A Singing Sanctuary:
Identity and Resiliency Construction in Underserved Youth through Vocal Expression

by

Anna K. Martin

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS
in
THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Ethnomusicology)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Vancouver)

April 2013

© Anna K. Martin, 2013
Abstract

In this ethnography of a youth choir I demonstrate the relationship between youth cultural identity construction and increased resiliency by providing stories and reflections about individual and group expression through voice. I have discovered through my research that it is not only vocal expression through song that supports identity construction and resiliency, but also the space of shared intimacy that is created through musical/vocal agency. I also revealed an underlying tone of youth resistance through voice.

Working within the framework of Teacher Action Research I set out to use my findings to aid and inform my teaching practices in support and empowerment of youth in my community. The research methods employed were audio recording, class observation, personal journaling, and interviews (group and individual). I understood that as a participant and as the subject’s teacher that I entered this research with certain biases and assumptions, but at the same time I knew that my proximity to the subject would give me insight in ways that would not be accessible to an outside observer. I was also cognizant of the fact that I was conducting “fieldwork at home,” recognizing through the literature review and research that this methodology also comes with challenges in terms of objectivity and clarity of subject and roles.

I drew inspiration and direction from Lila Abu-Lughod, a Palestinian-American professor of Anthropology and Women’s and Gender Studies at Columbia University in New York City, who works in the tradition and methodology of what she calls ethnographies of the particular. Abu-Lughod argues for “the effects of extralocal and long-term processes [that] are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words” (1991: 150).
Preface

The study that formed the foundation of this dissertation required the approval of the RISE UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board. The Principal Investigator (PI) was Nathan Hesselink, the Department Approver in the music department was John B. Roeder, and the Primary Contact was myself, Anna Martin. The study, numbered H13-00495, was deemed to be a behavioural study of minimal risk. The initial approval date for the study was April 5th, 2013, and the study required ethics reviews with annual renewals. Study completion occurred April 29th, 2012.
Table of Contents

Abstract ....................................................................................................................................... ii
Preface ........................................................................................................................................ iii
Table of Contents ....................................................................................................................... iv
List of Tables ............................................................................................................................... vi
List of Figures .............................................................................................................................. vii
List of Abbreviations .................................................................................................................. viii
Acknowledgements .................................................................................................................... ix
Dedication ..................................................................................................................................... x

Chapter 1: Becoming a Researcher ......................................................................................... 1
  Overview ................................................................................................................................... 1
  Personal Musical Heritage ...................................................................................................... 4
  "Fieldwork at Home" ........................................................................................................... 16
  Structure of Thesis ............................................................................................................... 22

Chapter 2: The GLC Choir ..................................................................................................... 24
  History of the GLC Choir ....................................................................................................... 24
  Structure of the Class ........................................................................................................... 28
  Biographies ............................................................................................................................ 35
  Context for Chapters Three and Four .................................................................................. 41

Chapter 3: Singing Cultural Identity in the GLC Choir ....................................................... 45
  Definitions and Literature ..................................................................................................... 45
  Vocal Expression of Personal Cultural Identity in the GLC Choir's Core Group ............. 55
  Vocal Expression of Collective Cultural Identity in the GLC Choir .................................. 64
Group and Individual Vocal Expression of Place Identity in the GLC Choir .......... 74

Chapter 4: Vocal Expressions of Resiliency and Resistance in the GLC Choir .......... 77

Definitions and Literature ........................................................................................................ 77

Vocal Expression of Resiliency and Resistance in the GLC Choir's Core Group .......... 84

Vocal Expression of Resiliency and Resistance in Past Seasons of the GLC Choir .. 101

Chapter 5: Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 109

Review .................................................................................................................................. 109

Identified Areas for Pedagogical Improvement/Education................................................. 111

Future Research ..................................................................................................................... 117

Bibliography .......................................................................................................................... 124
List of Tables

Table 4.1 Masten’s Short List of Resilience Factors ................................................................. 79
Table 4.2 Ungar’s Table of Tensions ......................................................................................... 81
List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Diagonal Relationships ................................................................. 43
Figure 2.2 Thesis Structure ............................................................................. 44
List of Abbreviations

The Guildford Learning Centre — GLC

The Guildford Learning Centre Choir — The GLC Choir

The Heart of Facilitation Training — HOF
Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people that helped and supported me through the process of my education and the researching and writing of this thesis, both morally and academically. First and foremost I thank my parents, the most inspiring and supportive people I know, for their unyielding support of my education and vision. I am grateful to Dr. Nathan Hesselink and Dr. Michael Tenzer for their support and guidance in the completion of this thesis. I would also like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Martin Guhn who, despite being in a different discipline, offered me great guidance and support in my foray into education research and was also a great moral support, believing in my vision. I am also indebted to my colleagues in the Ethnomusicology Department at UBC (Chelsea, John, Mike, and Alex) for their camaraderie. Lastly I thank my cousin, Sara and my friend, Vanessa for their “big brains” and “big hearts” — a killer (and helpful) combination.
I dedicate this thesis to the youth in the GLC Choir — past and present.
Chapter 1: Becoming a Researcher

Plato…speaks of a doctrine of continual change and becoming…which he finds in the Heraclitean image of the river, where “everything moves on and nothing stands still.” (Cratylus 402 A8, cited in Kahn 1979: 166)

Overview

I am a “choir” teacher at an alternative high school in Surrey, B.C. for underserved youth between the ages of 13 and 19 years old, who have either dropped out or been kicked out of the regular school system. The reason I put the word choir in quotations is because this is what the school calls the program, but in reality it does not look much like a regular high school choir program. I am working with my own interests and the interests of my students focusing primarily on finding each individual’s “true voice,” both through the physical, sonic voice, but also the lyrical expression of self through original and composed material. We also work every week on our collective voice, learning cover songs chosen by the group and collaborative songwriting. This young group of singers, The Guildford Learning Centre Choir (hereafter the GLC Choir), is the subject of my research.

Working within the framework of Teacher Action Research I intend to look at the overlying themes that emerge from my research related to youth identity construction through voice, and to use my findings to aid and inform my teaching practices in support and empowerment of youth in my community. My key observation from the reviewed literature on this topic is that the authors who wrote about their own cultures (Elorriaga 2011, Hall 2005, Hammond 2004, Hill 2009, Whidden 2012, and Russell 2007) or that had prolonged direct relationship with their subjects (Wood 2010) were more engaging, the research was less

1 Teacher Action Research is a sustained, intentional, recursive, and dynamic process of inquiry
scattered, and their ultimate goal was directed at practical implementation of the research through pedagogical initiatives — in essence, Teacher Action Research. This is the kind of research I aim to conduct myself, building from this body of literature and relating it to my own culture and career goals.

Along these same lines of seeking agency as a teacher and researcher, I would also like to draw attention to an overarching song-leading philosophy of mine that is largely summed up in a list of attributes of a community musician by Lee Higgins in *Community Music: In Theory and in Practice*, many of which presently inform my work and/or I aspire to incorporate in my work:

**Community Musicians:**

- are committed to the idea that everybody has the right and ability to make, create, and enjoy music;
- seek to enable accessible music-making opportunities for members of the community;
- consciously encourage and develop active musical knowing and doing with participants;
- seek to foster confidence in participants’ creativity;
- acknowledge both individual and group ownership of musics and are committed to celebrate the participants’ work;
- work within flexible facilitation modes and are committed to multiple participant/facilitator relationships and processes;
- strive for excellence in both the processes and products of music making relative to individual goals of participants;
- recognize that participants’ social and personal growths are as important as their musical growth;
- are committed to lifelong musical learning;
- work in such a way to show respect for the cultural property of a given locality and/or community;
- put emphasis on the variety and diversity of musics that reflect and enrich the cultural life of the community, the locality, and the individual participants;
- are particularly aware of the need to include disenfranchised and disadvantaged individuals or groups;
- recognize the value and use of music to foster intercultural acceptance and understanding;
- participate in an ongoing commitment to accountability through regular, diverse, and relevant assessment and evaluation procedures.

(2012: 5)
With the GLC Choir in particular, I am interested mainly in how voice work can contribute to a strengthening of personal and collective identity for youth. Many of the youth in the program face major adversities in life: teen pregnancy, homelessness, drug abuse, depression, and emotional/physical abuse. I also wonder whether the support of the group, as well as the voice work we do in class, helps to buttress their resiliency, and if so, how. The research methods employed are audio recording, class observation, personal journaling, and interviews (group and individual).

I understand that as a participant and as the subject’s teacher that I enter this research with certain biases and assumptions. As much as I intend to approach this research with objectivity, I am fully aware that I am embedded in the research and therefore my opinions and experiences as a group participant will influence it. At the same time as this participation may hinder my objectivity, I am also aware that my proximity to the subject will give me insight in ways that would not be accessible to an outside observer. I am also cognisant of the fact that I am conducting “fieldwork at home” and recognize through my literature review and research that this methodology also comes with challenges in terms of objectivity and clarity of subject and roles, which I will discuss further later in this chapter.

Although there are parts of this paper that are written more objectively reporting research outcomes, I will largely employ a self-reflexive narrative strategy allowing me the opportunity to express myself in as honest a voice as possible. Here I am drawing inspiration and direction from Lila Abu-Lughod, a Palestinian-American professor of Anthropology and Women’s and Gender Studies at Columbia University in New York City, and Katherine Hagedorn, a professor of Ethnomusicology at Pomona College in Claremont, California, who both work in the tradition
and methodology of a “narrative of personal specificity (writing against culture within ethnographies of the particular)… situating the fieldworker in the field” (Hagedorn 2001: 12). Abu-Lughod argues for “the effects of extralocal and long-term processes [that] are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words” (1991: 150). And while Hagedorn in Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santeria (2001) wrote about a culture other than her own, I found the balance between narrative, reporting, interviews, historical research, and prose entertaining, as well as satisfying academically and artistically, and I wish to follow a similar format.

**Personal Musical Heritage**

It is my firm belief that we are all born to sing, as the introductory chapter in Mithen’s Singing Neanderthals suggests: “we can only explain the human propensity to make and listen to music by recognizing that it has been encoded into the human genome during the evolutionary history of our species” (2005: 1). It seems we are wired to be rewarded for singing; a team of Swedish researchers (Grape et al. 2003) found that consistent singing increases levels of testosterone in saliva, a release of oxytocin, and reduces stress by triggering an anabolic regenerative effect. I have been singing my whole life, and at this point in my life feel it is my calling to lead song and help people explore their voices in different capacities in my community of Vancouver, B.C., Canada. I have arrived at my present research — looking at what impact singing may have on the individual and collective identity construction of underserved youth, and in turn on their resiliency — through a series of personal experiences and journeys in academia, work, and life. I wonder if music, and more
specifically singing, could be one of the ingredients involved in helping us answer the existential questions we all ask ourselves at sometime in our lives, and often during adolescence: Who am I? Who are we? I begin this introduction with my own personal musical evolution as a youth, performer, music teacher, and ethnomusicologist in order to orient the reader to the framework of musical and life experiences that have led me to this work and research.

Thinking about the musical childhoods of the youth I work with, I wonder whether they feel that the music of their childhood has anything to do with who they are today. When discussing possible repertoire, many of them talk about what their parents/guardians were listening to when they were growing up, becoming very animated and excited at the prospect of singing songs they historically connect to. This led to my interest in how much the music and musical parenting of my childhood has influenced my musical life and work. To this end I interviewed my parents to gather information I have forgotten. I believe by revisiting my youth I can learn to empathize with the youth I am working with, and even though many of their experiences in childhood where perhaps surrounded by very different circumstances, they seem to similarly respond to musical memories with fondness and nostalgia.

My parents initiated and greatly encouraged my interest in music. When I questioned my parents about musical interaction and stimulus in infancy they had a list of memories to draw from. My mom describes nursing me: “With every feeding, I would rock and sing to you, and then I would think, ‘oh my god, an hour and a half went by.’ When you were asleep after a nursing, I would put you on the couch and play music [records].” My dad talks of his musical interactions with me: “I would dance with you and hum along with the music — you liked that.” Both of my parents said that they sang lots of children’s songs and lullabies to me. My mom
comments: “I played music [records] all the time while I was pregnant with you and when you were a child.”

When people ask my mom why I am a musician, she always tells them about her father (my grandfather), Mickey McEwen, who was a multi-instrumentalist and the leader of a dance band in Nelson, B.C. She believes my “talent” may have been passed on to me through him. In turn, he may have received his “gift” from his mother who purportedly could be heard singing a mile away. I was very close to my paternal grandmother, who was one of my biggest fans and a huge music lover. I remember her lying on her couch listening to the Saturday Afternoon at the Opera on CBC and tears running down her cheeks during the arias. She would ask me to sing for her and told me it didn’t have to be a performance, I could just practice and she would listen. She loved it and would lie for an hour or more listening. She would never go on with compliments, but I could tell she loved it. Now in retrospect, it seemed she was in a form of meditation, of deep relaxation. I sang for her when she was dying. She will always be with me when I sing. This is my “musical heritage.”

Listening to recordings seems to be a key element in my musical exposure, as no one in my immediate family played instruments. This seems to be the case for the youth in the GLC choir as well, as I will explain later. As a child, listening skills were further acquired by eight years of Suzuki violin. I asked my parents why they chose the Suzuki Method, to which my dad replied, “Because I read an article on the philosophy of the method and it said that it develops the ear for music, rather than reading music. It was developing the capacity for listening which I thought was a much more natural way for a child to be introduced to playing an instrument. It was more about the osmosis, the ritual and the discipline. It developed the capacity for appreciating music in a more organic way.” I think that this philosophy greatly impacted me as I
teach the majority of music to all my students by ear and the GLC Choir, completely by ear. I emphasize listening skills as a key part of musical skill (and, inadvertently, social skills) in the GLC Choir.

When interviewing my parents, my dad added, “The other thing that should be mentioned is your love of drama and dance, they were as strong as your musical connection — you loved to combine these elements.” My first big chance to incorporate all my loves — music, dance, and theatre — was when I was 8 years old and auditioned for a production of Annie produced by the Kamloops Players, an amateur local theatre company. “Annie was huge for you. It combined your love of singing, movement and performance — you were in your element,” my dad exclaimed. My mom added, “You would rather act than eat. I would sheepishly take you in late to school…but you absolutely loved that whole experience.” I do remember being in my element. Almost every moment I was in rehearsal and on stage, the rest of the world fell away and I was present with the process and experience. Many youth in the GLC Choir have mentioned having this same feeling in regards to singing/playing music.

I participated in a program in my elementary school called Olympics of the Mind (OM) that encouraged children to create their own theatrical productions based on given themes, and then there would be a competition every year. There was only intermittent adult supervision to provide supplies and minimal guidance. Luckily our teacher, Mrs. Gelowitz, fully supported us and never interfered with our creative process. We (seven Gr. 5-7 girls) created three original productions with music, script, costumes, and set. My mom says, “OM was so good for you — group co-operation and a huge creative outlet.” I think I am always aware of the creative power of children because of this experience, knowing first hand what they are capable of.
I was in the District Honour Choir in elementary school and I remember not really liking it, even though I loved singing. My mom adds, “Because you loved singing you wanted to be there, but the repertoire was boring for you…no movement.” When I was twelve I had singing lessons with a woman who was young and pretty hip. I remember liking our lessons. I sang material that wasn’t necessarily that appropriate for a young girl, but I liked the songs — “The Rose,” “The Water is Wide” — and could feel the important universal message behind them, even though I hadn’t experienced romantic love. I think the youth in the program have the same sense of a larger story behind the songs they sing, especially because many of them have had varied life histories already in their short lives.

My high school had a flourishing drama and music program and was known throughout the city for its yearly theatrical productions. I was in four plays (two musicals) in my high school career and these experiences were definitely forms of meditation, a break or relief from the tumultuous personal life of a teenager — puberty, acne, gossip, romance, and a lot of anxiety. My body was often wrought with anxiety and the only time I found some relief was when I was singing, acting, dancing, or playing sports. I may have still had the body tension, but didn’t notice it when I was engaged in these activities. I can still remember the trials and tribulations of being a teenager and believe this memory affords me a way to relate to and empathize with my teenage students. Revisiting the opportunities I had at school to be creative in the performing arts makes me very appreciative of these opportunities afforded to me, and I feel a further impulse to keep encouraging and creating avenues of creative self-expression for youth in my community.

Following high school graduation after a few years of traveling and taking general arts courses at college and university, I decided all I wanted to do was sing. I was torn between applying for music school or theatre school, and eventually decided on music school. I think I
have been on a search for a discipline, a craft where I could explore my voice, a shared forum where “having your own voice” within the discipline is the ultimate endeavour. I felt music was this discipline. This theme continues in my career, performing and teaching, and is a major part of our exploration in the GLC choir, as I will explain later.

I enrolled in the Contemporary Music Diploma Program at Vancouver Community College (VCC) majoring in voice and focusing on jazz and Latin music. The repertoire and diversity I experienced at VCC has greatly influenced my original music as well as the music I teach. Seven years after completing my diploma at VCC, I returned to VCC and completed a Bachelor’s Degree of Applied Music. One of the most significant parts of this study was the private voice lessons with Paula Kremer. I had been having difficulty with my voice for some years, “losing it” on a regular basis due to stress and bad technique. She helped me to find ease and comfort in my voice. It was difficult at first, as I had to start at the beginning with breath and simple rehabilitation exercises, but I found significant results. The rehabilitation process allowed me significant insight into the nature of the voice and, in turn, has aided my voice teaching, focusing on the relaxation of the body as the instrument.

I have been performing as a vocalist in Vancouver for 15 years. During my time at VCC I started my own band, AnnaEleven, playing original material; sang with The Damsels Undistressed and The Prohibition Jazz Band, a seven-piece swing band; sang with a ten-piece Latin band called Diez; and sang with Catita, a three-piece bossa nova group. I have toured BC and Alberta — solo and with various configurations of my band — playing festivals, bars, coffee shops, art galleries, churches, and community events. I have recorded three albums: Mental Moonlight, with Michael Simpsonelli and Joe Rosenblatt, a governor-general’s award recipient for poetry; my own original material on Heartbones; and A Deal With the Wind with my band,
Anna B. and the Heartbones. I am working on my fourth studio album, *becoming*, which attempts a synthesis of acoustic and electronic instruments. This performing and recording experience gives me some “street cred” with the GLC Choir, although it isn’t especially the kind of music most of them are listening to. The songwriting skills and experience I have acquired are very useful in my teaching, as songwriting is a major component of our process in the GLC Choir.

