been working with that person so much better than before. Our discussion really helped me to understand that if I'm asking for her to change, I have to change some of the ways I do things as well. So in general, I've changed some things to be considerate of the differences in our personalities. i.e. I've been super prompt and on top of things to accommodate her, and I think she's noticed that and has been more at ease against my more relaxed personality.

Also, I've really changed the way that I make suggestions, as we were discussing, and I'll make it very "I"-based, and ask questions, rather than make assumptions and statements. It has worked REALLY well, and it actually influenced her to change her approach to making suggestions, and she almost copied my new behaviour as well. So I thought it was interesting, that I essentially manifested what I wanted out of her, in MYSELF, and this changed the way she acted. WOW. Isn't that cool? If you want to influence someone's behaviour, be the person you want them to be! It's like magic, what a cool idea!

I love emotional intelligence :P

Thanks BoYon!

7.7 Juggling Relationships with Mentors

In music performance studies, most students study with one primary instructor for their major instrument. A student also has an option to minor in another instrument, in which case the student needed to study with more than one instructor. Rarely, a student would study one instrument with more than one teacher. In Julian’s case, his primary instrument is clarinet, and he did not minor in another instrument. However, Julian is currently studying with two teachers. Unfortunately, this arrangement was going to change because one of the teachers expressed that it would be better for him to study with just one teacher.
Julian had been an eager student, and as such, he had sought after some of the most well-known teachers in the city long before he came to the university. After 3 years in the university, Julian realized that he had studied with everyone on the faculty in the clarinet department at some point in his academic development. As he matured as a clarinetist, he wanted to expand his horizons even further and wanted to intake as much external input as he can manage. For this reason, Julian actively committed himself to various performance engagements and activities. Julian also welcomed opportunities to play for professional musicians outside his usual circle of teachers and mentors at the university. When Julian met and played for the clarinetist John, he felt as though it was a match made in heaven. He explained to me why he had been studying with two teachers and why he desired to study with John next year.

J: I wrote a list of an ideal teacher. I think I was very intuitive last year when I said I wanted to study with both of them because when I thought about it, both of them made the list of my ideal teacher.

B: Collectively?

J: Exactly. So I thought, “is there a possibility to find one person who has these qualities?” and I found it very challenging to do that. But what it led me to is this clarinetist in the city that I had two lessons with and every single time I think about these two lessons, I remember a lot of things that kind of fit into this list of my ideal teacher.

B: And this is not either of the two you are studying with right now?

J: Exactly.

Julian clearly expressed that he was interested in studying with John. However, there were many obstacles in making this a reality. Most notably, John was not a faculty member at the university. The school did not officially endorse private lessons outside of the faculty. Julian had already talked to the administration a few times and had been rejected. He was definitely disappointed but seemed to fully understand the school’s stance on the matter. “It can complicate things for many people,” said Julian. Julian knew he really wanted to study with John as his primary applied music teacher next year, but he also did not want to burn bridges in his existing relationships with his current teachers and the school. Julian was concerned about getting the approval from the administration more than anything because one of his current
teachers supported Julian’s desire to study with John, and the other one had already expressed that he would not continue in the current arrangement of two teachers.

B: So how would you know that our talk was useful to you at the end of our session?

J: Well, I have a meeting [with a school official] next week to talk about this. Even though he’s already said that this is not possible, he also said he wouldn’t mind if I came to explain my reasons. So I’m thinking of coming [up] with a list and laying on paper all the reasons why I need this teacher. But also, I’m wondering if there’s a better way to do that.

Julian seemed extra cautious; he wanted to choose his words very carefully because he believed that the administration wouldn’t take him seriously after a number of tries. Julian wanted to brainstorm a strategy for the meeting, which included drafting a concrete list he could present to the performance coordinator. If only John was invited to join the faculty, studying with him would not be a problem.

J: I thought maybe one of their concerns was that they didn’t want to make exceptions. They didn’t want to just hire someone for me. At the same time, I do know other people that would want to study with him as well. So, I thought that it would be a good idea to maybe have some endorsements from other students. [I could collect] some names, who would not necessarily say, “I’d 100% study with him,” but [say], “I’d be interested in studying with him if he was on faculty.”

B: I see. That’s a different approach. Rather than to say, “I want to study with him,” you are saying, “he’s a great guy and there are a number of us interested in studying with him. If you can make that happen, I would definitely be one of the students that’s interested.”

J: Yeah.

B: Oh, you’ve already packaged it nicely. I guess you could do that.

J: Yeah.

B: What else have you thought about?

J: The other thing I’ve thought about was how he would actually benefit the school because he’s the principle of the opera company. And we don’t have a clarinet faculty member that plays in the opera. So he would be the first clarinet faculty that plays the principle clarinet
in the opera company. So I thought the fact that we do have two fully staged operas a year, having someone who specializes in opera would be a great asset. I just played at a u of t opera where I played a major clarinet part and I felt like if I had someone with great expertise in opera background, I could make a better contribution to the production. So I feel like that’s a great part.

B: I see.

J: And the other thing is that he’s fairly new. New in the sense that he recently graduated from Juilliard in 2004 and the fact the he’s a recently out-in-the-world kind of professional is great because it shows that he’s recently been successful in winning auditions. I think that’s important because I believe he can offer more current and relevant advice to students who will be doing auditions after graduation.

B: Mm hmm.

J: Also just the fact that he has a lot of credentials that are really really impressive. He has Juilliard education. I think he’s in his early 30’s. He’s been the principle clarinet of the New Mexico Symphony, he went to Aspen Festival, and he has his own chamber thing that he does in the States. And I think when people choose their teachers, they choose their schools, and for their performing credentials. Also the fact that he’s very well known in the city for playing in the opera [is an attractive factor.] And every person I talked to about him, they love his playing and they love his sound. I think just from that experience of word of mouth, I think he would attract a lot of people to U of T.

B: Great.

J: Yeah. So I thought maybe if I said how he’d benefit the school overall, that would be good. A part of it could just be what my goals are in having him as my teacher but maybe I’ll throw that in as a last thought because I think the school may be more interested in what’s going to benefit the school.

Julian made a strong case for why it would benefit to have John on the faculty. However, Julian expressed uneasiness; “maybe it’s not going to help me in deciding that people are there to make fun of me, or you know, just turn me down.” I did not realize Julian feared being turned down until he made this comment. Then, it made perfect sense that the task of facing the administration and presenting one’s case to try and convince them would naturally be accompanied with sense of overwhelm and fear. After all, the school official had already said no once, and he also said that he was not going to change his mind. However, the administration was giving Julian an opportunity to talk about the situation and was willing to listen to Julian’s reasons. I wondered what would change if Julian made positive assumptions about the meeting
and the school official; perhaps the meeting was going to be pleasant and the school was there to assist Julian in any way possible.

B: Let me ask you a scaling question. On a scale of zero to ten, where at ten the school is going to say yes. And obviously zero is NO. Where are you on the scale now?

J: Because I’m optimistic, I would say five.

B: Great. And five, why not four? What’s already giving you that confidence or assurance?