During my 20s I experienced an increasing degree of anxiety that greatly impeded my enjoyment for singing, as I became overly concerned with what people thought of me and my music. When I turned 30 I decided that I did not want to live with the level of anxiety I was experiencing and so in a leap of faith, with nothing to lose and terrified, I went to a ten-day silent retreat to learn the practice of Vipassana meditation — an ancient practice, purportedly taught by the Buddha. After a very challenging course, I returned home and was disoriented by my relaxed state. Three days after returning I had a show at a local restaurant with my band and I couldn’t remember the last time I enjoyed myself so much on stage, no doubt due to my new-found relaxed state. Now I see my music practice — performing and teaching — as another form of meditation, to further the exploration of our shared human experience. Ironically, as my meditation practice led me further into myself, it also led me “out of myself” and into more musical communion with people as a voice teacher and choir leader. I incorporate a lot of mindfulness techniques into my teaching in general, as I find it does for my students what it did for me: it relaxes them into enjoyment and ultimate creative catharsis. With the GLC Choir I hope that an ongoing mindfulness practice in class can help them not only to relax and enjoy “choir” class, but also perhaps aid them in the rest of their lives as a tool for stress management.
After many years of performing and barely making a living at it, a friend of mine suggested leading choirs. I decided it was an interesting idea as another way of generating income, but still working within the music field. At first I thought of my relatively unsatisfying experience in choirs as a child, but took it as a challenge to create a different kind of a choir experience for people. I took a course called *Community Choir Leadership Training* (CCLT) in Victoria, B.C. from Shivon Robinsong and Denis Donnelly, song leaders of the *Gettin’ Higher Choir*, a 300-plus member community choir. Like Gibbons’ grounding philosophy in Community Music, the CCLT’s foundational philosophy is one of inclusive music making, providing a place where everyone is welcome to sing regardless of experience or talent. After this training I returned to Vancouver and immediately started a choir in my basement suite, starting with about ten people and growing in the last few years to 70-80 singers. At first I drew a lot of repertoire from CCLT, but have increasingly sourced my own repertoire and style of leading, teaching more and more by ear (less sheet music) and involving more dance.

There were two objectives I was interested in when starting a choir: 1) to encourage the community to sing together regardless of experience; and 2) to have fun, the process being as important as the product, if not more. We do not perform concerts in the traditional sense, as I think that performing puts a different emphasis on the weekly sessions and often a stressful element that the choir members — many of them busy with families and work — don’t need. For myself, a performance orientation also puts a completely different emphasis on our weekly sessions. That being said, we do go out into the community and sing. We do flash mobs in the local shopping centres and other public spaces, and sing at hospices, senior care facilities, and low-profile community events. We always invite people to sing with us, and inevitably people do. We are called *Local Vocals*. I have the same above approach and objectives for the GLC
Choir, although we do perform more than Local Vocals, as the youth are more interested in public acknowledgement. I also lead Everybody’s Choir, a real community choir where everyone is welcome — babies, children, teens, adults, seniors, and people of all abilities. Through my studies in ethnomusicology I have realized that in most cultures the musical focus is on the adults with children learning alongside the adults by osmosis, so naturally my focus is on the adults, though I do keep things active to keep everyone physically engaged.

In my private voice lessons, as I have already mentioned, my fundamental focus is on uncovering each person’s unique and natural voice by way of relaxation of the body and mind. As I have experienced in myself and in my students, there are layers and years of tension, expectations, and habits in the way of a clear, easy, and natural voice. I find that the more you work at undoing these impediments, the less you need to work on technique and music fundamentals — pitch, rhythm, tone, or ease through range. These elements, which I believe are inherent skills in all of us to a lesser or greater degree, automatically start to show up if you clear away the debris that has been built up in various ways. It is always amazing for me to hear from most people I talk to that they don’t think they can sing. I believe it is actually the opposite — that most people can sing, they just haven’t tried for fear of judgement and have very little experience or practice. I have also worked with several people who one might consider “tone deaf” — not being able to carry a tune by themselves and/or with other people — and with weekly lessons and, more importantly, a change in their orientation towards listening, they improve significantly with time and practice. I have had quite a bit of experience with this phenomena in the GLC Choir, as I will elaborate on in Chapters Three and Four.

Similar to the GLC Choir, I lead a program for underserved elementary school children through the Sarah McLaughlin School of Music (SoM). The program focuses on holistic music
making incorporating song, dance, non-pitched percussion, and pitched percussion instruments like xylophones and marimbas. I have had this concept affirmed by my study in ethnomusicology in which I have studied the music of Ghana and Brazil in particular, where music and art itself are not separated from each other and not separated from life. This is what I wish to bring to the children and adults I teach. In the SoM program we learn songs that incorporate music, song, and dance and we also write original songs, choreographing them ourselves. The children have a further investment in the group when they take ownership of the material. I incorporate many of the same elements into my work with the underserved youth in the GLC Choir, as I will outline in Chapter Two.

It is my personal experience and intuitive belief that early musical experiences can shape our lives and open up our world. My first foray out into the world, from our little cabin in the woods of B.C., was when I was 2-and-a-half. My parents, after deciding to move to New Zealand, packed us up and sailed on a ship to New Zealand with stops in Hawaii, Rarotonga, Tahiti, Fiji, and New Zealand. In each of these stops we had musical experiences and my parents said that I loved it and would sing and dance. Of this experience my mom states, “On our trip to New Zealand you were exposed to Hawaiian music, Fijian, Maori, and lots of live music.” Perhaps this adventure initiated my interest in the music of other cultures.

I have a few potent childhood musical listening memories. Someone Robbed the CPR, the bluegrass theme song from a musical I had seen in a local park about Billy Miner (a Canadian train robber) as my parents inform me, was apparently on constant rotation on the record player for months and I would dance and sing along. Kinalat, a large band from Guatemala, came to Kamloops and my parents took me to the show. I remember when they started playing that I thought my head was going to blow up from excitement. I remember not being able to sit still,
dancing in the aisle ecstatically. The other memory was in aid of the anxiety I had as a child, especially at nighttime. My dad took me to the music shop one day to pick out a couple of tapes for me to listen to, in order to help me sleep. I chose Paul Simon’s _Graceland_ and listened to it every night for months. It is an album that has shaped my musical tastes and compositions. Knowing how music soothed me as a child, I wonder if the youth in the GLC Choir have found music as a mode of stress reduction and catharsis in times of need.

During my childhood my parents listened to Latin jazz, in particular Brazilian bossa nova and samba — Stan Getz with Tom Jobim and Joao Gilberto. I loved these records so much that I used to take them to my room and play them on my Fisher Price record player. My dad says, “It was important in our house and we played it a lot…and then you re-discovered it later yourself.” I believe during these intense listening experiences I was unconsciously learning a great deal about the fundamentals of music and what it meant to human experience. Some of the youth in the GLC Choir seem to have eclectic musical tastes and I wonder where they got the exposure to other kinds of music, other than what is popular on the radio.

The four formative years following high school graduation I traveled, studied, and found my own musical voice. A month after high school graduation I participated in a Rotary Exchange to Turkey for a year. I was introduced to music I had rarely heard before and distinctly remember the moment when I figured out the 5/4 syncopated clapping pattern all the youth in the bar were clapping along with the music. At first I was completely disoriented, having no prior orientation to this style of music. I didn’t figure it out in a theoretical way, but in a corporal way. The music and dance of Turkey were very exciting and stimulating for me. I also began to write prose and poetry, having no other outlet for creative expression.
After returning from Turkey, I picked up the guitar and began writing original songs. Since then, songwriting has been a major part of my life. I have used it for many years as a meditative, self-soothing, and communicative device, often getting lost for hours at a time in the songwriting process. Knowing the value songwriting has had in my life, I am often eager to provide the impetus for songwriting and share my skills with my students. It has been one of the most satisfying and rewarding parts of the GLC choir for them, as well as for me. After Turkey I travelled and studied Spanish in Mexico for eight months. As I became increasingly fluent, I started to write songs in Spanish and my love of Latin musical traditions grew. A year later I headed for Havana, Cuba in an exchange program through the Latin American studies program at Simon Fraser University to attend the University of Havana focusing on Cuban and Latin American cultural studies. I took Afro-Cuban dance, joined a theatre troupe, joined a Cuban rock band, and continued songwriting. Years later after returning to Canada I would co-write, produce, and perform a one-woman, interdisciplinary (Music, Dance, Visuals, Monologues) play called The Havana Project at the Havana Theatre in Vancouver. Brazilian music, as I mentioned before, has been a love of mine, and I have performed bossa nova and samba with various groups, as well as incorporating the rhythm, harmony, melody, and Portuguese language into my own music. I received a British Columbia Arts Council Grant to study voice, dance, and percussion in Rio de Janeiro in 2008.

In Turkey, Mexico, Cuba, and Brazil I experienced a musical participation I had rarely witnessed or experienced in Canada, and it made a lasting impression on me. This experience is what I try to bring, to the best of my ability, to my classes. As much as I have appreciated my overseas experience, I also realize that for years I was searching for a home, somehow not feeling grounded in my home culture. Through my studies in ethnomusicology as well as some
serious soul searching, I have arrived at home, wanting and willing to find the same interest and level of engagement and excitement in my own culture’s musical life.

“Fieldwork at Home”

Upon my return from Brazil I enrolled in the ethnomusicology department at the University of British Columbia and am presently in my final term of the program. Each course I have taken in the program has brought me closer to focusing on my present research: an exploration of home, culture, land, identity, and human resiliency through song in an ethnographic study of the GLC Choir. As I mentioned above, I have spent many years of my life searching for “home,” never feeling entirely rooted in a Canadian culture I could define. Inspired by the way other cultures interacted with and used music as a social vehicle, I longed for this level of engagement in my home culture and often begrudged the fact that I did not feel the same level of musical enthusiasm and participation when I was at home. I have often criticized my home culture for not having a defined musical culture, along with other well-defined cultural markers. In recent years, to a large degree through academic inquiry, I have brought my attention homeward, knowing that my home culture has a rich musical life I have perhaps just been blind to. As I turn this lens on myself and my culture, I realize I have avoided this inquiry largely due to its ambiguity and my disorientation in terms of my own identification and connection to home.

There are two questions I pose to myself: What musical life is here at home? And how can I be involved in my city’s musical life in an increasingly supportive and effective way? I will delve into the first question, looking at the small group of Canadian youth in the GLC choir, and the answer to the second question will no doubt be supported, at least in part, by the answers to
the first question. The accumulation of the above musical experiences has led me to the emerging ethnomusicological realm of fieldwork at home.

Fieldwork has been an integral part of an academic’s research in the field of anthropology, sociology, and ethnomusicology. Historically, and perhaps somewhat stereotypically, it has been a white, western-classically trained, male ethnomusicologist traveling overseas to gather facts and information from indigenous populations in an effort to understand the diversity and similarity of the music of the world, as well as to preserve the endangered music of endangered peoples. Bruno Nettl describes this historical tradition of ethnomusicological fieldwork in *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*:

> In my student days, an ethnomusicological fieldworker was represented as someone working in an isolated village, living in conditions of considerable privation, having to make do with a monotonous diet shared with the villagers, living without running water, to say nothing of indoor plumbing, communicating for the longest time with sign language, perhaps the first outsider to confront the community. (Nettl 2005: 184)

Some examples of this kind of field research include Malinowski in Papua New Guinea, Herzog in Liberia, Anthony Seeger studying the Suya people of the Amazon, and (although she is a woman) Michelle Kisliuk living and researching the music of the BaAka people in the Rainforest of the Central African Republic.

My stereotypical definition, Nettl’s description, and these examples of fieldwork are feeling more and more outdated in the academic world. As the world closes in on itself, there are fewer and fewer cultures isolated from the rest of the world, and increasingly a whole network of diversified, emergent cultures are more and more present, therefore making this kind of traditional kind of research increasingly rare. Perhaps because of this presently vague identification with the “other,” we are turning to ourselves as subjects worthy of study. Nettl remarks: “We see ethnomusicology beginning to ask itself whether the study of the ‘other’ taught
us something about ourselves as members of Western musical academia. Shall we try our usual questions on our own culture, society, music?” (2005: 189).

Looking at a few sources from anthropology — a field with a long history of fieldwork — they, too, are looking at the shifting nature of the field. Burgess states “members of both disciplines [anthropology and sociology] now increasingly focus attention on the study of their own culture using a range of research and methods” (1984: xiii). In “How Native is a ‘Native’ Anthropologist?” Nayaran argues “against the fixity of a distinction between ‘native’ and ‘non-native’ anthropologists… outsider/insider or observer/observed. I propose that at this historical moment we might more profitably view each anthropologist in terms of shifting identifications” (1993: 671). Jonathan Stock in a work called “Fieldwork at Home: European and Asian Perspectives” makes the point that investigation of “home fieldwork is made challenging by the fact that the image of such study remains rare in English-language theoretical writing on ethnomusicological fieldwork” (Stock and Chiener 2008: 108). From my research so far it seems that perhaps fieldwork in “foreign” places is less problematic than fieldwork at home where identity and research methods can get muddy, and objectivity is more difficult to maintain. The roles of researcher and researched become ambiguous, as the subject isn’t the “other” but rather “we” or “I,” or at least a shared landscape, nation, language, and relationship.

As I re-read the chapter “You Call That Fieldwork? Redefining the Field” I felt Nettl’s, as well as my own, challenge and discomfort with how to clearly define “fieldwork at home.” As a relatively new academic concept, there is not a fixed definition or a plethora of historical examples. Nettl states that

The notion of “at home” suggests looking literally in one’s own backyard…what actually qualifies as your backyard? The idea that the world consists of a lot of easily distinguished societies, each with its distinct culture, and that you can tell easily which one you belong to and
are an insider of, while being an outsider to all others — a model that, though unrealistic, was helpful in establishing our scholarly identity — has had to be abandoned. (2005: 186-87)

And so with new, changing, and expanding definitions of home, identity, and culture the field is becoming increasingly more complex.

I have an interest and history in social activism. I have been involved in movements and protests for gender, socio-economic, and racial equity, founding an organization for support and education of women musicians, participating with my choir in protests against provincial spending for the Olympics, organizing rallies in support of the safe injection site in Vancouver, performing music at Occupy Vancouver, and (most recently) attending a conference in Brazil on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Music always seems to play a large part in social activism and it is another way I wish to show my support for equity in my community.

I am presently attending a five-month training program called *Heart of Facilitation* (HOF) in Seattle and Portland with an organization called *Partners in Youth Empowerment*, whose mandate is to awaken the purpose, power, and possibility of young people around the world. They focus on empowerment through the arts. The training looks at many different structural elements of facilitating groups of youth, but also brings awareness to the power dynamics within groups according to race, gender, ability, and socio-economic status. We also examine how a facilitator can be increasingly aware of and negotiate the various needs of a particular group. It is a large support and catalyst for my growth as the facilitator with the GLC choir in the research for this thesis, and as a facilitator of music in my community.

For me personally, studying ethnomusicology has not only been an academic pursuit but also a further political education. The deeper I delve into my studies in ethnomusicology, the more uncomfortable I become with the seemingly normative academic paradigm within the field
— which still seems to be predominantly economically privileged white people studying the music of economically under-privileged brown people. Of course this paradigm is changing within the field, as we become increasingly aware of racial and socio-economic power structures and world dynamics and populations shift and transform. However, as a white, economically privileged, English speaker I have become increasingly aware of my status in the world. I entered the program thinking that I would return to Brazil to do a formal, academic study of the African musical roots in Brazilian bossa nova. The longer I studied the field of ethnomusicology, however, the less I wanted to be in the role of the foreign academic studying other people’s music. The more I read and studied, the more I understood this form of research as a further extension of colonialism.

At home I encountered this racial and socio-economic divide perhaps stronger than anywhere else I have traveled. This is probably largely due to my personal historical connection with the land and its people — the relationship between European settlers and the land’s First People. A couple of summers ago I embarked on an ethnography of a First Nations musical group in my home town of Kamloops, hoping that this research would lead me to a thesis involving the same topic. As a side note, it is interesting in retrospect to notice that even though I had turned my attention to my home, I still was interested in the “other” — the Kamloops First Nations community, which has always been present in my environment but with which I have had little direct contact in my life.

I took my audio recorder to the pow-wow — a musical gathering of First Nations people of North America — in Kamloops and recorded different drumming groups, trying to make connections with some of the people involved. Even though I was genuinely moved in many ways by the music, my new-found role as academic researcher in this setting made me feel
uncomfortable. Following an inquiry about the group, I received an e-mail that confirmed my worst fears and again made me aware of my status, and the reality of the continuing divide between cultural and racial groups. This was part of an e-mail I got in response to my request for an interview:

The group of guys are pretty...um, how would you say, “Indian,” and don’t have much interest in non-native interests, so it’s been difficult for outside musicians with these interests to get straight honest answers or participation. I blame this on our history of mistrust, genocide, and exploitation for publication. However, I will run it by the group.

And so even though I may be in danger of sounding idealistic or too grand, I do not want to withhold my hopes as a community musician, a role Higgins designates as a “dreamer” in our society. Higgins suggests that “cultural democracy is made from the stuff of dreams. However, this is not a dreaming about what will never be, an aimless wander of the mind toward utopian ideals or a place of pure plentitude” (2012: 171). Therefore, in direct response to my ongoing discomfort and moral dilemma with my role as an ethnomusicologist and world music song leader and a recently found freedom in wanting to be as honest as possible about my view of the reality of the world order at present, I wish this thesis to be a political statement of sorts, as much as a traditional study of culture. Perhaps even an act of resistance. It is an opportunity for myself, and hopefully a larger audience, to engage in a discussion of the dynamics at play within our home culture as well as our academic institutions. I believe it is my responsibility as one of the more “privileged” people on the planet to take the time to be aware of my status and grow increasingly comfortable with my position — not for the purpose of feeling guilty, disempowered, or indebted to others — but simply to be aware of the reality of these human dynamics and in this awareness and acceptance of reality to be open to discussion and change in search of growing equity in our lives and in our communities.
My musical life, studies in ethnomusicology, experiences in social activism, meditation practice, and the ongoing voice work I have been engaged in both personally and professionally seem to be tied together. What I have become increasingly interested in is how we can become more and more comfortable singing individually and collectively, leading us to greater ease in our relationship to ourselves and to each other. This is what I am interested in investigating regarding my teaching with the underserved youth in the GLC Choir. I observe that this increasing ease with “self” and “other” are present and true in many ways for the youth in the choir program at Guildford Learning Centre, but I am interested to see if this individual and collective singing aids in cultural identity construction and whether the program increases their resiliency to cope, withstand, and potentially overcome the many obstacles in their lives and if so, how.