J: I say five because at least this time around, I’ll be able to give him more specific reasons that sound convincing. I guess I don’t want to say eight because I really can’t predict that.

Julian was absolutely right in saying that he couldn’t predict someone else’s behavior. Regardless, I thought it would be good to check in again and clarify his expectations for the meeting.

B: Ok. What would be good enough for you to achieve from this one meeting?

J: I would honestly be happy if I at least got through my reasoning and the list in completion. And I would like to get the sense that maybe he doesn’t agree but he understands my points.

Surprisingly Julian’s ultimate outcome for the meeting was not having John as his primary instructor next year. This was a small but significant difference. The fact that Julian wanted to study with John remained unchanged but the success of this meeting now depended more on what Julian could control within his conduct than what he couldn’t control such as someone else’s decision. I wondered if it would be helpful to paint a vivid picture of how he was going to conduct himself throughout this meeting.
B: So when is this meeting going to be?

J: Next Thursday.

B: Ok. Thursday. Suppose today is Wednesday. What do you have planned for today? Today’s Wednesday.

J: Just imagine today’s Wednesday? Well, by Wednesday I have everything planned out what I want to say and I would have probably rehearsed it a few times to people and I’ll probably see if I can talk myself out of [negative self talk]. He might give me a question that throws me off balance because it’s not going to go the way I rehearse. Maybe I’ll ask people to ask me questions that they think are legitimate questions to ask. That’s all I can think about my part.

B: Ok.

J: I’m going to have my chocolate ready.

B: You’re going to have your chocolate ready? To feel good?

J: No, I mean I made chocolate truffles for everyone for Easter. Maybe I can bring him a little chocolate.

B: That’s an excellent idea. OK. So by Wednesday, you get your truffles ready, your talk is written out, you rehearse, ask other people to give you some unexpected questions or unrealistic questions and you rehearse that. And then suppose you finish everything that you have to do, suppose you go home, have dinner. Is that what you normally do?

J: After rehearsals? Yeah. I just …

B: What time do you get to bed?

J: Well, for the past two weeks, I’ve been really good about going to bed really early. Early for me is like 11:30. (laughs)

B: Ok.

J: So realistically, I’ll probably go to bed around 11:30.

B: Ok. So let’s say you did everything you wanted to do on Wednesday and you went to bed at 11:30. And while you are sleeping, a miracle happens. And this miracle… what should this miracle do?

J: Umm. A miracle would just miraculously make me a lot more confident.

B: Ah. Ok.
J: I’ll just feel super super confident that I’m just going to get to my points effortlessly, and he will consider them, because that’s my end goal.

B: Oh ok.

J: Sorry. Is there more to that question?

B: No. So this miracle made you confident?

J: Yup.

B: Now you don’t know that this miracle happened because you were sleeping. When you wake up in the morning, what do you notice that’s different?

J: Umm. I had a better sleep.

B: How many hours is a better sleep?

J: Probably for me, it’s seven hours.

B: ok.

J: Seven to eight. Usually when my thoughts are a lot clearer, and I’d imagine I’m pretty focused on what I’m going to do today, I just feel a lot more energy. I feel like when I’m confident I’m more extroverted.

B: Ok. Now, when you go into school for the meeting, what does the admin notice that says to him, “oh, Julian seems extra confident today”?

J: Ah, maybe just like more assertion in my voice, umm…

B: What else?

J: I would definitely be smiling a lot more, and generally give a vibe that I’m happy because obviously if I’m confident that this is going to work. I’d be a lot more smiley, and I feel that I was trying my best to be respectful the last appointment so I wasn’t trying to butt in or anything. I was just giving him the opportunity to speak. But I’m wondering if I’m more confident, if I would be more comfortable and say everything I want to say and not feel restricted.

B: Mm hmm. And what’s going to help you to do this? To speak more confidently and comfortably?

J: Um. I think maybe just practise with other people would be better and helpful.

I wanted to explore the times when Julian had to have a difficult talk and managed to do it more or less confidently, so that he would realize this was within his abilities. The miracle question, in
my view, would become more helpful for Julian if the details of his preferred future was somehow connected to what he had already done in the past or was able to do now. Unfortunately, our time was running out for the session and Julian had another appointment after our meeting. I decided to give him some feedback, which I had seldom done in our sessions, and make a suggestion to finish the miracle question on his own. I suggested that he take ‘the miracle shower.’ The miracle shower was an exercise I learned from Peter Szabo\textsuperscript{19}. The exercise was a modified miracle question. Julian claimed that he felt much clearer with what he had to do in order to prepare for the meeting. He still felt he had a lot to think about and was excited to try the miracle shower on his own.

7.8 Interlude

Once again, Julian sent me an email to report how his meeting with the school administrator went.

Hi Bo Yon!
I had a meeting with the school official today and I went with a completely different attitude. I believed that he was going to be extremely open and receptive, and that he wants what’s best for my career. I also identified all of my fears and wrote "countering statements" towards all of them and read these aloud before going into the meeting, and WOW everything was different from the last meeting.

I explained to him my reasons, and my passion for opera, and he said he was aware of the mentorship with the Canadian Opera Company, and really wanted to support me in that regard and thought I was a "definite candidate.” However, he still was unable at this point to make a definite decision as to hire John as my "applied teacher".

I did ask if it was possible to allocate a select number of lessons from Mark, my current primary teacher, to go towards John instead, and he said THAT may work, but he needs to speak to Mark about it. I know Mark is fond of John, and he's actually encouraged me to have lessons with him, so I think this may be a good "compromise.”

I'm very satisfied with this meeting, because I basically achieved everything that I planned out to get out of it. yay! I'm excited for what's to come :)

\textsuperscript{19} See p. 51-58 for the full description of the researcher’s personal experience with the “miracle shower” exercise.
Thanks for all your support throughout the term! I honestly don't think I could explain to you all of the things you've done that have changed my life.
You're amazing!
Chapter 8

8 Interpretations

In this chapter, participants’ stories are revisited and interpreted in order to make meaning of their experience in the research. As discussed in Chapter 4 Methodology, the participants’ stories are unique and different from each other, and therefore different approaches were taken for each participant. For Annie’s story, an inductive analysis examined the changes in her language. The use of coding was inspired by analytical techniques used in grounded theory research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). For Julian’s story, the learning outcomes of the Three Artistic Processes (Shuler, 2011) and Bloom’s taxonomy (Krathwohl, 2002) provided frameworks for interpretation.

8.1 Annie’s Journey

Annie’s journey throughout the study was a journey of self-discovery and empowerment through the changes in her perspectives and behavior. These changes signify Annie’s development as an emerging independent learner. This chapter will attempt to recapture and highlight the transformation in Annie’s thinking patterns as well as behavior, both of which suggest that Annie has evolved as an independent learner through the course of the study.

8.1.1 Transformation Seen Through Language

The change in Annie’s language throughout the study signifies the shift in her perspectives. This section will discuss two elements that reveal such change. The first change of language is observed in Annie’s statements about how she perceives herself and her reality, which was noticeable upon reading and re-reading the transcripts of sessions with Annie. In attempts to capture the emerging changes in Annie’s perception and to produce qualitative expression of findings, colour-codes have been employed to represent the tone and perspectives of Annie’s statements. The tables 1 to 6 contain statements Annie made during our private coaching
sessions. In these statements, Annie either describes who she is, what she does, or what she notices. The tables are presented in a row to demonstrate the flow in changes of the colour dominations over the course of six sessions.

The orange boxes contain statements that refer to deficiency or unsatisfactory matters. The tone of these statements is negative within the context of the conversation. The green boxes contain statements that acknowledge Annie’s strengths and her progress. The tone of these statements is positive within the context of the conversation. The purples boxes contain statements that refer to her experience in the first term of school before she joined the study. These statements emerge in session 5, and they represent Annie’s current perception of her past performances as affected by the culture and demands of being in a music school. The blue boxes, which emerge in the last session, contain statements that reveal Annie’s perception on practice and work, and the tone of these statements are rather neutral compared to the other statements Annie makes throughout her sessions.

The ratio between different colour boxes changes from the first session to the last session. In the first session, orange boxes dominate in number as Annie makes numerous statements that describe what she doesn’t do well and how she is struggling. There is an underlying tone of discontentment and frustration. Annie does make a few positive comments about herself, such as “I have a very analytical mind,” but she immediately counters the statement by saying that she hasn’t been able to apply her analytical mind to music studies. In the second session, Annie makes only one comment about herself: “I am a morning person.”

In the third session, Annie makes an equal number of positive and negative statements about herself and her progress. From the fourth session, the positive statements in green boxes outnumber the negative statements in orange boxes. The negative statements Annie makes in the fifth session are limited to descriptions of her performance in the first term of the school year. There is no clear evidence that Annie’s perception on her past performance, which is negative in
tone, has a negative influence on her current perception of herself and her performance. In the last session, orange boxes disappear and green boxes become predominant. The blue boxes represent Annie’s perception on practice, perhaps influenced and changed by the experience in the study. In the context of the conversation, these statements appear to be neutral in tone; they neither condemn nor praise Annie’s performance.

Table 5: Annie’s Session 1

| Referring to deficiency, unsatisfactory matters, negative tone |
| Acknowledging strengths and progress, positive tone |
| Interpretation on past experience |
| Current perception on practice and work, neutral tone |

- I am an older student.
- I’m not efficient.
- I get anxious.
- I get stressed.
- I don’t plan well.
- I’m never fully confident.
- I’m not looking ahead.
- I’m not thinking about things when I’m practising.
- I’m just doing things over and over.
- I never take that approach with music.
- I’m never ready.
- I just don’t have that kind of planning at all.
- I just don’t have that kind of planning in my system at all.
- I can never estimate.
- I haven’t been able to put that into music.
- I’m open to ideas.
- I have a very analytical mind.
- I’m a new musician trying to figure it out.
Table 6: Annie’s Session 2

| Referring to deficiency, unsatisfactory matters, negative tone |
| Acknowledging strengths and progress, positive tone |
| Interpretation on past experience |
| Current perception on practice and work, neutral tone |

I am a morning person.

Table 7: Annie’s Session 3

- Sometimes, I even screw up the rhythm.
- I never catch my errors.
- I'm a very slow starter.
- I take my time to learn the music.
- I have a better vision.
- I'm not so stressed.
- I'm not very rigid.
- I'm pretty accurate.
Table 8: Annie’s Session 4

Referring to deficiency, unsatisfactory matters, negative tone

Acknowledging strengths and progress, positive tone

Interpretation on past experience

Current perception on practice and work, neutral tone

I just don’t learn anything fast.
If I learn anything fast, it’s not good enough for performance.
I’m not that fast with [playing in the high register].
I’m just not used to the fingerings.

I can count but I’m so bad at it.
I’m afraid.
I have many good ideas.
I’m happy because I have ideas to implement.

I get the original things back very quickly.
There’s a lot that I can just sightread.
I’m not that slow as I think I am.
I’m the only one who's trying to play in the high register.

I’m a first year student.
Table 9: Annie’s Session 5

| Referring to deficiency, unsatisfactory matters, negative tone |
| Acknowledging strengths and progress, positive tone |
| Interpretation on past experience |
| Current perception on practice and work, neutral tone |

| I'm somewhat experienced. | I'm not that much more experienced. | I'm relatively faster at writing than other people. | I found myself as to where I am. |
| I have a lot of hope to get back my confidence and my ease of playing. | I can do that. | I'm good on that front. | I don't need to practise as much when I play with others. |
| (The negative things) are slowly going away. | Maybe I'm more focused. | I'm not distracted. | I think I lost two things when I came to university: my confidence and my ease of playing. |
| I was very anxious about the conductor yelling at me. | I was just losing my confidence. | I had been having lots of setbacks. | I had more technical abilities and confidence before I came to university. |
| It felt like I was getting worse. | | | I was losing confidence and as a result my playing has been suffering. |
The change in Annie’s perspectives is also observed in Annie’s choice of words. In the first three sessions, Annie labels many things as a “problem.” It is a “problem” that the skills acquired from her previous profession, an engineer, have not transferred to music. It is also a “problem” that she never feels ready or confident to be on stage. When Annie returns to the second session after having experimented with specific practice plans, she reports more problems than non-problems or things that are working. Annie does recognize small improvements, i.e. “planning is better,” but she is quick to add a “problem” to her statements, i.e. “I still have the problem of feeling it’s never ready.” In the second session, Annie uses the word “problem” seven times while describing her progress and circumstances: running out of time to practise and falling behind her practice schedule; orchestra rehearsals that are three-hours long; scheduling only working on certain days when she has more time; not getting to bed early; a Monday evening class that ends late; TV shows that she finds addictive; and watching more than one TV episode at a time.
Changes slowly emerge in the third session when Annie begins to refer to what’s happening in her life as “issues” or “concerns”; she mentions the words “issue” twice and “concern” once. She still does use the word “problem” but the frequency is dramatically reduced; she uses the word “problem” three times in the third session. The words “issue” and “concern” both refer to what she experiences when she tries playing her pieces at a fast tempo: it’s not as accurate as when she plays them at a slow tempo.

The word “problem” does not disappear until the last session, but the use of the word is noticeably reduced over the course of six sessions: once in session four and once in session five. When she uses the word, it refers to what other people are experiencing, such as a fingering problem, or what she has experienced in the past. Instead of the word “problem,” a new word emerges in the fourth session: “challenge.” Annie describes these challenges as “new” or “good,” which signifies embracing attitudes. These challenges are learning a new piece quickly, playing in the high register, a new repertoire in the orchestra, and rhythm. This new word, “challenge,” appears six times in the fourth session, and the word “challenging” also appears once in the fourth session.