Structure of the Thesis

In the second chapter I provide a brief history and description of the alternative high school, Guildford Learning Centre (GLC), and the development of the GLC Choir, as well as an overview of the class structure and history to date. I also discuss the demographics of the choir members, as well as offer brief biographies of each of the current core participants, as their background will help the reader understand each student’s unique participation. These contextual details also play a major role in my understanding of them and their behaviour in the classroom context.

The third chapter addresses my primary research questions regarding cultural identity construction through voice in the GLC Choir. Beginning with pertinent definitions and a discussion of the relevant literature, I then report on my research findings from this year’s core
In the fourth chapter I discuss the relevance of vocal expression’s contribution to resiliency factors in the youth in the GLC Choir. This chapter also begins by discussing definitions and literature, followed by examples of resiliency supported by voice/song from the GLC Choir’s core group as well as examples from past seasons. I also look at the youth’s use of resistance in support of resiliency, an underlying theme that emerged as I analyzed my research.

The conclusion consists of an overview of the findings and further interests and inquiries that have emerged. I then discuss my plans for integrating and applying the information gathered from my research into my teaching and facilitating of youth.
Chapter 2: The GLC Choir

“Choir is like a sanctuary” – Sara (personal communication, 2013)

History of the GLC Choir

As I begin my research on the history of alternative high school programs called “Learning Centres” in the Surrey School District No. 36 and the history of the Guildford Learning Centre in particular — home of the Guildford Learning Centre (GLC) Choir and site of my research — I realize that I don’t know much about the history of these progressive models of alternative education that are addressing the needs of underserved youth in the community. I look on the internet for more information about the five Learning Centres in existence and the small amount of information I can find is on the school district website (https://www.surreyschools.ca/Pages/default.aspx): “Feature flexible hours and small group instruction, and allow students to work at their own pace. Individual learners may be employed full time or part time while attending school.” Each Learning Centre has its own individual page with a brief description of the centre and a mission statement, like this one on the GLC site (https://www.surreyschools.ca/schools/guildfordlearningcentre/Pages/default.aspx):

The Guildford Learning Centre is a school of choice located in Guildford in a non-traditional storefront setting. The school is designed to help students experience success by providing a smaller educational setting. The flexibility of our programs allow students to complete Provincial courses to reach their educational goals whether it is to return to High School or to graduate at the Guildford Learning Centre.

The site continues with their mission statement: “The Guildford Learning Centre is a caring, supportive, and respectful community of learners committed to student success and developing global citizens”; beneath this is a list of their values:
• An environment to meet the diversity of students in our community
• Individual instruction to meet the unique learning needs of our students
• The potential in each student and the inherent ability of students to meet the challenges of a dynamic society
• Relationships and the need to work together in respectful manner to achieve individual and community goals
• Community experiences in student learning in developing global citizens

I am inspired by this list of school values, as they are in alignment with my values within the GLC Choir. In an interview I conducted with Rino Marrone, a humanities and piano teacher at the GLC, as well as founder of the music program, he speaks of the creation of the Learning Centres: “They started as a way of giving at-risk youth an opportunity for success and an opportunity they weren’t finding in the mainstream schools for various reasons.”\(^2\) The two other main goals of the Learning Centres besides helping youth graduate, according to Rino, are “to have relationship based learning and also to be able to have work experience while they complete their schooling.”

The Guildford Learning Centre is situated in the heart of the Guildford commercial district in the midst of blocks of strip malls and fast food restaurants. The school itself is in a two-story office complex that has a corporate appearance. The inside, upstairs and downstairs, is set up much like any classroom. There are teachers, other support staff, and students, and in moments of low student attendance it feels as if the staff outnumber students. There are four science and math teachers on the ground floor with approximately 20-30 students at a time, and five humanities teachers on the second floor servicing 30-40 students. There is also a librarian, a support staff person, two counselors, a first nations educator/counselor, a principal, and two

\(^2\) Rino Marrone, interview held during lunch meeting, Surrey, B.C., February 2013.
secretaries. There are two teachers on staff who teach piano and guitar and GLC contracts me to come in and teach “choir.” On Tuesdays from 12:30 to 3:30 pm, when the GLC Choir meets, we have traditionally assembled in the First Nations education room/music room, which is quite small — approximately 20x20 feet. Presently we are in a room at a local recreation centre for various reasons that I will outline later in this chapter. There is definitely a more casual feeling in this Learning Centre than I have felt in the mainstream high schools I have visited on occasion. The students call their teachers by their first names and they are relatively informal with them while maintaining respectful student/teacher roles. Communicating more like peers, joking and teasing each other as well as confiding in each other, the teachers not only want to connect on an academic level but also on a personal one.

I had known Rino for many years from the live music scene in Vancouver and his membership in my adult choir, Local Vocals, before he sent me an e-mail one day asking if I would be interested in leading a choir program at the high school where he worked. He described the type of school the GLC is and basically gave me free reign as to what the program would look like. I jumped at the opportunity, excited about working with underserved youth and happy to have a regular paid gig. This leads me to the initiative of the GLC Choir program and its four-year history. Over the years I have realized that the usefulness of the choir program is not only to provide a musical expressive outlet for the students involved, but to help keep them engaged in the school. Rino talks about how and why the school and the school board support the program: “When he [Ray, the principal of GLC] spoke to the school board, that’s what he said in a nutshell, is that this program is actually getting kids to school, it’s a way to get kids off the street, and its keeping kids focused on their path towards finishing school.” This effort has been successful with some students, as I will discuss in Chapter Four.
In my interview with Rino he describes how the idea for the music program was born: “[It] started with a staff room conversation with our counselor at the time, Carolyn, who was a great advocate for youth, and started great programs, practical programs. We had a conversation about getting a few instruments and just starting and seeing where it goes and her eyes lit up, she didn’t have a music background, but she has a huge passion and she was able to get $5000 for startup of the music program.” After a year of guitar and piano programming they hired me.

When I began the choir program the principal, Mel, had been there for many years. He was quiet and subtle in his leadership, but definitely in full support of the students, teachers, and innovative programming. I remember on Mel’s last day as principal we had the year-end BBQ and the GLC Choir performed. I thanked Mel for his quiet support that I felt came from the heart, and he said, “Yah, like a bass.” We laughed. After Mel’s departure, we wondered about the fate of the music programming as it depended on the decision of the new principal, Ray. Thanks to several opportunities Ray had had to observe the choir, both in the school and at performances in the community prior to his becoming principal of GLC, he was in full support of its continuation and, as I mentioned above, even advocated for its existence to the school board.

When I started the choir at GLC I was not sure what it would look like, having never run a program quite like this before — I was quite nervous. The school did not give me any guidelines or curriculum outlines so I was free to create my own program. Having led vocal programming in other venues (afterschool care, children’s music camps, and family choir) with children and teens, I wasn’t completely inventing a new program, but building off programming that had worked in the past with other groups. The only thing was that I had never worked exclusively with underserved youth ages 15-19, and it felt slightly intimidating, as I was fully aware and still am that many of my students have experienced situations and hardships in their
lives that I have never encountered. I also felt humbled by the opportunity to learn from them. I was interested in going into the program with an open mind and heart, learning what they were interested in doing and seeing what skills and opportunities I could afford them. Thinking of what I have learned from the youth in this program over the years brings me to tears — a highly rewarding personal as well as professional experience.

I would like to briefly discuss the term I use in the title and throughout this thesis: underserved youth. As far as I can tell, people use the terms underserved youth and at-risk youth interchangeably, but for me they have different meanings or stereotypes attached. The term at-risk youth sounds more like a negative label, a label that has been imposed on youth. The term underserved youth assumes that family and societal services were not afforded to them adequately and it puts onus on the government and adults of society to make a difference in their lives. For these reasons I will use the term underserved youth.

Structure of the Class

At this point I would like to describe the structure of the class in general terms, wishing the reader to also be aware that there are always adaptations in class programming and structure according to how I am gauging the group’s energy, behaviour, and feedback any particular Tuesday. I have had two main groups of youth over the last five years: 1) the first I guided through two years of choir to graduation; and 2) the second I am currently engaged with, who are about to graduate this June (2013). The two groups have been substantially different in terms of demographics, skills, and feel. I find myself to be fairly adept at reading a group and being able to adapt my teaching to fit their needs. Perhaps at times I adapt too much, not retaining some of the core of my programming and bending to the will of the youth. I guess part of my rationale for
allowing for a large degree of democracy and adaptability in class is that I wish for them to feel some ownership in the program and to have a very positive musical experience, at the same time building trusting, lasting relationships.

As I mentioned before, the majority of time the GLC Choir has been in existence we have convened in the music room on the second floor of the GLC. Last year for the spring term, however, we met weekly at a community centre not far from the school. The reason was that there is not much space in the music room at the school and we often like to break off into groups to rehearse or compose (the music room and the school’s physical space in general are not very conducive to these needs). I also think with the group’s volume it is difficult at times for the rest of the students and the staff to concentrate, and at the same time we need to feel free to sing loudly if we feel like it and not worry about being too loud.

In the fall we came back to the GLC because the community centre wasn’t available. There are advantages to being at the GLC: 1) the energy of the group feeds off the energy of the school and vice versa; 2) it creates interest in the music program with our presence felt on a regular basis; and 3) we are plugged into the workings of the school, participating in its daily events. Unfortunately issues of space and noise became an issue again, so Ray found us a room at a recreation centre near by. We need to drive and cab every week and pack the instruments over to the new space (which is cumbersome at times), but I think the youth and I feel it is worth it for the space and autonomy we have there, although we still miss being at the school. At present we go to the recreation centre if there are enough youth to warrant it, but if there are only three or four we have been staying at the school. There are rumors of the school moving to a bigger facility next year where there would be a dedicated music room. This would be a
welcome change for the school — staff and students — and would also allow the school as well as the music program to grow.

After we arrive at the recreation centre the youth help by setting up the room with the piano, guitars, and a circle of chairs. We sit and usually start with a weekly check-in so I know how they are doing and what new issues they might be dealing with this week. This usually can take anywhere from 10 minutes to half an hour. At times I have questioned whether I need to have this be a focus in my programming and if I should work to shorten it somehow, but I also feel this is a time when the group gets to share their daily feelings, worries, and experiences. I think that it brings intimacy to the group that might not be present if this were not part of the class structure; this intimacy in turn aids the musical process. Some youth inevitably share more than others, and even though I encourage the others to share, I think they all gain value and insight in their own experiences from the sharing of others.

We generally move on to a vocal warm-up that includes a physical warm-up and some form of visualization or mindfulness meditation practice. I begin the warm-up with some stretching, constantly reinforcing the concept that our bodies are our instruments and the more relaxed our bodies are the more relaxed our voices are, ultimately working effortlessly for us. The youth who have been with me for a while understand this concept by now and buy in to it for the most part; however, when I first introduce this concept and the warm-up to them they are often uncomfortable and awkward with the silence and the body awareness, quite often talking during the exercise and some even opting out. I ask for silence during the warm-up unless it is singing so that people can have their own experiences. I also allow them to proceed at their own pace, hoping that eventually they will start to see some value in it and even start enjoying it.

Either during or before the physical warm-up I integrate a visualization exercise or a breathing
meditation to encourage relaxation. Some of them respond positively to these relaxation exercises, even requesting them, while others find it difficult for whatever reason to engage. Some don’t even try, feeling too challenged, awkward, and self-conscious, opening their eyes and just sitting there, which is not ideal as it makes the rest of the group more self-conscious. I generally allow people to be at whatever stage of participation is comfortable for them, not demanding their participation.

After these physical and mental relaxation exercises we warm up the voice with more traditional scales and exercises focusing on technique: tone, pitch accuracy, and agility. Generally this warm-up portion of class takes 15-20 minutes. After the warm-up we typically sing a warm-up song or round, often of my choosing. This is when I will introduce them to songs in different languages and from different cultures. They often find it challenging at first, as it is foreign material to them and there are few of them on up to four parts — interlocking or in harmony — but they generally like it once they get it and allow themselves to relax into it.

Moving on to repertoire we are working on from week to week, we generally sing one or two cover songs that are chosen by the students. This term we have been singing Bob Marley’s “Buffalo Soldier” and “No Woman, No Cry,” as well as The Beatles’ “A Hard Days Night” and “Hey Jude.” One student has brought in a tune she likes called “Maybe I’m Just Tired” by As Tall As Lions and we have been focusing on that for the last month. It is a challenging song with complex rhythms and background vocals. Through the years we have sung compositions by Sinead O’Connor, Alicia Keyes, Radiohead, Michael Jackson, Bruno Mars, Josh Groban, TLC, and other jazz, pop, rock, hip hop, and country songs.

We generally take a break after all of this collective musical activity for about ten minutes when many of them leave for a cigarette and/or a chat, while others keep working on
music. This is an opportunity for me to touch in with any of them that seem like they may need extra personal or musical support. After the break we normally begin the second half of the class with something I call “master class.” “Master class” in the Western, classical music world is traditionally a class given by a teacher at an artistic/musical institution in a particular discipline where a student performs a song/piece of music in front of the class and the teacher workshops the piece with the student, approaching areas of technical difficulty and/or emotional responses. In the GLC Choir setting, master class relates to the above definition as I do workshop the piece of music with the youth, but the main focus is to create a safe environment for the youth to perform, for the students to learn how to give compassionate constructive feedback, and for the performer to explore the physical, sonic, and emotional terrain of the song with the help of the other students and myself.

I am most interested in a youth finding his/her own individual, unique voice in this exercise. I coach a lot through physical movement, encouraging them to let go of their bodies hoping their voices will follow (as they often do). I also encourage them to use their own voice, accent, and tone finding this through singing informed by the speaking voice. I basically ask them to sing the song as if they were speaking it and the results are often immediate and beneficial; their range and tone increases, pitch accuracy improves, they have more agility, the lyrics are more comprehensible, and most of all they sound like themselves. They often find this exercise disorienting, and “weird” is the most common emotional descriptor they report. I lead this exercise with my adult students as well and witness the same response.

We grow up to mimic, as it is how we learn; however, what has become apparent to me as a singer and a voice teacher is that attempting to sing like another singer is very difficult as everyone has a different physiology. Allowing ourselves to sing working with our own
physiology is naturally much easier, and from what I have felt myself and witnessed in my students this feeling of ease and singing like oneself can feel disorienting and can bring up feelings of vulnerability at being exposed. The other students often see and hear the difference in the performance of the song which reinforces the work they are doing themselves to “find their own voices.” This is a very exciting and satisfying part of the class for me as well as the students, as there is often a personal breakthrough in sound and emotional connection for the performer and the audience.

At this point in the class we do a variety of things on different days depending on what we are preparing for. At times the emphasis has been on each student practicing and rehearsing their own original or cover song as I rotate through the group helping those who need it. We also have used this time to write an original song together, brainstorming themes, breaking up into smaller groups to work on different parts of the song, returning together to see how the independent parts could fit together, and sharing musical and lyrical ideas. We have done this a few times in the history of the program and it has always been a very rewarding experience for the group, as the collaboration is exciting for them and brings them together like nothing else seems to.

We have occasionally ended with a contemplative song over the years, which the first cohort of GLC Choir students sometimes insisted on. Being a more emotionally mature group, they may have the need for closure as we often delve into some risky, emotional territory through song. I realize that often due to my poor time management skills (often getting absorbed in the exercises) we are rushing to finish, pack up, and leave the recreation centre without having a closing activity. I find this final closing song one of the most rewarding moments in Local
Vocals, and remember the first group feeling the same way about the closing song, a time when they can let go and relax into a meditative song after three hours of hard work.

I admit that the above description of class structure works well at times and doesn’t seem to work as well at other times. I can feel like an effective leader of the group some days or moments, and then other times I feel lost as to how to engage them effectively. There are days when I am not sure how to “reach” them as they seem despondent and distant. I worry sometimes they are bored or they don’t like class or a song, but I am never sure exactly what is going on. There are brief moments when the whole class is connected and engaged, but those moments are rare. I like to think of these classes as being in alignment with Chaos Theory\(^3\), a whole variety of reasons why some days are different than others, and I have to let go to some degree of control of the structure and expectations I had in mind. That being said, I realize that I need to hone my skills as a teacher and facilitator, finding strategies for meeting resistance. HOF has educated and equipped me with tools and skill sets for dealing with these highly variable situations, slowly working their way into my tool bag and at times in the last few months I have been surprised at how they reveal themselves in my teaching.

One of the teaching/group management strategies I learned in HOF is to begin each new season with a brainstorming of “Goals and Agreements” which sets specific goals for the group to work towards and also sets boundaries in terms of acceptable behavior. These were the goals and agreements we came up with in January 2013:

_________________________

\(^3\) Chaos Theory is the study of the behavior of dynamical systems that are highly sensitive to initial conditions, an effect which is popularly referred to as the “butterfly effect.” Small differences in initial conditions (such as those due to rounding errors in numerical computation) yield widely diverging outcomes for such dynamical systems, rendering long-term prediction impossible in general (see Kellert 1993: 32).
Goals

• Have Fun, Rock Out
• Singing and playing an instrument
• Finding own voice
• Singing together in harmony
• Ear-training
• Building vocal confidence
• Giving/receiving constructive feedback
• Songwriting

Agreements

• Come on Time
• Attendance
• Positive Attitude
• Responsibility to group
• Respectful to self and other – no judgment
• Confidentiality

Biographies

I now introduce the reader to the core (regularly attending) members of the GLC Choir at present, providing brief biographies of each student. I have changed their names to maintain confidentiality and have left out certain pieces of information that could be identifiers. I believe informing the reader of the background of these youth can help aid in understanding the youth and feeling more connected to the subject. This context aids me everyday in my growing understanding of and admiration and compassion for the youth I work with and subsequently informs my teaching.

Lila has been attending the choir for a year and a half and she has been one of the most regular and dedicated attendees in the history of the GLC Choir. This month for the first time in her membership in the GLC Choir Lila sang for the group by herself. From what she has shared
with the group and myself in class, Lila has been in and out of foster care her whole life. Her mom was a teenage mom and has struggled with mental health issues and drug addiction. She has been abusive both physically and emotionally to Lila, which is why Lila has been taken away from her on and off by social services since she was born. As a result of this very disruptive upbringing, Lila has anger and it comes out in class occasionally in different ways. It is never really that disruptive or destructive for the class, as she largely keeps it inside with short, brief outbursts, but it is clearly self-destructive. She becomes easily frustrated with lots of elements of the class, but she keeps coming back week after week and has recently shown that she really wants to break through her inner barriers to self-expression.