8.1.2 Transformation Seen Through Behaviour And Stories

When Annie first began the study, she expresses frustration towards her performance in school, and does not show a great deal of autonomy. She seems to believe that she does not have the control over her playing. Annie explains by saying that she “couldn’t play the way she wanted to”, and she “would just play something wrong” in chamber music even though she has played it correctly “a million and ten times” on her own. Annie also describes how her productivity is restricted by external conditions such as lengthy orchestra rehearsals, classes that end late in the evening, and TV shows that she finds addictive. Even when Annie is brainstorming ideas for getting up early in the morning, she relies on external sources for motivation, such as her husband getting up early with her, or the smell of coffee that would function as a morning call. The locus of control seems to be more external than internal.
Regardless, Annie is determined to become more “result-oriented” as she explains in her reason for joining the study. Annie constantly experiments with the way she practises and comes up with several strategies of her own. The majority of these practice techniques incorporate what she has done in the past or is already doing, such as sending herself weekly emails with goals and reminders, and practising her entries in orchestra repertoire by listening to recordings and either singing her part or yelling out “now” at her entries. Annie feels the need to be focused in her practice, and composes a few different “cards” that contain questions she would ask herself to remain conscious throughout her practice: these are Annie’s personal tools that are constructed based on Annie’s knowledge and experience.

Finding her own ways to deal with practice issues expands outside of her practice room, as noticeable in the stories she tells in our sessions. For example, Annie initially mentions how she finds it difficult to make her entries in the orchestra. Annie would say to herself, “it’s coming, it’s coming,” and panic and evidently miss her entry. She claims that she may be “afraid” of entries, and labels her response as an “anxiety.” In the fifth session, however, Annie shares a different story about playing in the orchestra. If she feels that she is going to play something wrong, she chooses not to play, and instead marks her music so she can work on it later: a strategy.

Annie’s sense of competency increases throughout the study as she begins to notice positive things in her studies. For instance, playing repertoire at a fast tempo is considered a “problem” in our earlier conversations. Annie, however, reports in the last session that she has made great progress in fast tonguing exercises. She explains that she began the exercises at 60 (metronome marking) and she has progressed to playing them at 100. While Annie cannot execute the exercise at 100 as well as she could at a slower tempo, she recognizes that she is getting better: playing at “80 wasn’t very good five months ago,” but now playing at 80 is “good” and she could “even play at 100.” Annie’s stories seem to echo one of the solution-focused approach tenets; small steps can lead to big changes.
Sense of autonomy and purpose are added to Annie’s growing sense of competency: a recipe for creating drive according to Daniel Pink (2011). Her growing sense of autonomy is noticeable when she reports that she is not “mindlessly practising,” but is rather “totally involved in it.” She claims that she is “exploring new avenues,” and is looking forward to doing more than what is required for her by memorizing her jury repertoire in order to improve her playing. Annie seems to welcome the opportunity to take on a challenge and experiment, as she demonstrates in the story of working on two orchestra excerpts completely on her own in her attempt to become more independent. The response Annie receives when she plays the excerpts in the class is mixed; while the feedback from the teacher is positive on her choice of fingering, the teacher also points out that Annie’s interpretation on the dynamics does not reflect the “industry standard” at orchestra auditions. Annie, however, receives the feedback without feeling badly about herself; Annie has her own reasons for playing the excerpt at $mf$ rather than $p$, and she claims that she did not know about the industry standard before her presentation in the class. Similar to her reaction to the occasional “crash” she experiences when she fails to practise according to her plans, Annie recognizes that she has done what she is able to do, and she does not stress herself out.

A strong sense of responsibility and high expectation, as noticeable in her statements such as “I should be more disciplined” slowly disappears. Instead, a sense of purpose emerges. In the fourth session, Annie states that she “came to university to play,” and that she “did not come to hide behind everyone’s back,” when she describes her motivation for taking on the challenge of playing the difficult parts in high register in the orchestra. In the last session, Annie clearly expresses her interest in becoming an “independent learner” whom she defines as someone who “does not need a teacher to tell you how to play,” and yet could play “the way the composer intended” or according to “the university standards.” She reiterates that she has come to the university to enjoy the liberty of “just picking up a piece, learning it, and playing it.”

As I accompanied Annie on her journey throughout the study, I witnessed the development of her independent learning skills. The three elements of an independent learner in Annie I recognized were: drive, skills or knowledge, and tools. Annie was clearly motivated to do
something different when she joined the study. She became more driven as she recognized her past successes and that she could incorporate them in her current endeavors. Using the tools and strategies she built, Annie made continuous attempts for improvements, and she became more satisfied with herself and the progress she made. The pre/post surveys attached below represent Annie’s own evaluation of her performance.

### Table 11. Annie’s Survey Results

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<td><strong>Performance</strong></td>
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### 8.2 Julian’s Journey

While drawing comparisons or creating generalized theories about how students learn and develop is not the intention of this research, perhaps it is worth mentioning one of the most obvious differences between Julian and Annie’s stories. Julian’s application of solution-focused approach seems much wider and more diverse than - and not as linear and progressive as - in Annie’s stories. Unlike Annie, whose application of solution-focused approach is limited to improving her practice, Julian experiments and applies solution-focused concepts to various parts of his life, not limited to performance related topics. Nevertheless, Julian’s primary focus is
improving his artistic process - performing in particular - and the discussion in this section will focus on developments related to performance and practice.

8.2.1 Balancing Act- Creativity and Critical Thinking

Julian is a juggler. His portrait in chapter 6 shows how he juggles many balls, including his time between numerous “commitments,” performance issues such as musical ideas and technical challenges, as well as his relationships with other people with whom he shares his musical journey. Julian even claims himself that his practice is “a balancing act.”

In examining Julian’s story, I discover another balancing act that seems to signal the emergence of an independent learner. Julian’s story is intricately woven with the four learning outcomes according to Schuler’s Three Artistic Processes (2011): creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, and communication. Critical thinking, in particular, is of high interest because it is one of the key goals in education (Oare, 2011).

Throughout Julian’s journey in the study, there is a small but significant change in his descriptions of his practice and planning strategies that demonstrate the development of critical thinking and creativity. Initially, his stories display basic understanding of planning concepts, and his practice strategies seem very general and vague. Over the course of the study, however, Julian begins to take more ownership and his stories begin to reveal how his conscious experiments and heightened awareness feed each other, resulting in improved self-efficacy and productivity. I will illustrate this with three excerpts from his sessions.

In the first session, Julian describes how he currently manages his time and commitments as the following: “I have a vague, or general idea. [condensed] I usually prioritize. I see what’s coming up and say, well this is coming up in 2 days so I should focus on that more than something that’s coming up in a week.” Julian also has a routine for practising: he usually practises two to three
hours a day, beginning with forty-five minutes of technical exercises to warm up, then moves on to solo repertoires. He ends his practice with ensemble pieces. When time is limited, Julian practises away from the instrument by studying the score visually. At this time, his planning is very general and is only designed temporally.

By the third session, Julian begins to report improvements in time management: he hasn’t procrastinated and he has managed to get to all his “commitments.” His priorities are still dictated by deadlines. However, he employs a creative strategy: “I put ‘w’ beside every commitment I had this week, and then I put a number beside it. 1 being top priority and following that not so much.” In addition, Julian begins to use the practice brochure that contains solution-focused questions. The brochure is designed to help students to have self-coaching conversations as they plan, strategize, and reflect on their practice. Julian has started using the planning section on the brochure and found it helpful: “I follow the page of the pamphlet on the practice planning. I find that really helps just to validate where I am right now. It helped me this weekend when I created a plan.. [condensed].. And creating that plan really helped because I just was really focused on what I thought I need more work.” In this short excerpt, Julian demonstrates how he “applies (the solution-focused concepts),” and “evaluates (his current status)” in managing his time and practice activities, two higher-order thinking categories in Bloom’s taxonomy.