Last summer she met her first love and brought him to choir in September. They were so attached that it was difficult for them to keep off of each other. By December they were pregnant. Lila is five months pregnant now. When she first found out about her pregnancy after months of being homeless, staying with her boyfriend and other friends, she made amends with her mom and went home, but things didn’t go well and again she is homeless living at present with her boyfriend and his foster family. She is currently waiting to find out if social services will support her in finding and funding housing. Last week I asked her if she had a piano at home and she looked at me with a half-disappointed, half-angry look and said, “I don’t have a home, Anna.” These are the moments when I realize how different our lives have been. I am constantly amazed and inspired by her resiliency. I think Lila knows that I like her and will support her any way I know how.

Lila’s boyfriend, Blaine, is also a very resilient young man finding his way through family divorce, leaving home, and attending different schools. He definitely has a sense of who he is and this is becoming more apparent as I get to know him better. He is showing himself, his
personality, and strength more and more in every class and is showing up as the leader of the GLC Choir not only in terms of his musical abilities — a good singer with a good ear and an excellent sense of timing — but also for his positive and “game” attitude. When he first arrived at choir in September he was quite shy and would look to Lila a lot for guidance and instruction, although he always was quite skilled musically. Blaine, more than anyone in the choir, has expressed how much he likes the breathing, visualization, and mindfulness exercises, perhaps being the one who can engage in them physically and mentally the most without getting distracted, as I will discuss further in Chapter Four.

I don’t know as much about Blaine’s past but he doesn’t seem to be quite as traumatized by life’s circumstances as some of the other students — it may just be his unique adaptive resiliency. He is becoming increasingly bold in class taking initiative to lead, and his performing demonstrates an increased desire for self-expression and catharsis. He takes feedback amazingly well, not getting defensive, and he incorporates the feedback almost instantly. I am grateful every class that he is present. The fact that he is going to be a dad seems like it has further awoken him to adult responsibilities, and (who knows) I suspect that Blaine will be a very good father, even though he is only 17 years old. He seems to have a sense of responsibility and maturity that I don’t often see in a youth his age. I am happy for Lila that she has a stable, responsible, and kind young man for a partner at this stage. Even though I fully realize that their lives are extremely precarious, these two youth seem to have a wisdom and maturity — perhaps because they have had to grow up fast — that not many youth, let alone many adults, possess.

Sara is the longest standing member of the GLC Choir to date and she is extremely dedicated, having hardly missed a class. She has been in the program for almost two years and she has told me how important the school and this program is. Sara is a real leader in the choir as
well, holding the group together via Facebook, touching in with kids who have been in the group, and recruiting potential members. She is a connector and I am very thankful for her role in the group. Sara appears at first as a regular, well-adjusted teenage girl — well put together and “on top” of her life. Generally speaking I haven’t had the opportunity to get to know Sara as well as some of the other students, and often I didn’t know the circumstances of her life. I admit that I often assumed she was doing fine, as this is how she appeared from the outside.

Last year her parents moved to Alberta at spring break and she went with them. She didn’t return and I thought that maybe she was going to stay and live with them, even though she had told me she would be back. The other youth in the program informed me that she was trying to get back to Surrey but that her parents wouldn’t give her the bus fare, as they probably wanted her to stay with them. She figured it out somehow and moved in with an uncle and aunt in New Westminster and commuted to school everyday. She told me a month ago or so that the reason she didn’t move to Alberta with her mom and dad was to stay at the school and to stay in the choir. I knew the school and choir were important to her, but I didn’t realize the extent of her need — the school and choir program were an obvious lifeline for her. Last fall Sara showed signs of distress, acting out in distracting ways in class and one day breaking down and crying for quite a while, while the group tried to support her as best we could. She told us that she was feeling really uncomfortable at her uncle and aunt’s, especially as her uncle regularly invaded her privacy by walking in while she was changing (this admission worried me and still does, even though she has never disclosed reports of abuse). She wanted to move out but didn’t know where to go. She seemed extremely overwhelmed and stressed; I had never seen her like this before.
After Christmas Sara moved out of her uncle and aunt’s house and in with a former GLC and choir student Hu’ng and his roommate. She lived there for a few months, sleeping on the couch and having her sleep disrupted by Hu’ng’s roommate who liked to party and keep late hours. She started to come to school visibly exhausted and not as well put together as usual. Luckily, through all of this upheaval, Sara had and still has a very kind and caring boyfriend who listens to her and supports her in ways he can. She speaks about him with fondness and admiration, saying how mature he is. He has come to her concerts with the GLC Choir and videotaped them.

After a few months of living with Hu’ng, Hu’ng moved home and Sara had to move out. She was homeless and found a safe house to temporarily stay in. She was there for a month and just last week moved into a group home for homeless youth. I marvel at Sara’s resiliency skills and am yet again inspired by her efforts to take care of her needs. She is a leader musically as well playing piano, guitar, and singing with proficiency. She has also started to reveal her “true voice” more and more in master class, as I will talk about in more detail in Chapter Four.

Neil came into the school and choir program in September and was very keen to learn to sing. Neil was homeschooled until this school year and is awkward socially due to his lack of confidence and experience. He often brags about himself to the group to gain acceptance, but of course this has had the adverse effect. He taught himself to play the piano by ear and intuition. He has a kind of a freeform style of his own and does not know how to read music or relate his own style rhythmically, harmonically, or melodically to play with others, as a result of playing alone. He loves music and practices a lot. He struggles with pitch and rhythm, but I have noticed that he is improving considerably in the last few months, finding his pitch and rhythmic orientation more and more easily.
As I have mentioned before, my growing philosophy on musical abilities is that at least in part pitch and rhythm issues can be attributed to a deficit in listening skills. I have encouraged Neil and others in the program to deepen their listening and to hear others who have consistently good pitch before they hear themselves. Neil has a floaty, other-worldly quality to him and I intuit that this quality, perhaps due to the lack of his social education, is hindering him from connecting to the group — socially and musically — although he is persevering, and again I am inspired by his persistence and resilience. He often seems distant and when I ask him how he is, he always shrugs his shoulders and says, “Okay, I guess.” It strikes me that Neil doesn’t know how he is feeling a lot of the time, confused and perhaps overwhelmed by his emotions, and he definitely doesn’t know how to articulate his feelings. I am encouraging him to decipher how he is feeling (i.e., body, thoughts) and to find words to articulate his feelings through song.

These four students are at the present time the core of the program. One major factor that I have grown accustomed to in this program is the variability in attendance. Because the students’ lives are often unpredictable, attendance is also unpredictable. There are three or four other students who presently come and go from the program, and I will introduce them as they appear in the research. Now that we have looked at the context for the GLC Choir — the researcher/teacher, the setting and structure of the class, and the students — I would like to look at the major focal point of my research: how singing supports the GLC Youth in the construction of cultural identity and supports their resiliency. Before I begin to report on my research findings, I would like to look at the overriding definitions and discussions of identity and musical identity.
Context for Chapters Three and Four

As our world becomes metaphorically smaller and its citizens become more intertwined, the concept of personal and collective identity becomes an increasingly pertinent and interesting subject to discuss and understand. What is the value of having an individual and collective consciousness of identity? And, more specifically pertaining to this thesis, how does vocal identity help define who we are individually and collectively? The online Oxford English Dictionary defines identity as “the fact of being who or what a person or thing is; a close similarity or affinity.” The word identity surfaced in the late 16th century and comes from the Latin idem, which means “same.” Voice is defined as “the sound produced in a person’s larynx and uttered through the mouth, as speech or song,” as well as metaphorically as “a particular opinion or attitude expressed,” and musically speaking as “the range of pitch or type of tone with which a person sings, such as soprano or tenor.” Voice can also be defined as a verb in conjunction with an object (i.e., they will voice their opinions). Common metaphorical phrases using the word voice are “to give voice to,” “in voice,” and “with one voice.”

An interesting sub-text that has evolved from my review of the relevant literature on the subject of musical identity is the threat of extinction — cultural, linguistic, and musical — and our new-found need for definitions of the above terms. Krader ends her article about song forms in the former Yugoslavia, commenting that through encroaching war and globalization, “their identity is threatened. This may have a strong bearing on their loyalty and love for these ganga song forms” (1987: 16). But what has appeared evident in my reading is that the concept of identity is being defined with increased multiculturalism, and, as Krader (1987) points out, identity — the term and its discussion — carries relatively new cultural importance: “I looked
for references to identity in Merriam’s *The Anthropology of Music* and in Nettl’s *The Study of Ethnomusicology*, but identity does not appear in either index” (15).

Since 1987 when Krader wrote this article, discussion about identity has exploded, perhaps because we feel our unique cultural identities are being threatened by rapid globalization. Solomon (2000) states in his article “that musical performance as a practice for constructing identities is now an ethnomusicological commonplace” (257). So it seems that somewhere between 1987 and 2000 the concept of musical identity was born. At the same time as Turino acknowledges this relatively recent evolution and discussion stating that “indeed, the relationship between musical performance and identity formation has been a prominent theme in ethnomusicology over the part two decades” (2008: 94), he also acknowledges that “the ongoing processes of identity formation and the strategic uses of identity categories remain a central problem for social and ethnomusicological analysis” (ibid.: 106).

I have had direct experience of all of the issues regarding voice and identity I will discuss, either in my own life or in my students’ lives. The events and research reported in these chapters will cover primarily the Winter/Spring of 2013, however I will also draw on individual and group experiences from past seasons in support of my research findings. My purpose in the next two chapters is to: 1) give key definitions and to take a critical look at some of the literature pertaining to my research; and 2) provide examples of cultural identity construction and resiliency from my research with the GLC Choir through the lens of singing. Chapter Three will look at the impact of the “voice” on cultural identity construction of the youth in the GLC Choir, and Chapter Four will look at the impact vocal expression and ensuing group cohesion in the GLC Choir has on their resiliency.
I would like to borrow an idea from “Music Education and Cultural Identity” (2005) by educational philosopher and theorist, Robert Davis, about the bi-lateral relationship between music and culture: “A culture does not simply determine and seamlessly transmit its music to its members, generation upon generation. Music is diagonally involved in the creation and renewal of culture” (57). If I replace the word “music” with “voice” and “culture” with “a person” we have the premise for this thesis. I will draw on this bi-lateral relationship (the proverbial chicken or the egg question) between identity and music throughout the following discussion in Chapters 3 and 4 (refer to Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: Diagonal Relationships

To introduce the next two chapters that will discuss my research findings, I would like to offer a model as a template for understanding the formation of understanding and research outcomes. I will make the argument that the adolescent construction of cultural identity through the voice leads to a heightened individual and group resiliency, as well as for some youth, a public voice of resistance to injustices present in the world around them. This model I have created is the structure upon which I will organize my findings (see Figure 2.2).
Figure 2.2: Thesis Structure

- Expression of Personal Cultural Identity
- Expression of Collective Cultural Identity
- Group/Individual Resiliency
- Vocal Resistance
Chapter 3: Singing Cultural Identity in the GLC Choir

“If we’re not singing, we’re not remembering” – Vera Dudoward, Kitsumkalum Elder (Hill 19: 13)

Definitions and Literature

Culture is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as “the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively; the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.” The etymology of the word culture comes from the Latin cultura, which means “growing” and “cultivation.” It is interesting to note that the words culture and identity are relatively recent, the word culture first coming into use in the early 19th century and the word identity becoming more important as a contemporary cultural construct, as I will discuss below.

Not available on the online Oxford English Dictionary, I consulted Wikipedia for definitions of the dual terms in this chapter. I was also interested in current popular culture’s collectively produced definitions of these terms. According to Wikipedia, cultural identity “is the identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as one is influenced by one’s belonging to a group or culture.” I feel it is important to look at the term place identity as well, even though only one of the articles to be discussed actually uses this term and its relationship to singing. As a relatively new term in academia, many of the other articles allude to this concept without specifically using this recently coined term. Place identity has not been a focus in my research to date, however, just as in the articles I reviewed, place identity has inevitably surfaced in my research as a point of interest related to cultural identity, as I believe the two forms of identity to be intrinsically linked. According to Wikipedia, place identity “refers to a cluster of ideas about
place and identity in the fields of geography, urban planning, urban design, landscape architecture, environmental psychology, and urban sociology/ecological sociology. It concerns the meaning and significance of places for their inhabitants and users.” In the introduction to Senses of Place, the title and content are described as “the relation of sensation to emplacement; the experiential and expressive ways places are known, imagined, yearned for, held, remembered, voiced, lived, contested, and struggled over; and the multiple ways places are metonymically and metaphorically tied to identity” (Feld and Basso 1996: 11). Being that music has historically often mirrored its environment, the only article (Solomon 2000) not so surprisingly to use the term place identity is from the discipline of ethnomusicology, not mentioned above as one of the disciplines that employ this term.

I would like to now look at various authors’ definitions and discussions of cultural identity vis-à-vis singing. I have grouped the following six articles on the singing of cultural identity into two groups of three: the first group deals with more traditional, homogenous cultures; and the second group looks at newly emerging, hybrid cultures. The first group discusses musical cultures in fairly isolated geographies with deeply rooted shared histories. Along with these qualifiers, I also noticed that these three articles shared the strongest evidence of place identity. When a people have a long history in a particular geography, it seems natural for their connection to the land to be expressed culturally through music and song. Acknowledging this relationship, in the following examples place identity could be said to simply be part of cultural identity.

Krader’s 1987 paper “Slavic Folk Music: Forms of Singing and Self-Identity” was the oldest article I reviewed and has already been mentioned in terms of defining the role of identity in musical expression, namely song. At one point in the article she calls for “further discussion of
identity” (15-16) which appears is needed, as there are moments in the article where the presentation of the material and its relationship to identity seems confused. Even though place identity was not part of her discussion, it is evident from her research that these two rural Slavic ethnic groups definitely express place identity in their respective song forms — “the song...heard far away, it resounds across mountain meadows and valleys” (14).

Russell (2007) writes of song competition in north-eastern Scotland and its relationship to whisky consumption, but the more understated theme is the question of “authenticity” and whether this old song form, “bothy ballads,” is a true representation of the cultural identity of the people of this region. Russell articulates the complexity in this question of “authenticity” when he says “that what is considered to be authentic or inauthentic is itself a construct” (187). Unlike the north-eastern Scots of Russell’s paper, the ethnic groups Krader reported on did not appear to worry about authenticity. Another related cultural topic of ongoing debate within communities is between musical tradition and innovation, and historical and contemporary song interpretations. I felt Russell could have made his research even more compelling if he had fleshed out these two overriding themes more extensively.

Russell’s article is also related to place identity, although he never names it as such. He quotes the lyrics of a “bothy ballad” that talks of the demise of a farm, “the logic or the reason for t is hard t unnerstan / Bit the waste wid gar a body greet, that’s thirled [bound by affection] to the lan [land].’ Such songs embody concerns that are strictly local, but at the same time global in their root cause” (2007: 187). Although Russell doesn’t define it as such, I believe this embodiment that Russell speaks of to be just as obvious an example of place identity portrayed through music as the examples in the next article that directly define the musical examples as expressions of place.
Solomon’s (2000) ethnography looks at place identity as it relates to cultural/group identity through carnival song in Highland Bolivia. The discussion of place identity or embodiment of place and its expression through singing sometimes felt forced, perhaps exoticizing and/or mythologizing indigenous connection to land: “…musical performance may embody identity and ground it in place. By *embodiment* I mean how musical sound gives physical presence to identity” (2000: 258). It may legitimately be the case that, generally speaking, indigenous peoples have a stronger cultural sense of place identity because of a long history dwelling in roughly one geographical area as I discussed above. But I believe it may also be that this academic discussion is often in the context of traditional cultures, and therefore subject to “othering” with exoticization or utopian idealization. Solomon makes a disclaimer attempting to foreshadow what may be problematic for the reader: “There may seem to be a certain *literalness* of identity — a too-easy correspondence between ‘community’ and ‘identity,’ and an emphasis on collective identities to the exclusion of other kinds of identity…I would respond that the literalness and textedness of identities discussed here are a result of the data” (ibid.: 272). Solomon attempts throughout the article to define place identity, giving the impression that perhaps he himself is still working out the concept. Just as a discussion of identity in music was a new idea in ethnomusicology for Krader, so was Solomon’s discussion of place.

All three articles encompassed the idea that vocal identity is an aspect of a holism that includes music, song, dance, fine arts, food, and costumes. Russell comments on the aspects of a “bothy” competition: “thus local identity was asserted in virtually every aspect of the competition, including performance, presentation, speech, song, costuming, and refreshment”
(2007: 186). This takes us back to the idea of the role of the community musician proposed by Higgins, of promoting inclusion — people in music, and music in the life of a community.

The next three articles discuss emerging, hybrid cultures that are multicultural in their expression of voice and song, as the GLC Choir is. Wood’s (2010) ethnography of a choir made up of aging Russian immigrants in Israel is well written and engaging. Judging from the depth and feeling in her research, she obviously had a strong and involved connection with many of the participants of the choir: “I join in the singing despite my deficiency in the lyrics, enjoying a deep connection when I catch the eyes of others” (2010: 185). She discusses how the Russian immigrants negotiate their dual citizenship through song, singing nostalgic repertoire from Russia, but also making sure they include Israeli standards acknowledging their present situation as Israeli citizens. Although the choir exhibits a collective cultural identity through song, Wood also acknowledges that “while the choir is by definition a group activity, music plays different roles in the lives of different people, reflecting their backgrounds, personalities, worldviews, attitudes to immigration and identification with Russian and Israeli identities” (ibid.: 167). She interviews four individuals of the choir and outlines their unique self-expression within the group. Wood describes the experience of Sima, an integral member of the choir: “the heightened experience of musical participation becomes part of her everyday identity” (ibid.: 174). Of all of the articles I reviewed, Wood’s article seemed to mirror my own work in terms of mode of conducting research, the translation of findings, and a similarity in content and philosophy.

This discussion is also at the heart of Hammond’s (2004) article on constructing South African identity through singing in choirs. As a young South African, Hammond himself questions in his introduction, “What right do I have to call myself ‘South African?’” (2004: 103), thus signalling that this article is both the author’s personal inquiry into identity as well as a
collective inquiry, “upping the ante” for both reader and author. He calls this generation (17 to 28 year olds) the “transitional generation in South Africa” (ibid.: 103). Unfortunately, Hammond is less than daring in his unearthing of key social (race, class) issues facing this “transitional generation.” Perhaps, as in Wood’s narrative, giving a background history of a few members of the choir so that the reader could have a cultural context in which to situate the choir members could have strengthened his research. Hammond argues that this kind of racially mixed choir could afford “an opportunity for South Africans of all races to interact and cooperate in a non-threatening environment, but also… a renegotiation of South African identities” (ibid.: 111).

Hill’s (2009) master’s thesis sets out to create a curriculum that introduces aboriginal music into the local northern British Columbian, mainstream school system for “cultural reconnection” (14) with the aboriginal community. Her main informants were elders in the aboriginal community in which she lives and teaches. There are two elements that I found integral to this research: 1) her use of elders for key cultural information and protocol — “Elders and role models are the first and best resources for learning traditional music”; and 2) her focus on aboriginal education through music curriculum development — “Elder Margaret Paul, of the Passmoquady Nation, points out, ‘through singing…that’s how I think you can reach young kids, is through songs, through dancing, through singing. I mean, you can’t reach them by talking and talking…’” (ibid.: 12).

Hill’s paper is much longer than Hammond’s, but the historical and personal context given by Hill was very helpful in situating the reader in the research. One thing missing was the absence of preliminary research into the agency of the indigenous population themselves for curriculum development. A survey of the area’s residents would have been helpful to get an idea of what they really needed and wanted from new music curriculum (if this indeed was done, it
was not articulated). One other element that she does not discuss is the effect of this curriculum integration on non-aboriginal students.

I noticed two overriding themes within the second group of articles: 1) a discussion of the construction or re-construction of cultural identity aided by song; and 2) a lack of discussion of place identity, perhaps due to the social and geographical upheaval of these cultures leaving any connection to land through song a re-connection to an older culture or a contemporary invention.

Krader quotes Krader:

> The search for identity is called for when the identity is called into question. The trouble may be psychological or social. When it is social, it occurs in times of rapid change, upheaval or revolution, or is the result of the impact of one people on another, by conquest, acculturation, or exploitation. At this time the psychological and the social disturbances multiply. (1987: 16)

Another major observation I had was that in the first group of articles, except Russell’s to a lesser degree, individuals’ stories are not discussed. I found individual narrative and the author’s personal connection to her subjects to be a very strong part of Wood’s research. Perhaps the above ethnographies would not have seemed so culturally homogenized or traditional if there was at least some focus on certain individuals (this line of inquiry being in direct line with the work of Abu-Lughod). Within this second group of articles there is more identification with the individual, or smaller groups. A less defined cultural identity leaves more room for individual expression, but also, paradoxically, perhaps more individual questioning of identity.

Sharing the above observations with my professors in ethnomusicology at UBC, they both had something to say about the term “culture” and its use in our field and in academia in general alerting me to this ongoing academic discussion. Dr. Michael Tenzer commented, “The eternal tension between individual and communal. Growing awareness of this reflects our
growing doubt about uncritical acceptance of the culture concept” (personal communication, 2012); and Dr. Nathan Hesselink informed me that “the idea of unified cultures is very much challenged these days, not only at the individual vs. group level, but also because in a globalized age we all have access to many different influences and experiences” (personal communication, 2013). This relates directly back to the reworking of culture in the ethnography work of Lila Abu-Lughod, who I mentioned as a major philosophical influence of mine. She argues “that one powerful tool for unsettling the culture concept and subverting the process of ‘othering’ it entails is to write ‘ethnographies of the particular’” (1991: 473). She also makes the point that “generalization, the characteristic mode of operation and style of writing of the social sciences, can no longer be regarded as neutral description (Foucault 1978, Said 1978; Smith 1987)” (ibid.: 473).

So as I trepidly embark on a chapter titled “Singing Cultural Identity,” I am especially conscious of my use of the term culture and at times have thought about omitting it entirely from my thesis. I believe, however, the term culture is so widespread at this point that it is still useful for understanding ourselves and our communities. That being said, an evolving definition of culture is not only crucial but unavoidable. I hope that by introducing this personal and academic friction that I will make the reader aware of the politics surrounding the term culture in our present world and in this paper. The way I wish to use the term culture in relation to the youth I am working with is through their assertion and expression of who they are, themselves drawing from the complex mixture of their genes and their environment, their home and their community. By focusing on individuals’ experiences and expression of self, as well as the group’s, I hope to bypass any generalization that could flatten the nuance and particularities of the group and individuals I am working with and researching: “By focusing closely on particular individuals
and their changing relationships, one would necessarily subvert the most problematic connotations of culture: homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness” (Abu-Lughod 1991: 476).

Before I leave the discussion of relevant literature pertaining to singing, culture, and identity, I feel it is important to briefly discuss an area of interest that directly relates to my work and this research: the contemporary cultural construct of the “non-singer” in North America. I have observed many of my students’ lack of confidence in their singing voice and wonder how this may inadvertently be affecting both the vocal presence and confidence in the rest of their lives, as well as having an impact on our larger Canadian musical culture. I see the same phenomenon manifested in my adolescent and adult choirs, and to a lesser degree in my children’s choirs, and boys are often more reluctant to sing than girls. There are also significantly fewer men than women in all of my singing groups, with the surprising exception of the GLC Choir at present. When people ask what I do and I tell them, the overwhelming reaction is “Oh, you wouldn’t want to hear me sing” or some variation of this sentiment. I have been greatly disturbed by this phenomenon and as Higgins points out, I am “committed to the idea that everybody has the right and ability to make, create and enjoy their own music” (2012: 5). I became interested in the history of how this cultural phenomenon may have come about and what other people’s experiences of the same phenomenon may be.

There are a few aspects pertaining to Western history and culture that seem to have had a great impact on the way North Americans relate to their voices, individually and collectively. As Louise Pascale states, “The traditional meaning of ‘singing’ is created out of convention and habit, perpetuated by the ‘main text’ (white, middle class) values of American society” (2005: 165). Our North American “main text” singing traditions came from Europe when “significant decisions made as early as the 1600s by prominent leaders of the church” (ibid.: 165), focused on
“good singing” and aesthetic perfection. Pascale believes “this ‘taproot’ continued to settle comfortably into the ground work of music education and has had major and long-lasting effects on how we generally perceive and experience singing” (ibid.: 166) — through the lens of “performance, perfection and virtuosity” (ibid.: 170).

We will now look at two papers that discuss the North American culturally distinctive term and social construct, the “non-singer.” In Whidden’s (2012) paper “Understanding Social-Cultural Influences Affecting Nonparticipation in Singing” she interviews a woman, Sara, who moved to Canada from Guatemala in her early childhood. Sara is included in Whidden’s research because she believes she is a “non-singer,” but when Whidden asks her if she would be considered a “non-singer” in her native country, Sara replies, laughing and saying “No. Because there is so much, you don’t even call it music performance. It is part of the culture. Everyone sings or plays something and you practice outside…there isn’t a gap like the performer, the sole proprietor and we can’t do it…you can take part and enjoy’” (2012: 10). Pascale had a very similar response when she interviewed Onika, a woman from Barbados who now lives in the United States. When Pascale asked Onika how she knew she was a “non-singer,” after some hesitation she responded, “Well, now that I think about it, it depends on where I am. When I’m here in the United States, I’m not a singer. When I’m singing my music in Barbados, I am a singer” (2005: 168).

From her research Pascale identifies three main elements that constitute being a singer in “a white, Western cultural context: someone who sings solos, someone who leads songs, and someone who can sing in tune” (2005: 168). Pascale proposes the integration of two aesthetics into musical education: the first, already implemented aesthetic that “values performance, perfection, and virtuosity…[and] the second [that] is an aesthetic for singing which stresses
community building, diversity, group collaboration, and relationships” (ibid.: 170). It seems that Pascale is re-introducing into Western culture the collective and largely inclusive elements of group singing portrayed in the first three articles reviewed in the discussion above on cultural identity.

Similarly looking at different interpretations of being a “singer” and the concept of talent, Whidden quotes Ruddock and Leong: “the idea that singing ability is in flux and may be developed throughout one’s lifetime is in direct opposition to the idea that musical talent is possessed only by a chosen few” (2005: 3). Both authors, I believe, successfully approached, defined, and to the degree they could dissected this new area of cultural studies. They made their objective clear in unpacking this cultural phenomenon, and gave ample evidence to convince the reader that this self-identification as a “non-singer” is prevalent within these two cultures and needs to be addressed in music education. As I mentioned in the introduction, this is a cultural phenomenon I am attempting to address through music facilitation in my community.

**Vocal Expression of Personal Cultural Identity in the GLC Choir’s Core Group**

As Wood articulates in her article on the Russian immigrant choir in Israel, “music affords a rich expressive space within which personal and group identity narratives are framed and re-framed for personal, interpersonal and outside consumption” (2010: 165). This is my experience of the GLC Choir. Over the past four years working with the youth in the GLC Choir, I have heard many unique and developed mediums of self-expression through song, rap, spoken word, poetry, discussion, and narratives. I would like to discuss a few of the more obvious examples of exploration in personal cultural identity by way of the GLC Choir. I will start with looking at musical developments in cultural personal identity in the present core group of the
GLC Choir who I introduced in Chapter Two, and then move on to other examples of this
identity construction through voice from past seasons.

Lila’s hair colour has changed several times in the year and a half I have known her, from
bleach blond to bright red to pitch black. She tells me that she is now as close to her real colour
as she knows, having dyed her hair for so long that she doesn’t really remember her natural
colour. Lila has two piercings in her bottom lip (one on each side), beautiful porcelain white skin
that she sometimes enhances with even whiter make-up, and black eye make-up. Her appearance
when she first arrived at the GLC Choir might be labeled as “goth”\textsuperscript{4} or “emo”\textsuperscript{5} in popular culture
references to style of dress and music preferences.

Initially the only music Lila was interested in singing was heavy metal, punk, or “emo”
songs, expressing an interest in learning how to sing “screamo.”\textsuperscript{6} The only other songs she has
wanted to sing is some classic rock, taking a particular liking to Bon Jovi — perhaps because she
learned the guitar parts for several Bon Jovi songs in guitar class, or possibly a musical influence
from her mother and/or foster parents. Many of the youth like classic rock from the 80s and 90s,
perhaps because their parents are still listening to nostalgic music from their era, or because
music cycles around like fashion. It is definitely nostalgic for me, as I grew up listening to much
of this music. Rather ironically, she also told me a couple of months ago that the only songs she

\begin{itemize}
\item The “goth” subculture is a contemporary subculture found in many countries. It began in
England during the early 1980s in the gothic rock scene, an offshoot of the post-punk genre.
Styles of dress within the subculture range from death-rock, punk, and Victorian styles, or
combinations of the above, most often with dark attire, makeup, and hair (Wikipedia, accessed
April 12, 2013).
\item Short for emotional, “emo” is a kind of rock music that is characterized by dramatic, epic
harmonies, complex melodies and confessional lyrics.
\item Screamo refers to a screamed vocal style used in early “emo” music, punk, and heavy metal
music.
\end{itemize}
could sing powerfully have been a heavy metal song called “A Little Piece of Heaven” and a South African song I taught the choir called “Somagwaza.” The only other time I have seen her light up over music is when we were talking about musicals one day and we started singing songs from “The Sound of Music.” I noticed her participation and she noticed me noticing. She offered with a smile on her face, “I had two gay guys for foster parents once and they watched a lot of musicals” (personal communication, 2013).

Of Mexican and German descent, Lila doesn’t identify as “white” — although she acknowledges that she “appears” white — but insists that she isn’t because she is part Mexican. She has talked about how her grandpa was from Puebla, Mexico and how she went there when she was little, but she doesn’t really remember it. However, this narrative plays large in her personal cultural history, as she has talked about it several times with the group. She has also mentioned that she is the only one in the rest of her family that isn’t all German. She has been interested several times in singing in Spanish even though she doesn’t speak Spanish, but has never actualized that wish, as she has just started to contemplate and experiment with the idea of singing solo. I realize that I haven’t followed up enough on this interest of hers and that I might suggest doing a duet in Spanish with her this spring… Sometimes it is difficult for me to remember and follow all of the threads of interest of the youth I work with and I feel a little guilty when I think about the opportunities I have missed, even though I realize it is impossible to address all of their interests.

I do not know as much about Blaine, partly because he is fairly private, not divulging as much personal information to the group as the other students. A few weeks ago, however, for the first time, he shared a lot about his life and his values with the group during a brainstorming session for a new song we are writing that I will explain further in Chapter Four. Initially Lila
brought him to choir and I wasn’t sure at first whether he actually wanted to be there, but I quickly realized that he liked to sing and loved music. He has become a strong yet unassuming leader of the group, both in terms of technical musical skill as well as the attention and focus he lends the group. I am often thankful for him being there, as in difficult moments when it is hard to bring focus to the group dynamic — which can often be slightly chaotic with all of the different personalities and behaviours in the room — Blaine is always ready to be present.

Sometimes I feel responsible for him not receiving the instruction and pace he himself could manage and I’m sure he would appreciate (I’m sure he would excel much faster); but again, the group dynamic is such that I can only manage the class with the skills I have. This is an area of growth that I will address in my conclusion.

Blaine seems to have had some solid relationships in his life. He strikes me as someone who has been loved, even though he has never told me this. He shared with us a couple weeks ago that his mother left his father for another man and that Blaine and his sister were very upset, and that he didn’t really want to live with his dad, but his mom abandoned them. He said he just had lunch with her the other day for the first time in a long time and they were able to discuss their feelings. I could tell he was satisfied with the meeting. Blaine says his mom was always the emoting parent, which was sometimes welcomed by Blaine, especially in contrast to his stoic father. But he also suggests that sometimes when he was little he didn’t want to talk about an issue for a long time with his mother, but she wanted to process the incident. He says he is grateful for the emotional skills he learned from her. Blaine seems to be aware of emotions and has, consequently, also figured out how to manage them, which is somewhat rare to see at his competence level in an 18-year-old male. This emotional intelligence is apparent in his leadership in class and in his connection to the process as well as to the repertoire.
In our class discussions on culture and race, Blaine has never mentioned his cultural history, although he appears white of European descent. Some of the youth I have taught don’t seem to know their cultural history — the roots of their ancestors — besides being “Canadian.” With such a new country like ours, primarily made up of relatively recent immigrants (besides the Canadian Aboriginal population), it seems most people know and/or are interested in where their ancestors immigrated from. But I have found more and more that multiple-generation, settler Canadian youth and children I talk to do not know and/or do not have interest in their ancestry — for them they are simply “Canadian” and they don’t need any other personal cultural descriptors. These youth who identify simply as “Canadian” also tend to solely choose repertoire that is from North American popular mainstream music, without choosing or writing music that is cultural specific to their particular ancestry.

Blaine dresses rather neutrally, not really aligning himself with any particular pop cultural group. His musical tastes reflect his non-conformity within the greater Canadian and North American cultural context. He knows what he likes and what he doesn’t, making it clear to me when my song choice is not of his liking. Over the six months he has been in the GLC Choir he has sung “Hey Jude” by The Beatles and “Johnny B. Goode” by Chuck Berry for master class, saying when he first came to choir how much he loved 50’s and 60’s rock and roll. He also sang Jack Black’s “Tenacious D,” memorizing the epic ten-minute song that tells long comedic sagas of absurdity. The latest song he has been working on is a song by Tool called “Aenima.” He also talks about loving jazz, old musicals, and classic rock from the 80s, which he listened to with his dad. He told me one day when he and Lila rode back to GLC from the Rec Centre with me that they had found his dad’s old record collection and they were really excited about getting a record player. We talked about how different the sound is on a record than on a CD, and they
seemed to know all about the technological differences: analog to digital, harmonic saturation, and the “feel” difference. They talked about how fun it would be to play a record. Lila said her grandpa used to have an old gramophone he used to play records on.

Born in New Westminster to Vietnamese immigrant parents, Sara has talked to the group about the differences between her views and the views of her parents and her older family members. Unlike some the other youth that are 1st- or 2nd-generation Canadians who express themselves vocally at least in part by way of their families’ cultural history, Sara doesn’t seem to express overtly much of her family’s cultural background, at least not vocally in the GLC Choir. There are modes of behaviour and interpersonal communication that Sara uses in class and I wonder if they are culturally informed modes of communication and identity that she has received from her family. Sara has expressed anger and frustration towards her parents at times in class. She has told us that they wanted her to quit school and work to support herself when she came back to Vancouver. She also talks about how her mom is sexist, making comments to Sara about what she should and shouldn’t do because she is a girl.

Sara’s musical taste is very developed. She has listened to a lot of music and it is an integral part of her life; many times I believe it has been a lifeline for her, as I will discuss in Chapter Four. This last year she has really connected to songs by Lights, a Canadian electropop singer/songwriter, and she has sung four covers of her songs for master class and performances. She sings them well and obviously connects to the lyrics and experience in the lyrics. The lyrics are fairly abstract and poetic and the music is harmonically and melodically interesting with the use of extensions and altered chord voicing, which has shown me that Sara has a mature capacity to interpret of music and lyrics. Perhaps because she has exposed herself to so much music, she is an educated critic. On a personal note, I have been thankful to Sara for introducing the group
to some really interesting music. I like her taste and appreciate the listening she has done and the
discernment she brings to her listening. Presently she seems to listen to indie-pop, but not what is
on the radio. She has mentioned that her boyfriend has introduced her to lots of music. Aligning
somewhat with the indie-pop image, Sara likes to dress in a somewhat “hipster”\(^7\) fashion with
Ray Ban glasses and ironic shirts.

There is a thoughtful side to Sara that is not always apparent. I have an ever-growing
respect for her as she reveals more of her inner life to the group through conversation and song.
When Sara first joined the group two years ago, as I mentioned in her brief biography in Chapter
Two, she did not open up very readily to the group, and I didn’t know what was happening in her
personal life. I figured she was fine and led a seemingly normative teenage (tumultuous yet cared
for) existence. I would sometimes be frustrated by Sara’s attention-seeking behaviour — acting
“cute,” being really hyperactive attributing it to sugar intake, sudden loud outbursts — that
would disturb the group’s process. Not having an understanding of where this behaviour was
coming from, I was confused. Since she has been opening up to the group and telling us her
story, I now understand her behaviour (not that it is necessarily easier to manage), but at least I
have a context. People are much more nuanced than meets the eye, which is what I believe Abu-
Lughod was essentially proposing, a greater depth into personal narrative to bring us closer to an
essence in our research. I also believe it brings us closer to each other, as Sara and I are finding
out.

\(^7\) Hipster refers to a subculture of young, recently settled urban middle-class adults and older
teenagers that appeared in the 1990s. The subculture is associated with independent (indie)
music, a varied non-mainstream fashion sensibility, liberal, or independent political views,
alternative spirituality or atheism/agnosticism, and alternative lifestyles (Wikipedia, accessed
April 12, 2013).
Neil, the last student from the core group that I will discuss, is quite proud of his intercultural background and has made reference to it several times in class. His cultural family background is French, English, and Micmac First Nations — a very historically Canadian heritage. He often goes on fieldtrips with the First Nations’ Counselor to different cultural events and seems to find a sense of belonging in identifying with a First Nation’s identity. He has talked with pride about his mom who works as the head pastry chef in a high-end downtown Vancouver hotel. I can only imagine the hours she keeps and I can’t imagine her being home much. Neil mentioned to me that his father doesn’t work and he and Neil fight over the computer to play videogames. As I mentioned before, Neil was homeschooled until this last September, when he started attending GLC.