In the fourth session, Julian describes how he has refined his planning strategies to include a few specific solution-focused questions. The questions elicit detailed responses in terms of what he is trying to achieve, including how he wants to sound and feel while performing. This description reminds me of the interpretation stage in Shuler’s three artistic processes. The questions he asks himself seem to help him articulate his thoughts and imagine his desired outcome visually and aurally: “I think creating a plan for myself before I practise has been working really well. Because I’m using a few basic questions that I’ve been saying to myself… like ‘what is this for?’ ‘what’s my next stepping stone?’ ..[condensed].. I’ll say ‘what do I want it to ideally sound like and feel like?’ ..[condensed].. I have this idea how I want to feel when I’m performing it. And I said ‘where am I to that idea?’ and then I’ll prepare.. and I’ll do the scaling
under and scaling above. And I come up with a game plan for myself of what I need to do to get there. And surprisingly I have a lot of answers. If I remember, I’ll actually see if it worked.”

“A game plan” is something Julian creates to facilitate his own learning process using the concepts he learned. This is significant because ‘creating’ is the highest thinking category in Bloom’s taxonomy. Furthermore, the last statement in the excerpt above indicates that Julian has begun to include more rigorous reflection and evaluation as a part of his practice regime. Julian continues to describe how he has been recording his practice sessions to listen back to his playing; rehearsing, evaluating, and reflecting are artistic activities that precede performance (Shuler, 2011). How to improve practice productivity still seems to be one of Julian’s main concerns. Yet, the coaching conversation topic has changed from quantitative and temporal productivity to more interpretive and qualitative productivity.

The developments in Julian’s cognitive processes seem to expand ways in which Julian constructs his own learning path. However, Julian tells a story of a setback in the fifth session. This session is interesting because while Julian does not clearly describe what caused the setback, his storytelling takes the pattern of his first session where meeting deadlines seems to be the most important objective and his higher-order thinking activities such as analyzing, evaluating, and creating disappear. With this information, I realize that the process of becoming and remaining an independent learner may be a delicate balancing act. Fortunately, Julian seems to recover quickly and his storytelling in the sixth session resembles those of third and fourth sessions where there is ample amount of analyzing, evaluating, and creating.

8.2.2 Sharing the Stage – Collaboration

“The sage on the stage” captures the image of an expert who imparts expert knowledge to others by lecturing. While it may be a great way of presenting information, it would be difficult to assess how much of this information has been effectively received by the learners. At the beginning of the study, Julian and I unintentionally follow this pattern of relationship. I, as a
novice solution-focused coach and an advanced student in piano performance, present many concepts I found helpful in my studies and make numerous suggestions. Just in the first session alone, I introduce the concepts of several solution-focused questions, debt-snowball, and SMART goal setting. There is no way to tell if Julian understood or found these concepts useful in the first session.

Over the course of the next few sessions, Julian reveals how he internalizes some of the concepts. Interestingly, there is no mention of either debt-snowball or SMART goal setting from Julian; these concepts are probably not integrated in Julian’s planning or practice strategies. Scaling questions, however, seems to be one of the tools Julian consistently uses in his practice even though his own responses to solution-focused scaling questions in the first couple of sessions always included what he was lacking. In solution-focused scaling questions, how high or low one rates himself on the scale is not as important as exploring what is already working well that warrants the rating. Imagining what is happening on the next number on the scale is helpful to define the next steps. In the first few sessions, Julian’s response to scaling questions includes reasons for deficiency: i.e. reasons why he doesn’t put himself any higher on the scale. By the fourth session, however, Julian’s response to scaling questions begins to change; he explains his position on the scale with what is working well, and then states what he needs to do next to move one step higher on the scale.

A new picture of our roles and relationship emerges in the last session. Julian has been progressively becoming the expert who presents information and explains concepts while I become “the guide on the side.” Julian not only presents and shares information and concepts pertaining to his instrument (clarinet technique) and music in general (rhythm, phrasing, stage presence, etc.) but non-musical topics such as personality types (true colours) and truffle-making as well. There is no appropriate place for my advice in our conversations and my two main activities in our sessions become listening and making tea. What a wonderful contrast to the picture of the expert-student relationship drawn in the first session!
Lastly, Julian’s story reveals that he mentally becomes “the sage on the stage” for himself. The following excerpt taken from his last session in the study describes the depth of his reflection and imagination, which fuel his artistic process.

“Sometimes I consciously and sometimes unconsciously ask myself, ‘well, is there anything I can do to make this more effortless?’ Sometimes it’s also those things you’ve heard before, like your teacher telling you, and for some reason I’ve never taken them at face value. It’s kind of like that exercise we did in the group where we asked each other about what our teachers would say about this. And I guess I’ve kind of been doing that. ‘If I took this to Mark or Brian, is there something that you know for a fact they would probably suggest?’ and I’ll think about it. And usually I remember, ‘you know what? He actually did say something like that maybe like a month ago.’ And I’d try it, and he was right.”

8.2.3 Stage Presence – Communication

Effective communication strategy is the central theme in our coaching conversation when Julian talks about how to work with a demanding member in his ensemble or how to talk to school officials. Communication also emerges as an important matter when performing; Julian becomes more aware of his musical ideas and the kind of stage presence he wants to create before an audience. This change begins in session three when Julian vocalizes his present concerns about performing: Julian is working on “how to play exactly the way (he) want(s) the first time,” and creating feelings of space and effortlessness. Julian also remembers that he is able to do this by “not focusing on technique at all but more focusing on producing music and letting (his) ideas and experience come out.” Julian also videotapes himself practising. He says watching himself play raises his awareness about many things including his physical gestures and performance habits. While Julian does not share any specific details about his musical idea at this point in the research, it is clear that Julian does have many ideas he wants to express in his playing.

In session four, Julian’s awareness for what he wants to communicate in his playing deepens. For example, his use of the scaling question demonstrates how clearly he executes his musical ideas. When he shares information about what and how he is practising, Julian shares his
musical ideas in greater detail than before: rhythm, phrasing, breathing, and stage presence. Julian even begins to practice before an actual audience by organizing several run-through performances in front of his friends. He wants to make sure he is able to communicate all of his ideas under pressure. Julian plans to watch videos of famous performers to “learn and copy their confidence on stage.”

In his last session, Julian shares his concern that reveals how important he feels effective communication is for a performer both on and off stage. When he talks about collaborating with others in an ensemble setting, Julian’s main concern is to have his ideas considered and communicate them to his team effectively. Considering and trying out as many different ideas in practice – even “risk-taking” ones- would make rehearsals “fun” for Julian. Even on stage, Julian wants to stretch his comfort level and take more risks in order to present a captivating performance for the audience. In this conversation, Julian introduces the concept of meta-communication in music making: he needs to communicate with his team members about what and how to communicate with an audience on stage. One of Julian’s solutions for this challenging task is to “be creative in the way he makes suggestions to (his) team.”