Neil is a “gamer”\(^8\) and when I asked him what he was doing for spring break he told me he would be playing video games. When I asked him how his spring break was he said it was boring — I get the feeling he only plays videogames because he has nothing else to do, and that if he had the choice he would choose human interaction over his computer. A lot of the music Neil likes comes from the theme songs for various videogames that he plays. I have often thought, “I wonder how he knows that song?,” and it always turns out that it is either from a videogame or a sci-fi movie. However, what I have also discovered about Neil is that he investigates music that he likes from videogames or movies and discovers other music from the same artist or the genre. He likes a lot of jazz music, learning about Dean Martin and the Rat Pack from “Ain’t That a Kick in the Head” — a theme song from one of his favourite videogames, Fallout: New Vegas. He also likes instrumental music from videogames as well as

\(^8\) The term “gamer” refers to someone who plays videogames during their leisure time (Wikipedia, accessed March 29\(^{th}\) 2013).
some Japanese theme songs from games (he is an avid drawer of Japanese anime figures). At times he has surprised me by bringing in songs that are very heartfelt and honest, and the last time he performed in master class he chose to sing Lies by Glen Hansard which he admits he found by mistake on YouTube and loved and listened to it so much that he now performs it with an Irish accent.

Neil is bright and interested in many things, and he likes to think of himself as he says in his own words as a “database of all kinds of information” (personal communication, 2013). He often brags about knowing and being good at many things, including music (piano and guitar). This is a personal trait he feels confident about and is also a way he attempts to assert himself and his power within the group, which is seen by several GLC Choir members as “bragging” and is often not well received. There have been various episodes in the last six months when there has been friction between Neil and some of the others in the group because they feel like he often criticizes them and brags about himself. They have also indicated that they are fearful of him, as he has shared past experiences and fantasies of violence with them. I have been trying to mediate this tension, but recently Neil has been showing signs of stress, being aggressive during school, and he has been asked to leave by other staff members on a couple of occasions. I feel a great deal of empathy for Neil and I like him, getting a kick out of his “quirky” personality. I think that he can tell that I accept him for who he is. I try to model compassion for Neil to the other students and I have talked to some of the other members about trying to find compassion for Neil by putting themselves in his shoes, thinking of his life experience and his loneliness. They have tried hard, especially Lila and Blaine, to include Neil at school and in parts of their social life.

The above narratives are examples of how the core group has presented their personal cultural identity — made up of several different environmental and inherited traits/elements.
Their personalities are so individual that I have trouble seeing where points of cultural identities might mix. Besides Lila and Blaine who have become more alike as they have been together, I had trouble seeing more obvious points of cultural connection, besides the overriding points of language, school, and the greater Canadian cultural context. I admit this is where being an “insider” researcher — a “fieldworker at home” — becomes hard as I have trouble seeing the attributes and characteristics of my home culture; I have trouble seeing the forest for the trees. Nevertheless, I attempted to find some points of cultural connection through various past members of the GLC Choir. I began to wade through past years of the GLC Choir to see if there were indicators of group cultural identities, points of cultural connection that the members of the group shared.

**Vocal Expression of Collective Cultural Identity in the GLC Choir**

Hu`ng, who I mentioned in Chapter Two as having taken Sara in for a few months while she was homeless, graduated last June from GLC and was an integral part of the choir program last year, 2011-2012 (he still is active, as many of the GLC Choir current members still see him regularly). Hu`ng is also the son of Vietnamese immigrant parents, and perhaps Sara and Hu`ng’s friendship and intimacy from choir in addition to this cultural connection encouraged Sara to trust Hu`ng and for Hu`ng to extend the invitation to Sara. Hu`ng is a very strong young man in physique and character. His family came by boat from Vietnam to Canada with his older brother and Hu`ng was born in the Lower Mainland. Hu`ng’s family is Catholic, and when Hu`ng was 12 years old he left his family to go to school at the seminary at Westminster Abbey in Mission, B.C. He learned how to sing Gregorian chant there and sang the songs he learned.
there for us several times in class. It was a very interesting experience for the rest of the choir members as many of them may have never heard singing like this before in their lives.

Hu’ng has a beautiful voice that is quite technically refined because of the musical/vocal training he received at the Abbey. His evolution throughout his year in the GLC Choir, especially after his training at the Abbey, was to figure out his own unadulterated sound and to unleash his potential. He has a huge range that goes from an extremely low bass to a beautiful high tenor and falsetto. He has an incredible amount of emotional power behind his voice as well that he was learning how to harness. He told me he left the Abbey after a few years because he figured out that “religion is bullshit” (personal communication, 2012). He took lots of risks last year in choir and encouraged others to do the same; he brought a mood of fearlessness and inhibition to the class.

At the same time as Hu’ng is serious, intense, and assertive in his political and moral convictions, he is also comical and dramatic. There are also times when it strikes me that he is not completely aware of what is socially acceptable in terms of language and content, perhaps partially due to the fact that he would have a certain culture at home to adhere to and another one in the outside culture that would be made up of primarily peers and pop culture. Hu’ng occasionally overstepped boundaries in the GLC Choir, and I would then point out to him that what he was saying would be inappropriate in a lot of contexts and that he needs to be increasingly aware of the context he before he speaks.

A couple of months later Hu’ng wrote a song about the racial stereotypes he deals with daily being an Asian, and more specifically a Vietnamese male in Surrey. Through observations of Hu’ng’s interests in class and this song I realized that Hu’ng identified with an intercultural Asian identity, combining references from the pop cultures of Japan, China, and the racial
stereotypes of Vietnamese people in the dominant culture in Greater Vancouver. In this song he seemed to be referencing the Asian experience in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, perhaps merging the distinct Asian cultures into one as perhaps the Greater Vancouver dominant culture does. When Hu’ng performed it for the school the students loved it, especially the other Asian students who could relate to the stereotypes and knew all the pop culture references he was using; they were killing themselves laughing. The principal, Ray and some of the other teachers looked a little stunned. As I said before, Hu’ng takes risks and often tells it like it is, even if this bold approach isn’t the most widely accepted. I admire him for this and at the same time, as his teacher, his boldness sometimes makes me nervous, as it felt like I was also taking a risk by allowing him to express his true feelings.

“Super Asian Song”

Mama, I don’t like rice
Everyday I be eating rice

Papa, Why am I Asian?
Everybody thinks I can kung-fu

Well I’m sorry to disappoint
But I ain’t got... kung-fu

Man, I wish I was Jackie Chan
Cause he got... kung-fu!

Cover to cover, I will scrawl
Anime chicks is what I will draw

Dance Dance Revolution!
With moves so fast, I’ll give you a seizure or two

‘Cause naked anime girls
Give me a super boner...

Will somebody please tell me
What’s wrong... with watching hentai⁹!?  

(Rap Interlude)  
I don’t carry batons in my bomber jacket  
And I’m sorry I don’t own a Gucci man purse  
So hey, Mr. Popo stop breaking down my doors  
I don’t grow weed anymore! That was so last season!  

I eat pho everyday and I fuckin’ love it  
But sometimes I make spring rolls when I feel like it  
They say Red Bull may give you wings—  
But Confucius says Red Bull makes you fuck better!  

LGs¹⁰ everywhere; that’s all I see  
With their tight ass TNA¹¹ pants — that’s fine with me  
Hoi um hoi Metrotown? [“Do you want to go to Metrotown?”]  

That’s right baby. Now everybody fung gao right now! [“Everybody go to sleep right now” — a pop culture reference from Rush Hour 2, when Chris Tucker tries to speak Cantonese]  

Oh ~ Super Asian!  
With moves so fast — everybody’s kung-fu fighting¹²!  

Oh ~ Asian invasion!  
We’ve already got Richmond; now we’re taking Surr-ey!  

Oh ~ Asian economy!  
We work for cheap and open-up-businesses-to-launder-money-and-run-massage-parlors-that-have-happy-endings!  

Oh ~ I forgot my lyrics!  
... ... ... Whateva ~  

The first group of students I taught in the GLC Choir had a lot of experience with singing, music, and performance already when they arrived in class, and thus were a very  

---

⁹ Japanese pornographic comics.  
¹⁰ LG, or “Little Girls,” slang for preteens who dress provocatively.  
¹¹ TNA, a brand name clothing by Aritzia.  
¹² A lyrical quote from “Kung-Fu Fighting,” a hit disco song from 1974 by Carl Douglas.
capable and powerful group. There were two young women, Celine and Lanora, who were very
good singers and who would often sing together. They chose R&B, soul, and hip hop songs to
sing. These were not necessarily all radio hits, but songs they were drawn to because of a
message they could relate to, which was often positive and empowering.

Lanora also played the piano very well and could read music. Lanora is from a big
Filipino family and she grew up singing and playing piano in a Christian evangelical church. At
one point she was leading the church choir. I have recognized through my experience in the
music scene in Vancouver and through different students I have had over the years that there is a
major connection between Filipino popular music and American popular music because of the
United States having occupied the islands from 1898 until 1946. Even after the occupation
ended, American music (blues, folk music, R&B, and rock and roll) has had a strong hold on the
islands and a Filipino music scene flourished that combined these genres. I have noticed that
many Filipino youth have had very musical upbringings, and like Lanora there are some Filipino
youth that I have known who are excellent R&B and gospel singers and who can use their agile
voices in a highly melismatic manner. Of course there are many youth from other cultures who
can sing/mimic in this African-American vocal style as it is a very popular genre, but I have
noticed a prevalence of highly skilled singers from a Filipino cultural background. By the time
Lanora was in the GLC Choir at age 17 she had had two children — one lives in the Philippines
with family and the other she never spoke about, although one time she showed me pictures of
both children on her phone. So as well as having a highly skilled voice, she also had maturity and
experience to give her repertoire emotion. Everyone loved it when Lanora would sing — she
would often give us all goosebumps.
Celine also grew up listening to R&B vocal stylings and has trained herself over the years. Celine grew up between her father’s home on a First Nations Reserve in Ontario and in Surrey with her mother. Celine’s mother has been an addict on and off her whole life and suffers from depression. She also has a twin sister who has been in and out of drug rehabilitation the whole time I have know Celine. Celine also deals with a disability — she is missing her right arm from her elbow down. She is her family’s caretaker, and seems to have been born or developed an internal strength that has allowed her to stay resilient within her surroundings. She is a very powerful person and a beautiful singer. Celine and Lanora sang many duets and were particularly inspired by Alicia Keyes, a strong African-American singer/songwriter and pianist who writes all of her own songs, many of which are about empowerment of women in relationships.

In the second year of the GLC Choir we were joined by Samuel, a young man from Ahousaht (a First Nations reserve on an island off the west coast of Vancouver Island). Like many First Nations reserves in Canada, Ahousaht suffers from the affects of the legacy of colonialism (disease, attempts at cultural genocide through the residential school system and various laws that tried to prevent First Nations people from maintaining their language and culture), contributing to rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, and unemployment. Samuel’s father died on the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and his mother moved back to Vancouver Island after battling drug abuse. He was living with a family from Ahousaht in Surrey. Samuel is a rapper who writes and performs his own material, and when he joined the GLC Choir he showed me YouTube videos of his original pieces. I was impressed — he is a good writer and has natural intuitions and skills with rhythm, phrasing, and timing. He wanted to learn vocal techniques to improve his rapping and was interested in singing as well. Despite Samuel’s raps
being well written, the content that I heard in Samuel’s YouTube videos was more or less the current generic hip hop themes with guns and violence, bragging about being the best rapper, and degrading women. I told him that I thought his writing and musicianship were good and I thought he had talent. I invited him to use his “real voice” in the GLC Choir; I suggested that “out there” he could carry on with his style and content, but in this space he could use the opportunity to write about his life, which he did. In Chapter Four I will discuss a powerful songwriting collaboration between these three former members of the GLC Choir.

There have been other GLC Choir members over the years that have rapped in their mother tongue, as well as in English. Ava, a Persian youth of Baha’i faith who escaped religious persecution in Iran and recently came to Canada via Turkey, wrote many raps in Persian and performed them with the GLC Choir. There was also a Chinese-Canadian young man who would sing and rap in Cantonese and Mandarin, as well as in English. There were also two young men who joined the GLC Choir briefly who were recent immigrants from Albania and Macedonia. They also wrote raps in their mother tongues. I see Rap as poetry with “street cred” and it allows youth to express themselves in a way that is socially acceptable to their peer group. These young people from different cultural backgrounds, through the trials and tribulations of their life, seem to have found a voice through the African-American experience of hip hop, perhaps because they can relate as minorities and predominantly people of colour to the struggle and resistance in the words and the music.

There were youth in the GLC Choir, particularly when I first started teaching, that were particularly drawn to contemporary country music and its main cultural/land identity markers: a blue-collar work ethic, chivalry, romanticism, Christian morals, nature, and working on the land. The youth that have been drawn to this cultural affiliation have largely grown up in rural or
suburban British Columbian communities where there was a large component of the mass culture that would also align itself with the cultural indicators of a rural lifestyle and largely listen to country music. There were a couple of young men, Jacob and Louis, who sang songs by Rascal Flatts and Tim McGraw as well as repertoire of other male contemporary country stars. Celine and another long standing GLC Choir Member, Chantel, were also often interested in singing contemporary country repertoire — Hilary Duff, Taylor Swift, and Carrie Underwood. Celine, Jacob, Louis, and Chantel grew up, at least in part, in Canadian small towns or rural settings. There is also a large population in the Fraser Valley who lives a suburban rural lifestyle with a history of farming and ranching and therefore also relates in many ways to the themes in country music. There has not been as much interest in the last year or so and none of the present core group has lived outside the lower mainland in B.C.

The final example of the GLC Choir’s collective cultural expression is in effect many individual’s personal cultural histories of war and resistance that met in a moment of sharing stories in a Remembrance Day assembly a year and a half ago. The morning of the assembly we were practicing the songs we had for the event — “Imagine” by John Lennon and another song I can’t recall. As we were talking about the emotion that we needed for the songs to have meaning and feeling for us and the audience, I suddenly asked them, “Whose family has been affected by war?” I half expected them to perhaps mention a great-grandfather or a great uncle, but I did not expect the plethora of personal narratives of how war and/or religious/ethnic persecution had impacted their family, friends, and community. I was blown away by the stories and suddenly we realized that every person’s family had been impacted by war somehow.

That moment had a deep impact on the group and when I think about it I still get chills. Hu’ng talked about how his uncles died in the Vietnam War fighting for the Viet Cong, and as a
result of this war his family had to flee to Canada. Sara also talked about how her family had to flee Vietnam because of the Sino-Vietnamese War, when the Vietnamese government was enslaving the Chinese ethnic community in Vietnam. Ava talked about how her family had to flee Iran because of religious persecution, Louis and Chantel talked about how their grandfathers fought in WWII, and Louis talked about a friend of his from Fort St. John who died serving in the Canadian Armed Forces in Afghanistan. It was a powerful moment of deep connection for the group and I decided that these stories needed to be heard, reflecting the essence of Remembrance Day.

Historically and culturally in Canada, Remembrance Day has been about commemorating the soldiers who died and the veterans who survived the World Wars and the Korean War, but I had a personal epiphany that day when I realized that Remembrance Day currently in Canada encompasses many more stories than just those aforementioned, with stories of war and resistance against human rights violations from all over the world. Remembrance Day took on a new meaning for me that day — it brought it “home” — and I believe it had a great impact on the larger GLC community when the GLC Choir told their stories and then we sang. The emotion and narrative in the songs were then directly related to the experience of the students singing them and the audience listening. The social studies teacher who conducts the Remembrance Day ceremony expressed to me what a good idea this was to have the youth relate to the subject; I can’t say I planned it or that there was any forethought on my part. It was a moment where things fell together, the magic that happens when you bring cultures together in ceremony and song through a shared context. Here is an excerpt from the rap that Ava wrote for the occasion that she translated into English for the audience before she began, but then performed in Persian:
Listen! Freedom needs pride that we don’t have.
Don’t pick poppies just smell the flowers.
They don’t smell like blood if we don’t step on them.
A brilliant person needs to work at night,
we don’t want to disagree.
I always walk alone in these streets
looking for a person in love.
If I’m negative I swear to god its not on purpose.
My heart is broken my friend left me.
It broke all by itself, all the dreams you don’t want,
one day for the truth to come out.

To conclude this section on cultural identity expressed through song, I would like to share some of the feelings I have had writing this chapter. There have been many moments during the writing and researching process when I felt like perhaps I was making assumptions about, and/or projecting, a white, middle class, “main text” (Pascale 2005: 165) lens on the creative process of my students and even on who they are. I am constantly questioning myself, which I think is healthy and at the same time can be deeply frustrating and halting. Having just finished HOF with an American group of youth empowerment organizations with an emphasis on race and class relations, I feel hyper-aware of my position of power and privilege in the world, as I mentioned in the introduction, and so as I am being educated and am educating myself, I realize that I will stumble, fail, and make assumptions in my ignorance. I feel that I am willing to take this risk, as these issues of social justice are at the heart of my work. Sometimes I feel “damned if I do, and damned if I don’t,” but silence is not the answer for me right now in my life and in my career; I am standing in the discomfort of these difficult conversations, the ones I believe we need desperately to have with one another. I am sharing this with you, the reader, not to excuse myself of any of the faults this research may have in your eyes, but just to share the thoughts and insecurities I have had and continue to have approaching my work.
Group and Individual Vocal Expression of Place Identity in the GLC Choir

As I mentioned during the literature review for this chapter, there was only one article that discussed indigenous place identity through singing (in Highland Bolivia). Even though this is a relatively new term in academic discussions, I wanted to address the presence of place identity construction through song and the GLC Choir as I believe it is also valuable to look at how urban and/or emerging intercultural populations may connect to land through expression of identity. There is a shared cultural experience in the GLC Choir by way of association to place — Surrey — and more specifically the neighbourhood of Guildford, with GLC being the epicentre, the hub of their present world, their gathering/safe place.

As I narrated above, Sara has chosen Guildford in Surrey to be her home. She has fought hard for it, obviously feeling like this place is integral somehow to her identity and her survival. She feels at home here and included in the life of this community. She knows Guildford and Surrey like the back of her hand, having walked and bussed all over ever square inch as most of the youth in the GLC Choir have (a highly mobile group within their community). They also know where each other live and take buses and walk together to and from school and other events. After Sara’s parents moved to Edmonton she decided to stay here by herself, and after moving in with her aunt and uncle in New Westminster she could have gone to a high school in that neighbourhood but chose to take two hours of her day to commute to GLC. When she moved into a Safe House she found one in Surrey, so that she could still be in her neighbourhood and attend GLC and the GLC Choir. Now that she is in a group home for homeless teens, it is not far from the school, looking out over the Port Mann Bridge and a large forested area. She loves it and is the happiest I have seen her. Her boyfriend lives in Cloverdale, which is further out into the Fraser Valley (a fair distance from Guildford), and I have wondered why she wouldn’t move
closer to him, but for Sara home is Guildford and I think she has made this evident by her decision to stay here. It is her place on earth for the time being, a place where she finds the support she needs and a part of this support has been the GLC Choir.

Lila and Blaine also have a strong connection to Guildford and do not talk of going anywhere else. Lila is presently looking for accommodation for herself and Sara, as they have been talking about moving in together. In fact when I think about it, many of the youth I have worked with in the GLC Choir have not left Guildford or Surrey, even though there are many areas of the Lower Mainland where they might chose to live. As the song lyrics below express, there may also be a fear in leaving the home they know.

There is a stigma against Surrey in the rest of the Lower Mainland — stereotypes of gangs, violence, prostitution, low-income housing, and drugs. Surrey is on the outskirts of Vancouver and I think historically and presently when people can’t afford housing in Vancouver, they move to Surrey. There seems to be a class-based and perhaps race-based (high population of Indo-Canadian and South-east Asian immigrants) discrimination towards the city that happens to be the fastest growing city in B.C. Hu’ng joked in his song, “Oh ~ Asian invasion! We’ve already got Richmond; now we’re taking Surr-ey!” This proclamation could be a result of him being aware and perhaps self-conscious of the fact that there is a growing population of Asians living in Surrey and/or him hearing discriminatory comments. Despite all of this, I have never heard the youth in the GLC Choir speak negatively about their community, put it down, or make fun of it like I have heard from other people who live in other regions of the Lower Mainland. Could this be because the youth in the GLC Choir have a deep connection, affection, respect, and pride for the place they call home?
Before the three-week winter break this last year the GLC Choir performed at a Winter Concert for the school. I was hoping that we could write a song for the occasion, and even though the final product never materialized, the brainstorming process yielded these potential lyrics, written collectively:

For things I see and hear,  
the city of Surrey is real.  
Continuing on the history of us all,  
real to the stars and the mountains.  
Above our heads, as they end,  
a new story begins.  
In the dark sky, there’s still a bright moon,  
that guides me to where I am supposed to be.  
But nobody knows where their place is,  
we are all completely lost in this city.  
Is it our home or is it our prison?  
I can keep this in,  
I can get through this.  
I know you can.  
With all your hope and dreams,  
use your heart as strength.  
And live for each day no matter what,  
even though you may be broken and not see.
Chapter 4: Vocal Resiliency and Resistance in the GLC Choir

The cave of making can be a dark and desperate place. From time to time, the darkness is dispelled by flashes that dazzle the obscurity. These sudden impulses are too bright to illuminate an idea or light up a thought; they make the night more impenetrable, the cave more unbearable. And yet, the memory of light lingers on, and leads you further into a darkness that slowly reveals its own geography of insight and ignorance. Then voices begin calling to you from beyond the cave — voices of instruction and encouragement, half inscripted and half intuited, half heard and half imagined. It is these voices, freighted with unresolved conversations and interrupted arguments, that finally help you to “hold” the thought; and in the midst of that movement of ideas and intuitions you discover a momentary stillness. This moment of reflection is never simply the mirror of your making, your frame of thinking, but a stillness sometimes heard in choral music when several voices hold the same note for a moment — omnes et singulatum — as it soars beyond any semblance of sameness. (Bhabha 2009: x)

Definitions and Literature

I began my research for this thesis thinking that I would concentrate on the identity construction of underserved youth through singing. As I have delved into these main themes and progressed in my research and writing, I realized the reason I am consistently inspired by these youth is because of their resiliency despite many adversities. I have also observed that singing and belonging to the GLC Choir supports their resiliency. I wondered why? Even though they may be facing more adversity than other youth I work with who may have more normative life circumstances, they still seem like “normal” youth to me with human needs and questions. In many ways I find them mature and wise perhaps because of the major issues they have had to face in their short lives, which are often issues of survival. I find my discussions and debates with them stimulating and insightful as I find the youth in the GLC Choir generally very open and willing to have them.
The students are at this beautiful and chaotic time of great change in their lives when they are no longer children, but not quite adults, either. And as awkward as this stage is, there is a boldness and courage in the thick of the pain and suffering. Looking at my research and also being led by my intuition, I knew that I needed to integrate a study of resiliency into my research. And as my model in Chapter Two outlined, I see identity construction — an ensuing assertion and expression of identity, and ultimately self-knowledge through voice — as a contributor to resiliency. Masten (2009) and other researchers on resiliency will argue for commonly identified structures of support in resiliency such as family, school, and community; I would like to add to this the youth’s own self-determination and self-expression despite adverse environmental factors. What I have seen in many of the underserved youth that I work with is that despite their circumstances, if they have an internal compass or level of self-knowledge, they are better equipped for resiliency and that having a venue to explore, unpack, and express their identities is beneficial. In this chapter I will look at the current literature on youth resiliency and investigate examples of resiliency through song in the GLC Choir. I will also investigate the correlation between resiliency and resistance.

The concept of resiliency has developed and been studied over roughly the last forty years in education and psychology. The research began with looking at how some people, thought to be special for reasons that were yet to be discovered, were more resilient than others in similar adverse circumstances. Studies were carried out that perpetuated the myth that some people seemed to be more resilient than others, however, the research being carried out at present and in the last 10-15 years has looked at how resiliency is in fact more of the norm than the exception. Ann Masten, one of the leading researchers on resiliency in youth, calls it ordinary magic: “resilience is all around us...early risk researchers did not expect to observe so much
variation or so many good outcomes among children who experienced poverty, violence, disaster, or trauma” (2009: 28). Masten defines resilience as “a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development. Research on resilience aims to understand the processes that account for these good outcomes” (2001: 228).

Two questions inferred in this definition now arise: 1) who qualifies as “resilient”?; and 2) what qualifies as “good” outcomes? Masten addresses the first question by stating that “resilience is an inferential and contextual construct that requires two major kinds of judgement (Masten 1999b; Masten & Coatsworth 1998). The first judgement addresses the threat side of the inference. Individuals are not considered resilient if there has never been a significant threat to their development; there must be current or past hazards judged to have the potential to derail normative development” (2001: 228). I have questions about the legitimacy of this judgement. I have friends, family members, and students who wouldn’t have been considered resilient in Masten’s defining context, especially when we look at Masten’s Short List of Resilience Factors (see Table 4.1). Many of these people had such factors in place, but in my observation they still had significant threats to their development and showed resiliency in how they managed their particular adversity.

Masten addresses the second question and discusses the second judgment: “The second judgment involved in an inference about resilience is the criteria by which the quality of adaptation or developmental outcome is assessed or evaluated as ‘good’ or ‘OK’” (2001: 228).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1 Short List of Resilience Factors (with Implicated Human Adaptive Systems)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Positive attachment bonds with caregivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive relationships with other nurturing and competent adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intellectual skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-regulation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive self-perceptions; self-efficacy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Faith, hope, and a sense of meaning in life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Friends or romantic partners who are supportive and prosocial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bonds to effective schools and other prosocial organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Communities with positive services and supports for families and children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Cultures that provide positive standards, ritual, relationships, and supports</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is another judgment that I will call into question as I discuss resilience in the context of the youth in the GLC Choir. Masten herself admits that this evaluation of behaviour “is a highly complex issue that is only beginning to be addressed empirically” (ibid.: 228). At the same time as I agree that many of these resiliency factors are crucial for successful human adaptation, I believe that there are some less obvious or less easily definable factors that may be left out of the research because they are too messy to unpack, like self-expression through the arts and the potential of using the medium of music as a resiliency tool. Many people have expressed to me that music, sports, drama, drawing, writing, or reading saved them when they were teenagers, and as a result had beneficial health outcomes for them. I was one of these people — music, drama and sports during my youth saved me from anxiety, boredom, loneliness, a sense of “feeling lost,” and potentially from self-destructive ways of filling my time and self-expression.

I found an ally in a Canadian resiliency researcher, Michael Ungar (2006), who has done a great deal of hands-on investigation into resiliency and through his research has reached the conclusion that the categorization of youth as resilient and the qualifications for resiliency should be developed on a case-by-case basis by the youth themselves. I believe Ungar’s research is in line with Abu-Lughod’s research into the “particular,” as well as an acknowledgment of Bhabha’s “inbetween” third space, a philosophical concept I will discuss in reference to the correlation between resilience and resistance. I also see Ungar’s definitional differentiation of resiliency as an act of resistance, pushing up against a tendency to generalize about a particular group in society. Ungar’s finding show “youth who experience themselves as resilient and are seen by their communities as resilient are those that successfully navigate their way through these tensions, each in his or her own way, and according to the strengths and resources available to the youth personally, in his or her family, community and culture” (2008: 231). Ungar argues
that the research on resiliency will become increasingly accurate the more we listen to youth and their unique path to resilience: “The better documented youth’s own constructions of resilience, the more likely it will be that those intervening identify specific aspects of resilience most relevant to health outcomes as defined by a particular population” (ibid.: 234). I believe Ungar’s Table of Tensions (Table 4.2) is a valuable way of looking at the many aspects of life that youth are negotiating to mediate resiliency.

Table 4.2 – Ungar’s Table of Tensions (ibid.: 231)

**Seven Tensions**

1. Access to material resources
   - Availability of financial, educational, medical and employment assistance and/or opportunities, as well as access to food, clothing and shelter

2. Relationships
   - Relationships with significant others, peers and adults within one’s family and community

3. Identity
   - Personal and collective sense of purpose, self-appraisal of strengths and weaknesses, aspirations, beliefs and values, spiritual and religious identification

4. Power and control
   - Experiences of caring for one’s self and others; the ability to effect change in one’s social and physical environment in order to access health resources

5. Cultural adherence
   - Adherence to one’s local and/or global cultural practices, values and beliefs

6. Social justice
   - Experiences related to finding a meaningful role in community and social equality
7. Cohesion
- Balancing one’s personal interests with a sense of responsibility to the greater good; feeling a part of something larger than one’s self socially and spiritually

At the same time as I look at key examples of expressions of resilience in the youth of the GLC Choir, I have become aware of and increasingly interested in the correlation between the resilience I witness in the youth in the GLC Choir and their agency through vocal self-expression as a form of resistance. I am narrowing in on the term resistance, having in mind the great resistance movements in recent history: the Underground Railroad during slavery in the US, resistance movements in Nazi-occupied territories during WWII, Gandhi’s resistance of British colonial rule in India in the first half of the 20th Century, Rosa Parks’ resistance spurring on the Civil Rights Movement in the US, musicians’ resistance to the military dictatorship in Brazil from 1964 to 1985, civilian resistance to the dictatorship in Egypt in the early days of 2011, the Occupy Movement resisting the inequalities in capitalism after the market crash and ensuing economic depression in 2007-8, and finally the Idle No More Movement resisting the current treatment of aboriginal North Americans by Canadian and American governments. Of course punk, metal, grunge, and rock and roll music at their inception were youth resistance movements, and music has often been used in the above examples of cultural resistance. And while the GLC Choir is not resisting an obvious forceful occupation and is a very small-scale and less dramatic example of resistance, I nonetheless witness these youths’ engagement in acts of resistance in many parts of their lives, and one such act is an expression of resistance through song. As I give examples from the GLC Choir of acts of resilience, I will also indicate where I have witnessed acts of resistance.
For years I have resisted employment in institutional musical settings where I often encounter constraints in terms of teaching philosophies and curriculum, preferring to have the freedom to develop my own curriculum and to relate to my students in a paradigm somewhat outside the traditional teacher-student construct I have witnessed in my life. This is one way I express resistance, and on reflection on the role of resistance in my work and the role resistance plays in the lives of the youth I work with I realize that the “space” created by the confluence of roles and structures surrounding our “space” are set up to some degree by resistance and therefore support resistance. Homi Bhabha, a researcher in contemporary post-colonial studies, calls this “space” the third space “which gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (cited in Rutherford 1990: 211). To further quote Bhabha, the third space “is a place and a time that exists in-between… and that site of in-betweenness becomes the ground of discussion to confront the inequities and asymmetries of societal trauma not as a ‘common people,’ but as a people with a common cause” (2009: x). In a similar vein, Skelton and Valentine in a book titled Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures explore the role of “space” in acts of resistance: “More recently feminist scholars and those writing in the area of identity politics have begun to recognise the importance of spaces, and in particular safe space or third space — where marginality can be affirmed or celebrated (Soja, 1996). But the crucial role of space in the production of subcultures of resistance, the interdependency of the production of ‘space’ and ‘self,’ have not been fully explored” (1998: 334).

As I discussed in the Introduction, I feel validated by the work of Higgins and his exploration and identification of “community music” in a Western cultural paradigm, having not necessarily thought of my work in the community and with youth in such a defined way. He talks
of “community musicians” as dreamers, but clarifies that “This is not a dream of pure nonviolence, which is an impossible dream, but rather ‘the dream of the emergence of something different, something that disturbs the sleep of the rule of the same’ (Caputo, 1997b, 23)…a chance to dream provocative and evocative thoughts…a lens to see in and between, over and beyond” (2012: 171). In this “in-between” space that Bhabha and Higgins speak of there is an edge of unpredictability and it is hard to simply “trust the process”; but I believe that is exactly the point — to be forging new pathways of relating in acts of resilience and resistance. I witness that the safe, inclusive, and daring space created in the GLC Choir provides an opportunity for an exploration of identity at least in part through resistance to the injustices in the status quo the youth witness in the world around them by way of voice and song that supports resiliency. I begin by reporting on the evidence of resiliency and resistance in the core group drawing examples primarily from the winter and spring of 2013.

**Vocal Expression of Resiliency and Resistance in the GLC Choir's Core Group**

When Lila first started attending the GLC Choir she was broody and difficult to connect with, but I knew that she was religiously attending every week for a reason and that the choir was obviously meeting a need, perhaps even a means of survival. I also knew that coming to choir every week was a gutsy decision for her, being that her level of confidence and trust appeared to be very low. Sometimes I would catch glimpses of lightness and fun in her, and when she smiled it felt like we had all just won a small but significant victory. She didn’t want to sing solo and admitted to being terrified of being heard by anyone, sometimes not even singing in the larger group for fear of being heard. When she would sing with the group I couldn’t hear her amidst the other voices because she was so quiet. I didn’t care though — I just wanted her to
keep coming. I try my hardest to meet the youth where they are at emotionally, at whatever point they are in their development of trust.

Lila is extremely inspiring to me in her perseverance to attend the GLC Choir. There was a moment last year when I asked her why she wouldn’t sing for us and she looked right at me and said, “Why should I trust you?” And I got it! I support her when she shows she wants support, also giving her space as needed. A couple of weeks after this incident we showed up for choir and there were only three of us: Hu’ng, Lila, and myself. We talked almost the whole class that day because it felt right to do so. Lila confided in us that day and told us a lot about her tumultuous life and her life philosophy as a result of her hardship. She revealed how wise, intuitive, and deeply spiritual she is — I was dumbfounded, and the next week told her how impressed I was with her wisdom and maturity and thanked her for sharing her story and insights with us. She shared with us who she is that day, apparently feeling the level of trust she needed. I felt this intimate experience was more important than singing a song. At the end of an interview with Lila I thanked her for her perseverance in choir and she said

Honestly, Tuesdays for the last year and a half that I’ve been here, have been the days that I look forward to when I wake up in the morning, I’m like, “thank God it’s Tuesday,” ’cause I feel like I can just relax and have fun, ’cause you guys are part of my family, you guys are like people I feel safe and comfortable around…I’d have a hectic week at home and then I would come here and like, feel happy and relaxed finally, I really like coming here…I’m gonna miss you guys when I grad. (personal communication, 2013)

This is a personal and teaching philosophy that I take with the choir: that quality relationships are just as important as musical skill, and one simply supports the other. As outlined in the Introduction, one of Higgins’ attributes of a community musician is that they “recognize that participants’ social and personal growth are as important as their musical
growth” (2012: 5). Lila has affirmed this philosophy, as I believe she is in the GLC Choir just as much, if not more, for the relationships it affords her as for the music. During the same interview as above, she had a sudden epiphany about the connection between the musical and the social aspect of choir: “I think that maybe it’s like the music that brings us all to be able to find similarities and just kind of become friends and get along so well…like when we sing our choir songs and how we all just morph our voices together, we learn how to kind of, come together, it teaches us how to actually work with each other” (personal communication, 2013).

At times she has been publicly frustrated with her progress and with the fact that for over a year she didn’t sing for anyone. I would assure her that I was not frustrated and that I felt positive that when she was ready she would sing for us, and if she didn’t that was okay, too. By the end of that first term in choir she wasn’t able to sing in front of us solo, but she did write and read a piece of spoken word that she had written. Everyone liked it. She seemed to be pleased that she was able to share something of herself with the group and at the same time she looked terrified that she had just revealed a part of herself. I can often see this in the students, and I know the feeling in myself — the feeling of satisfaction and connection in sharing your vulnerability and at the same time the fear that comes with the same act of sharing, a double-edged sword.

A month ago Lila sang a song with Blaine in front of the group for master class. They sang a heavy metal song called “A Little Piece of Heaven.” Lila had played the song for me on her MP3 player a couple of months after she started coming to the group, and it was difficult for me to listen to as it was extremely violent about a boyfriend stabbing his girlfriend repeatedly. At the same time as I was horrified by the lyrics, I could understand Lila’s attraction to the song: it was full of anger and hate that eventually redeemed itself by turning into love. When Lila first
played it for me she told me this was all she wanted to sing and I told her she could sing it for us, but maybe not the school (we both laughed). She finally sang it last month. I made a disclaimer to the others in the class before they started that the song is extremely violent and that if people are upset by words and depictions of violence they may want to sit this one out. They all stayed, either because they were okay or because of peer-pressure. Lila told the group the moral of the story from her analysis before they started: “Even though the boyfriend screwed up by killing his girlfriend, he learned from it and brought her back from the dead. It is actually a really beautiful love story” (personal communication, 2013).