8.2.4 The Pre/Post- Study Survey Result

Julian is a highly motivated student whose achievements are proof of his dedication and talents for music, both before and after the study. As the chart below shows, Julian has rated himself 8 or higher on most of the pre-study survey questions. The lowest score on his pre-study survey is 7 on “Time Management,” which corresponds with the opening conversation during the first session; Julian wants to improve his time management skills. Julian shows an overall increase in the post-study survey; however since his pre-study survey scores are high, the difference does not seem dramatic. It is interesting to note that the scores on “Performance Satisfaction” and “Independent Learner” have decreased in the post-survey. Since Julian reports many successes throughout the study, a possible explanation may be that the experience in the study influenced Julian’s perception, and increased awareness on his playing perhaps raised his standards and expectations.
In response to my inquiry about his interpretation on the survey data, Julian sent the following email.

Hi Bo Yon!

My thoughts are below:

Performance Satisfaction: I think maybe a factor that have contributed to this very slight decrease may have been the fact that over the course of the year, I had challenged myself with harder repertoire than I have ever done before. For example, the Denisov clarinet sonata that I played on my recital was by far the hardest 20th century piece I have ever studied. Essentially, I think it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain and/or surpass my satisfaction levels as more complex and new skill sets are required out of me.

Independent Learner: I'm more certain on this decrease because I see it actually as a very positive change. I think ultimately what SF Therapy has taught me was that if you don't have the answers, then figure out who to seek for the answer because even knowing who to seek is an answer in itself. Therefore, I was more willing to make more use of my already established support team as well as extending this support team to include new people.

Table 12. Julian’s Survey Result
8.2.5 Independent Learner vs. Independent Learning

Initially, whether or not his experience in the study developed the independent learner in Julian was a question I could not answer with confidence because I did not witness a dramatic transformation similar to the one observed in Annie’s journey. What I could confidently say was that Julian and I both enjoyed our journey, and that Julian’s participation was definitely positive. Julian had clear session goals each time and he always followed the plans and strategies we developed in each session. Julian seemed to integrate the solution-focused concepts in his studies; he readily used the outcome questions, scaling questions, and relationship questions when he made plans for his practice and performances. Julian reported that he enjoyed increased awareness when he answered the solution-focused questions as they helped him to articulate his thoughts. Also, Julian’s application of solution-focused concepts was not limited to music making; the expectation that he would be responsible to apply his learning to other areas of his life, he claimed, gave him a sense of increased independence.

Yet, the positive impact of the study seemed superficial because I had the impression that Julian seemed to rely on our individual sessions for him to generate ideas and strategies to deal with the issues he brought to sessions. Only when I revisited his stories and observed his experience through specific lenses – Bloom’s Taxonomy and Shuler’s Three Artistic Processes – I began to see that Julian did progress as an independent learner, exhibiting critical thinking as well as creativity, collaboration and communication: outcomes of an artistic process. This helped me to realize that perhaps Julian thrived in social settings where he could balance between internal and external resources. Perhaps he needed a sounding board that allowed him to resonate his ideas and validate his feelings and opinions.

Despite the consistent need for social interaction to accompany his learning, I view Julian’s learning process as that of an independent learner for three specific reasons. First, Julian actively sought after assistance and resources that he deemed necessary for optimal performance without anyone directing him. Second, external input was internalized to either produce higher-level
thinking or facilitate his artistic process. Lastly, Julian always took responsibility for his own action and decisions in his music studies.
Chapter 9

9 Concluding Thoughts

9.1 Summary

Participants in this research were advanced music students studying performance at the university level. The solution-focused approach was introduced to the participants through private coaching sessions and group meetings as a possible means to promote productivity and effectiveness in practice, to improve self-perception, increase confidence and motivation, as well as to facilitate the development of independent learners. The participants’ lived experience through the research including how each participant internalized and applied the solution-focused tools in their music study was the main source of data in this qualitative research.

The cases of two participants, Annie and Julian, were examined with different analytical approaches. In Annie’s case, the transformation in her perception and practice throughout the research was analyzed by examining the changes in her language and storytelling. In Julian’s case, a picture of an emerging independent learner was sketched by examining his stories using analytical framework that described critical thinking and artistic processes. Employing different lenses for analysis seemed appropriate and necessary when interpreting subjective and personal data such as individual stories.

In Annie and Julian’s stories, the research revealed that the solution-focused approach may be adapted as useful tools for the following learning stages: planning, strategizing, reflecting, and evaluating. Also, Annie and Julian both effectively utilized solution-focused tools in their music studies to create positive changes in practice productivity, to raise self-awareness, to improve self-perception, and to mature as an independent learners by actively initiating and refining their own learning process.
9.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study

9.2.1 Non-Expert Stance

My personal experience as a solution-focused practitioner, prior to this study, had mostly been a smooth sail. I, as a student with music background, had a relatively easy time taking a non-expert stance when engaging in a coaching conversation; I didn’t have the expertise to give a diagnosis or suggest interventions even if I wanted to. Working with students who dealt with the same problems that I have struggled with in my learning, however, revealed how difficult it was to remain in a non-expert stance. Especially after having worked as a music teacher for several years, I wasn’t always successful keeping my mind and mouth quiet when listening to students sharing their problems. Thankfully, as the study progressed, my ability to remain within a non-expert perspective did improve. The later transcripts show that I talk less and less and manage to hold back from sharing my story or offering advice. However, I wonder how differently the study would have unfolded for many participants had the coach and researcher been an actual non-expert. It would be an interesting point to be mindful about in future studies.

9.2.2 Participant Expectation

According to Asay and Lambert’s study on successful therapeutic communication (1992), the client’s hope and expectation make up 15% of success factors. In this study, one of the factors that influenced participants’ expectation was the recruitment process. The participants were recruited by various means such as email communication, flyers, info session, and word-of-mouth. Those who attended the info session had an opportunity to decide for themselves whether they thought this would be a useful experience in their learning. Some students who joined the study without understanding the nature of solution-focused coaching because they were recommended by their teachers or peers, somehow seemed to think that this research would provide extra support for their studies; several of them explained that they heard somewhere that this study was where they could get tips on how to practise. I did wonder if this kind of expectation had shaped their research experience and limited solution-focused applications even before they started their journey. Either screening participants with either interview or survey to
control the participants’ expectation or studying the impact of participant expectation on the research experience would be interesting possibilities for future inquiry.

9.2.3 Uniformity in Research Design

The length of the study was quite long; the study was conducted throughout the entire second academic semester. However, the design of the study was flexible and considerate of student’s time commitment. I wanted to encourage students to do what worked for them, and didn’t want participation in the study to become another onerous obligation in their academic life. I believed this was following the client-centered principles of solution-focused approach. As such, private sessions were optional after the second session. Only those who found it useful and wanted to meet in a private setting could book appointments for private coaching sessions. However, the participants who demonstrated significant and positive change were mostly students who were committed to participating in private coaching sessions in addition to the required group meetings. Annie and Julian both participated in six private coaching sessions. In their cases, the impact of solution-focused applications and emergence of independent learning were progressively more noticeable in later sessions. While solution-focused coaching is an effective brief coaching model, allowing sufficient time and opportunities for participants to be fully immersed in the experience may be necessary to observe significant changes in their stories or research findings. Therefore, a more rigorous structure in research design and commitment to the research may be helpful in future studies.

9.2.4 Furthering the Development of Independent Learners

In this study, the concept of independent learners was examined within the context of educational environments. However, true independence in learning may be taking place outside of an educational institute. There are several possibilities to follow this research: 1) a follow-up study to examine the sustainability and long-term effects of solution-focused coaching; 2) a study with students who either graduated or may be studying on their own; and 3) a study with private music teachers adapting solution-focused approach as a pedagogical tool to facilitate student-centered learning.
A study that looks at the sustainability and long-term effects of solution-focused coaching would be interesting for the following three reasons. Firstly, it would be a deeper testimony of usefulness of solution-focused tools. If students are voluntarily applying the SFBT concepts to their study beyond this research, it reflects that students perhaps recognize the benefit of using the solution-focused tools. Secondly, if students continue to exhibit characteristics of independent learners beyond the current study, it suggests that the SFBT approach could be integrated as an effective pedagogical method that fosters independence in learning. Lastly, if students are able to sustain or improve self-perception and productivity beyond this research, it fortifies the current literature on the validity and effectiveness of brief coaching methods such as SFBT.

A future study with students who either graduated from university or may be studying on their own may present the possibility of a larger scope of independent learning that would include the realm of interpretive choices and artistic decisions. This is insight that comes from observing Julian’s journey in this research. As Julian evolved as an independent learner, the description of his study and current concerns also evolved. Chapter 7 illustrates how Julian’s primary concern moved from time management to making decisions about musical characters and expressive gestures in his playing. A further study which explores SFBT application with a more mature demographic, may reveal interesting insights about the deeper development of musicianship and artistry.

Employing the SFBT concepts and technique as pedagogical tools may be valuable in understanding how to create student-centered learning environments within the traditional structure of private music instruction. Perhaps it may be worthwhile to conduct this research with different student demographics such as young beginner-level students, pre-college level students, and university level students. The effects may be different among various groups and the insights may reveal when it is most effective and appropriate to adapt solution-focused approach as a pedagogical tool. In chapter 5, I described my personal experience as a teacher experimenting with solution-focused tools in the lessons I taught. My impression was that younger students were more liberal in expressing their thoughts; the older students seemed more
apprehensive. The older students, when asked for their opinions, often conferred with me to validate their answers. I wonder if different student responses I observed are results of conformity to the traditional music instruction methods; students learn to depend on teachers’ expertise to validate their thoughts and competencies. An in-depth study may be useful to either confirm or invalidate my observation.

9.3 Researcher’s Reflection

I began this research as an attempt to find answers to some of the questions I had about my own training as an aspiring musician and my development as an emerging music teacher. Playing an instrument is a highly skill-based activity, and it is difficult to imagine teaching new skills while assuming a non-expert role. The challenge is even greater when you realize that the skills involved in creating music are not just physical but also conceptual.

The traditional teaching environment of master teacher and apprentice appears quite logical for private music instruction. In my formative years, I did not question the climate or culture of such an environment; it shaped and formed my fundamental musicianship and also helped me pursue advanced studies in piano performance at the university level. When I started teaching, however, I quickly faced the challenge of working with students whose talents, motivation, aspiration – and even parental support – varied. While my teaching approach was consistent – often mimicking that of my teachers’, my students’ performance varied; it was intriguing for me because I wasn’t always certain why my approach worked with some students while it didn’t with others.

Encountering SFBT opened doors to a fresh way of thinking that provoked me to examine my own performance as a musician: both as a student and a teacher. I found myself fascinated with the concept of a client-centered approach. I also found the solution-focused questions very unorthodox and yet quite useful. After several small experiments in personal settings, I set out
on a mission to explore the possibility of adapting solution-focused approach in music, and so began my journey in the DMA program.

As I get close to the end of this journey and reflect on my experience thus far, I realize that this was a process that confirmed my personal belief about the usefulness of the SF tools in private music education. Participants in the research succeeded in creating a liberal and democratic learning environment for themselves and witnessing their successes was simply exhilarating. I can confidently say that the experience in the research is transforming my practice when I approach my instrument as well as when I approach my students. It is my sincere hope that other musicians, performers and teachers alike, will see the benefit of solution-focused learning, share in my enthusiasm for this new avenue, and join in the movement for transforming our studios.
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Dear students,

This is an invitation for you to participate in a DMA research, "Coaching in Music Education: The Solution-Focused Approach to Practice and Performance."
If you are a performance major in either an undergraduate or graduate program, have a recital to play in the upcoming term, and want to learn new ways to increase efficacy of your practice, you may be interested in participating in this research.

The objective of this research is to provide you with tools to improve your practice and performance strategies by adapting the principles and techniques of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy to your music study.

If you are interested, please join us for a brief information meeting on Friday, January 11th, 2013, in room 209 (EJB) from 12 pm-1 pm.
Light refreshments will be served.
Appendix B

GENERAL CONSENT FORM

To Whom It May Concern:

You have been invited to participate in a study that uses counselling tools of Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) in music education, in particular students studying music performance at post-secondary level.

We will be investigating how using the SFBT tools can help music students clarify performance related goals, create appropriate and manageable plans, and evaluate the progress as well as the final outcome with improved self-awareness, motivation, and confidence, all the while increasing learning potential in practice rooms and performance potential on stage.

Your choice to participate in the study is entirely voluntary, and will in no way affect your grades associated with performance study, seminars, studio classes or coursework. If you choose to participate initially, and then wish to withdraw at any point during the study, you may also do so without penalty, adverse affect on your grade, or negative treatment from any of the instructors.

The study will commence in January, 2013 and conclude in April, 2013. There are three components to this study: individual coaching/interviews, weekly small group activities, and written surveys. Individual coaching/interviews and small group classes will provide a platform for you to learn about Solution-Focused Brief Therapy and explore different ways you can apply it in your own studies. Surveys will be used to gather your perspectives on the research process.
and your progress.

Both the interviews and the group meetings will be video-recorded and transcribed for the data collection and analysis. The content of the interviews, group activities, and surveys will be kept confidential and will only be used with anonymity in the dissertation.

Upon your decision to participate in the study, your private teacher will be contacted to participate in filling out a short survey, before and after the test period, and after you have completed your recital/ performance exam.

We will be collecting your personal information such as your name, instrument, program of study, contact information, and your private teacher information. This is necessary in order to keep track of your progress throughout the test period, schedule interviews and group meetings, and to contact your teachers for teacher observation. All personally identifiable information will be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of this study and discarded upon completion of the research. Any and all data collected from this study will be kept with strict confidentiality. No personal and identifiable information will be used in written reports based on this research such as research summary and thesis.

Audio/ video recordings and survey questionnaires will be kept in a locked facility or on a secure computer (with password). If at any point a participant chooses to withdraw from the study, their data will be destroyed or deleted. Data collected from study participants will be kept through the duration of the study and then destroyed/deleted when the study is completed and results have been disseminated.

In the future, short clips of the video recordings or transcriptions of audio/ video recording
may be used for scholarly presentations at conferences, or as part of online publications, but without identifiable personal information. If you would be willing to have your video recordings be considered for publications or conference presentations please sign your consent in the SEPARATE form marked Appendix D.

At the end of the study, written summaries will be available for any participants who request a copy. Please contact Bo Yon Koh at boyon.koh@mail.utoronto.ca to request the written summary.

If you have any questions or concerns that may be raised during the study, please do not hesitate to contact the principal investigator Bo Yon Koh at boyon.koh@mail.utoronto.ca

To indicate that you have read this statement and that you are willing and able to participate in this study, please sign both copies of the consent form, and submit to Bo Yon Koh.

For further information regarding the rights of research participants, please contact the Office of Research Ethics (ethics.review@utoronto.ca, 416-946-3273).
Appendix C

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Dear Participant of “Coaching in Applied Music Education: The Solution-Focused Approach to Performance and Practice” study:

Thank you for voluntarily choosing to participate in this study!

This statement is to reiterate that the investigators of this research will handle all personal and private information gathered during the study with complete confidentiality. Your personal and identifiable information will only be used for the purposes of this research and will be discarded upon the completion of the research.

In writing of thesis, no personally identifiable information will be used.

Participants of this study are also asked to keep the content of this research confidential, especially those private and personal matters of other participants which may be shared during the second phase of this study when you will be placed in small groups which will meet weekly in performance class settings.

Bo Yon Koh

boyon.koh@mail.utoronto.ca
STATEMENT OF PARTICIPANT: I understand that this study will be conducted with complete confidentiality and anonymity. I also respect and agree to keep the content of this study completely confidential, especially those personal and private information of other participants which I may encounter during group sessions.

(please circle one):

YES

NO

If yes, please print your name:

Signature: ___________________________  Date: _________________
Appendix D

CONSENT FORM for data (transcriptions/videos) to be considered for publication in online journals or used as part of future conference research presentations

Dear Participant of “Coaching in Applied Music Education: The Solution-Focused Approach in Performance and Practice” study:

Thank you for voluntarily choosing to participate in this study!

In the future, short excerpts of interview transcriptions/clips of the video recordings may be used for scholarly presentations at conferences, or as part of online publications, but without identifiable personal information. If you would be willing to have your video recordings be considered for publications or conference presentations please sign your consent below.

Even if you have signed this consent form, you may choose to revoke permission for use of your video recordings in research publications or presentation, at any time during the study or afterwards. In this case, please contact the principal investigator as soon as possible:

Bo Yon Koh, (boyon.koh@mail.utoronto.ca)
STATEMENT OF PARTICIPANT: I give permission for my participation in the study, Coaching in Music Education: The Solution-Focused Approach to Performance and Practice, as recorded in transcriptions / video to be used in scholarly publications or conferences, and understand that no identifiable and personal information will be disclosed.

(please circle one):

YES

NO

If yes, please print your name:

Signature: ___________________________  Date: __________________
Appendix E

Questions in the Practice Brochure

Articulating Goals

1. What are you working towards? What is your destination? (i.e. a recital, audition, competition, etc.)
2. When is your performance? How much time do you have to prepare for the performance?
3. If you are experiencing a problem, what would you like instead?
4. What does your ideal performance look like?
5. What would your teacher expect to see in your performance?
6. What would give you a clue that you did your best and that your performance reflects your hard work and true potential?
7. How will you know that you’ve arrived at your destination?

Confidence & Motivation Building

1. Why is giving a great performance important to you? What difference does it make?
2. When was the last time you were able to give this kind of ideal performance, even in small bits?
3. How were you able to do that?
4. What are some contributing factors to your success?
5. What are some positive comments you received about this performance?
6. What does it say about you and your ability as a musician?
7. What can you learn from this?

Strategy Building

1. Suppose you want to create a roadmap to your destination. What signs and landmarks do you see in your map?
2. What are some smaller goals, and by when do you need to accomplish them in order to perform well at your proposed event?
3. What’s going to help you to stick to your plan?
4. Who can you ask for help/support?
5. How will you celebrate your small successes?

**Practice Planning**
1. What will you play in your lesson next week?
2. What do you want to accomplish by next week?
3. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is where you want to be at your lesson next week and 0 is the opposite, where are you today?
4. Why that number (X), and not a number lower (X-1)? What is working well already?
5. What needs to happen if you want to move up a number on the scale (X+1)?
6. What does that tell you about what/how you need to practise today?
7. What is your top priority?
8. How much time can you invest in practising this?
9. When are you most likely to practise, and for how long?
10. What is going to help you focus?
11. How will you know when things are good enough for today?
12. If you are working on multiple repertoires, what is a good way of managing your time so that you make continuous progress on all of them over time?

**Daily Evaluation**
1. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is today’s practice was highly effective and efficient and 0 is the opposite, how would you rate your practice today?
2. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is your practice plan was extremely helpful and 0 is the opposite, how would you rate today’s practice plan?
For both questions ...

3. Why that number (X), and not a number lower (X-1)? What is working well already?
4. What needs to happen if you want to move up a number on the scale (X+1) tomorrow?
5. What will you do more of?
6. What will you do differently?
Appendix F

Pre/ Post Survey Questions

1. Your Full Name?

2. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you are always satisfied with your playing (in general) and 0 is you are never satisfied with your playing, where are you today?

3. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you always feel great about your performance (recital, competitions, etc.) and 0 is you feel your performance never reflects your hard work and true potential, where are you today?

4. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you are always prepared for your lesson to your teacher's expectation and 0 is you are never adequately prepared for your lesson, where are you today?

5. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you can always articulate your goals and 0 is you have no idea what you want to accomplish, where are you today?

6. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you know how to approach accomplishing your goal in small steps and 0 is you have no idea how to take small steps to your final goal, where are you today?
7. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you always know what to practise and 0 is you never know what to practise, where are you today?

8. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you always know how to practise and 0 is you never really know how to practise, where are you today?

9. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you are always focused when you practise and 0 is you can never really focus when practising, where are you today?

10. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you always know how to create a realistic and manageable plan for yourself to follow, and 0 is you don't know how to approach planning, where are you today?

11. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you feel very satisfied with your time management skills, and 0 is you really need help managing your time, where are you today?

12. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you are always motivated to practise and 0 is you are never motivated to practise, where are you today?

13. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you clearly know your teacher's expectations (for lessons and performances) and 0 is you are never sure what your teacher expects from you, where are you today?

14. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you know exactly what your strengths are and 0 is you have no clue what you do well, where are you today?
15. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you know exactly what needs improvements and 0 is you have no clue what you need to work on, where are you today?

16. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you believe you have what it takes to accomplish what you've set out to do and 0 is you don't believe you have what it takes, where are you today?

17. On a scale of 0 to 10, where 10 is you consider yourself an independent learner who is confident in making his/her own musical and educational decisions, and 0 is you need external support and guidance on all your musical and educational decisions, where are you today?