Lila and Blaine sang “A Little Piece of Heaven” and Lila battled with her self-consciousness and momentary feelings of self-defeat throughout the song. Stopping and starting again, but with consistent encouragement from Blaine and me, she managed to get through a lot of the song before they stopped and couldn’t remember anymore. She seemed pleased enough to have gotten through it. The group then gave her feedback, describing her voice as “angelic” and “beautiful,” and several of them said how nice it was to hear her. She took it all in, looking uncomfortable but at the same time empowered.

I asked Lila and Blaine to try it again and to get into it — to let their bodies and voices relax, allowing their sound and feeling out a little more, and to sing to each other this time. I was hoping this direction would allow Lila to further let go of her inhibition. Technically I was interested whether this direction to pay more attention to each other would align their pitch. The first time they had sang the song I think that Lila in particular was in her own world, not listening and connecting to Blaine’s pitch. I could see Blaine struggling to find her chosen key, but she kept evading him. Both of them have a good sense of pitch. They started the second time and Lila and Blaine met eyes and pitch for about a minute in perfect connection and then Lila
couldn’t handle it and she stopped, saying she couldn’t do it with him looking at her. I understood that this is one of the most vulnerable positions to be in — singing with someone face to face — and that she perhaps wasn’t ready for that step, even with her boyfriend.

I am learning that the youth in the GLC Choir will only take on what they can handle, and I am starting to read when they want and need to be coaxed to progress or whether they have had enough for that particular session. I have learned this skill through my meditation practice as well — that the body knows how much it can handle and acts accordingly. I trust my own as well as the youths’ skills and intuition to be capable of taking care of their emotional and physical needs in class. The youth in this context are learning their edges, knowing how far they may be able to stretch themselves and when they need to stop.

As I mentioned before, Sara has been hard to get to know. Admittedly, I have at times felt impatient with Sara, not knowing why she wasn’t able to engage more emotionally in the class, and I felt frustrated by her acting out in distracting ways. I was confused by her behaviour, as she seemed to be so together in her presentation and her academic achievement. But as she disclosed to us a month ago, she had a very lonely and isolated childhood, being largely neglected by her parents. During a songwriting brainstorm about worldviews and parenting she said, “I had so many rules for outside the house, but none for inside the house. I would make long lists of chores for myself and schedules because no one else was doing it for me, but I would never do it. I just wanted to be like normal families where the parents told the kids to go to bed and wash the dishes and stuff” (personal communication, 2013).

My longest standing student in the GLC Choir, I have witnessed a slow thawing of Sara’s guard and an unveiling of her story, voice, vulnerability, and emotions as she gained trust and learned emotional vocabulary and intelligence from the other students as they shared their
voices. I am encouraged at how easily Sara is now sharing her story with the group and I can feel
from her that there is a sense of relief and comraderie — that she is not alone. Sara’s voice has
changed significantly through the course of her time with the GLC Choir, and as I mentioned, as
Sara allows herself emotional expression and relaxation, her vocal expression also relaxes and
opens, enhancing her sound and performance — a symbiotic “becoming.”

Sara, perhaps more than anyone else I have worked with in the GLC choir, understands
the GLC Choir master class process — the unlocking of natural sound by undoing tensions,
stress, affects, and damaging vocal habits to reveal each student’s “true” voice. Once when
Blaine exclaimed how weird it felt to reveal his voice, Sara said to him, “It’s like that for
everyone at first. You’ll get used to it” (personal communication, 2013). She could probably lead
master class at this point in her education and experience in the GLC Choir.

When Sara first started the choir it was hard for her to connect to the feelings in songs,
but as she has revealed her true voice and emotional expression the connection to the lyrics is
increasingly personal and, from my own experience, as well as witnessed reactions of others,
emotionally affects those listening. She chooses repertoire that reflects her predominant
emotion/mood at any given stage in her life. When she was homeless and in a lot of distress, she
came to choir one day ready to sing a song for master class, “Fall” by Cider Sky. When she sang
the chorus it was so heartfelt that I started to tear up. Everyone was deeply moved and I felt very
encouraged by her letting go, her surrender to the lyrics and inherent emotions, and she admitted
to feeling a deep sense of catharsis in her sharing.

Chorus of “Fall” by Cider Sky:
Some people fall, some people fall apart
Some people fall while running in the dark
Some people fall when they run out of luck
Some people fall, some people fall in love
Until the last few months when Sara started opening up to the group and disclosing some of her hardships, she had largely expressed her emotions through the songs she sang. She recently told me somewhat accusatorily, “you didn’t even know I was depressed last spring” (personal communication, 2013), but in fact I had a feeling something was wrong because of the songs she was singing and because of the emotion she displayed while singing. There was a period last spring when she was heartbroken because she had broken up with her boyfriend. I didn’t know this fact and I had no idea of the details, but I knew about some heartache she was experiencing because of the lyrics from two songs, one original and one cover, that she sang for the group and in performance several times last spring:

“Cactus in the Valley” by Lights

I never meant to wither
I wanted to be tall
Like a fool left the river
And watched my branches fall
Old and thirsty, I longed for the flood
To come back around
To the cactus in the valley
That's about to crumble down

And wipe the mark of sadness from my face
Show me that your love will never change

If my yesterday is a disgrace
Tell me that you still recall my name

Oh, here
In the shadow
Here I am
And I need someone by my side
It becomes so
Hard to stand
And I keep trying to dry my eyes
Come and find me
In the valley
“Original Song” by Sara

Every night, it’s love at first touch
Every time, with bare skin on skin
Every night, always in a rush
Every night, the moonlit wind
It threw me to you, you to me
Your touch sets me free

Chorus:
Your heartbeat is my rhythm tonight
Your love is my music tonight
But the sun is coming out
And all our time is up
Until tomorrow night

Every day, the memories linger
Every time, each fading faster
Every day, the waiting gets tougher
Every day, the sun will shine brighter
The daylight blocks my way to you
And it still won’t let me through

There is no night without day
There is no you without me
There is no life without love
Don’t say you’re not good enough

I’ll see you in my dreams tonight

Self-soothing has been a large part of Sara’s musical experience. Perhaps because she has been alone a lot in her life, she has turned to music for solace, both playing music and listening to music. One day when Sara and I were the only ones who showed up for choir, we worked on one song — “Maybe I’m Just Tired” by As Tall As Lions — the whole three-hour class. It is a tricky song with a difficult rhythmic relationship between the piano and the vocals, and again between the lead vocals and the background vocals. Sara had figured out the piano part and I figured out the rhythmic relationship between the voice and the piano part. Sara seemed to have
an intuitive feel for the song, having listened to it repeatedly as a coping mechanism after her boyfriend had introduced her to the song during the difficult time at her uncle and aunt’s home.

During spring break this year I loaned Sara a keyboard and she said that she played it a lot during those two weeks. She told me about how relaxing it is to listen to her boyfriend play around on the guitar, making things up. She also relaxes by “noodling” around on the guitar and piano, going into a zone that is sometimes hard to pull her out of during class. Again, like we will see with Neil, this act of escaping into music is a break from the difficult reality of their lives, a deep relaxation that they may not feel anywhere else. As I indicated in the Introduction, I can relate to this coping mechanism, as before finding meditation music was the only place I could find escape from my worries. Sara and Neil have found the same survival tool.

Neil, coming from a similarly socially isolated past as Sara, didn’t have the advantage that Sara had everyday of escaping home to go to school. Neil was at home with his brother and his father. As I mentioned in the two previous chapters, there have been issues in the GLC Choir with Neil being accepted socially by the other youth; he is desperate to be their friends and in doing so pushes them away with the particular techniques he employs to gain their attention and respect. I have had various discussions with both Neil as well as Sara, Lila, and Blaine about these conflicts, hoping for all of us to gain some insight, understanding, and ultimately compassion for one another.

I have been questioning my work with Neil lately because there have been some major blow-ups at school to do with anger management. I believe Neil has a lot of stored-up anger and he started to express it in song a few months ago in master class. Neil sang a song called “Lies” by Glen Hansard for master class and it was the most emotive I have ever seen him in class. Here is an excerpt from the song:
I think it’s time, we give it up  
And figure out what’s stopping us  
From breathing easy, and talking straight  
The way is clear if you’re ready now  
The volunteer is slowing down  
And taking time to save himself

The little cracks they escalated  
And before we knew it was too late  
For making circles and telling lies

You’re moving too fast for me  
And I can’t keep up with you  
Maybe if you slowed down for me  
I could see you're only telling  
Lies, lies, lies  
Breaking us down with your  
Lies, lies, lies  
When will you learn  
So plant the thought and watch it grow  
Wind it up and let it go

For the first run through in master class Neil was more worried about the melody and the guitar chords. We couldn’t hear the lyrics very well because his volume was low, even though it was evident that there was emotion behind the quiet tension that was waiting to be released. The other youth picked up on this and gave him the feedback that they would love to hear him sing out more and it seemed like he was holding back. I encouraged him not to worry about the guitar or the melody, but to concentrate rather on the lyrics and why he chose the song in the first place. I was encouraged by his ability to take the feedback and apply it immediately. He sang it again and he was much louder and more effective in every way; his pitch improved, the lyrics where easily understood, and the emotion inherent in the lyrics was evident. Neil, as the song’s interpreter, was unveiled. It was very exciting for the rest of the youth and they told him how good it was and how much they liked it.
I find the youth very responsive to feedback and that there is a general willingness to let go of old habits and affectations, even though as I reported before, it often seems to be a slightly disorienting experience as they often have never heard themselves sing in such an unaffected manner. I asked Neil how he felt about his performance and he couldn’t tell me. This is when Neil’s lack of experience in emotional literacy is evident; when he is uncomfortable with the attention or the subject, he either can’t decipher what he is feeling or words to describe it or he is feigning ignorance to avoid showing vulnerability to the group. I am concerned that perhaps this new school environment is a lot for Neil to handle emotionally and that perhaps his expression of anger in master class has opened up a vault that has been unexpressed for years. This is a projection, an assumption on my part, but I hope that the school and I can find some support for Neil as he releases and begins to understand and manage this stored emotion.

What is exciting for me to see as a song leader and voice teacher is his ongoing improvement as a singer and a musician. Having played music by himself his whole life, he was challenged by the group process of making music. When he first joined the group, he would sing with the group but at the same time he would be in his own world of pitch, rhythm, and emotion. He would often close his eyes and look like he was deeply into the shared musical experience; however, I believe the opposite was true — that he was retreating from the shared experience when he closed his eyes as his pitch and rhythm was independent from the group. I have encouraged him again and again to listen — to listen to Blaine and to hear the rest of the group before he hears himself, and he has taken my feedback well and has consistently gotten better at incorporating himself musically into the group.

In spite of all this, I believe Neil to actually be adapting fairly well to school life given the circumstances, having never been in a school setting or around so many people, especially
his peers. He comes to school regularly and has been trying in his own way to fit in and find his place in the school; a significant way for him is through music as he already has capabilities in this area. I see his coping skills, despite obvious social deficits, as major signs of resiliency. He is trying his hardest to figure out how to navigate his new environment; I just hope that he can weather the sudden change of scene and perspective.

Just like Sara, as Neil slowly thaws he is becoming more and more aware of a larger field outside himself, which is at the same time thrilling and terrifying for him. Their experience reminds me of a quote from Anaïs Nin: “Music melts all the separate parts of our bodies together” (1939: 99). It also brings to mind the following anonymous quote: “And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom” (source unknown). Without knowing it Neil is in an act of becoming, which I believe to be an act of resilience as well as an act of resistance to staying stuck and static. Lila perhaps said it best: “The people [new students] when they first come in there, they’re like so serious and like, “you guys are weird,” but by the end of choir, like if they stay, they end up loosening up and like you see the actual person come out in them” (personal communication, 2013).

Blaine has a quiet wisdom and an internal strength that is inspiring to behold, and it has been a pleasure to have crossed paths with him. As he is consistently attentive and waiting for instruction, he has taught me a lot about areas for my own improvement in group facilitation, including class/behaviour management, lesson planning and structure, and providing opportunities for self-direction. Blaine has slowly and quietly become the leader of the GLC Choir. One day in the fall I called him over and told him how much I appreciate him and that I acknowledge him for being a leader in the class. He nodded.
At times, however, Blaine admits to being unfocused and expresses frustration for not being more independent and self-directed. The students often say to me that they need more direction or that they can’t do it by themselves. Generally their attention spans seem limited. This is a difficult situation, as I can’t split myself to help all of them at once. I feel that individual creation and expression is an important skill for them to learn and so I keep trying. This teaching method has also worked in past seasons and so I have a precedent for it being successful, however, every group is different in skill level and energetic and emotional tone. This is an area I need to improve upon, to give them clear directions and instructions and parameters for working by themselves or in smaller groups.

Blaine is consistently skilled as a musical leader as well, leading the male youth in the choir on their vocal part as he has a very good sense of pitch. His timing and rhythm are also very good and he regularly plays a cajon\textsuperscript{13} drum in the class to keep the group’s rhythm and tempo steady at which he succeeds (he has also expressed interest in playing the kit drum). I asked a friend if he would teach him some more skills on the cajon to accompany the GLC Choir, since it is hard for me to not get personally involved with the youth in the choir, especially when I see potential and the propensity for these youth to be continually underserved. In times like these I feel a kind of sadness that many of these talents and deep passions, interests, and dreams have been and will be put aside in everyday survival. However, as I have given examples of here, these youth, even against all odds, more often than not have a resilience to overcome adversities. I try to focus on this evidence in times like these where I can feel some sadness and disappointment.

\textsuperscript{13} A wooden box drum used in Latin American music.
Blaine also responds more than any other youth in the GLC Choir to the warm-up exercises, particularly to the mindfulness meditations I lead. I ask them to close their eyes and not distract anyone else, and when I open my eyes occasionally to see what is going on Blaine is often the only one who has really settled into the exercise. I remember one of the first warm-ups he participated in after joining the choir last fall. I was doing a physical warm-up combined with a mindfulness meditation and I asked them to let their arms go limp and shake them. After about a half a minute, I tell them to let their arms hang by their sides and to feel the blood rushing through them. Blaine exclaimed out loud excitedly, “Whoa! I’ve never felt that before” (personal communication, 2012). Occasionally when I haven’t led a mindfulness exercise, Blaine asks if we can do one, indicating to me that it is a useful part of class for him.

Taking this body awareness and relaxation into his performances in master class, Blaine has been able to successfully and progressively release tension with each session. Once as I coached him through “Johnny B. Goode” by Chuck Berry in master class and as we got deeper and deeper into the sentiment of the song, Blaine let go more and more until his volume and tone, as well as his corporal involvement, were double the expression of that during his first attempt. When we were done and the other youth had given Blaine accolades for “going for it,” Blaine said “That felt amazing! Now I need to do one of those relaxation exercises…” (personal communication, 2013). Like the others, as Blaine works using his speaking voice to inform his singing voice, utilizing the comfort and consistency of his own physiology in accent, tone, and lack of affect, his sound and emotion grow in clarity, ease, and connection, which is at once obvious to himself as well as the rest of the group.

As I mentioned in Chapter Three, currently Blaine is working on a song by the band Tool called “Aenima”:  

97
Some say the end is near.
Some say we’ll see Armageddon soon.
I certainly hope we will.
I sure could use a vacation from this
bullshit three ring circus sideshow of freaks
Here in this hopeless fucking hole we call LA
The only way to fix it is to flush it all away.

Fret for your figure and
Fret for your latte and
Fret for your lawsuit and
Fret for your hairpiece and
Fret for your Prozac and
Fret for your pilot and
Fret for your contract and
Fret for your car.

After he finished, Rino came in and validated Blaine saying he sounded passionate about what he was singing and he also asked us if we could keep the volume down so as not to disturb the other students. Blaine agreed but didn’t apologize for his passionate performance or for the obscene language. In a way I think Blaine meant to “stir shit up!” — in resistance to the staid, controlled nature of institutional learning. I am often torn by my role as the responsible teacher and an ally to the resistance of the youth. I was sympathetic to Blaine’s conscious or sub-conscious endeavour, as singing this song any other way would have been antithetical to the meaning of the song and to the way Blaine was feeling. I became fully aware in that moment of Blaine’s resistance to the status quo, and that asserting his position and voice encourages his resiliency and strength.

We are scheduled to perform for a choir concert titled “Singing for a Just World” in Vancouver June 8th, 2013 with two other choirs — a labour choir called The Solidarity Notes, and the East Van rock n’ roll covers choir known as the Kingsgate Chorus. I describe these two groups to the GLC Choir as a group of old communist hippies (The Solidarity Notes) and a
group of young hipsters (The Kingsgate Chorus), and they became very excited. As we prepare for the concert I would love for them to write their own song collaboratively, as well as sing a few covers of their choice. We have been brainstorming the last few weeks on our theme for our song. We have had excellent discussions about the injustices of the world — racism, sexism, poverty, selfishness — and last week I think we landed our theme: encouraging vulnerability and openness in humanity. During this discussion Blaine shared with us more about his life than he ever had before. The students came to this conclusion from Blaine’s wisdom: “That’s what people really need to do, be in-depth about it, and honest and respectful, and start being comfortable with letting their emotions out to each other.” He has learned this through his own lived experience. These are some collectively brainstormed lyrics from that session:

We’ve got so many problems unsolved, with the ones we love.  
How can we fix this pain, lying here going insane.  
Mend the things that are broken, try to make things right.  
Speak the words that are unspoken, lead our world into the light  
We can have a better world, if we change our point of view.  
Society can make it happen, if we just pull through.  
Its up to me and you.

There is a deeply human element inherent in the group’s sharing — musical or spoken — that one might dare to call spiritual.

The core group has expressed in different ways that they think of each other as family members and the GLC Choir as a family. The core group has a “fictional” family comprised of Blaine and Lila as the parents and Sara, Super, and Hu’ng (from last year’s group) as their children. As you may have noticed, Neil has been left out of this family, however, Lila and Blaine told me that Neil has told them that they are the only friends he has and that they are like a family to him. Even though they can relate to Neil’s search for a sense of belonging, they are also uncomfortable and annoyed with his socially awkward interactions. When I asked Lila about
how she feels about her voice, she told me: “I’m opening up a lot more. When I first started it felt so closed in my throat, and now I don’t care if I mess up anymore. I feel a lot more confident. …I feel almost like you guys are my family, ’cause I can open up like her” (personal communication, 2013).

In September 2012 a young woman named Sydney joined the group. She told us on the first day of the GLC Choir class that she moved here from the Okanagan because her parents were neglecting her. She was a key member of the choir until her sister, who she had been living with in Surrey since she moved to the Lower Mainland, took a job and needed a babysitter for her two small children. This left Sydney as their caregiver and her GLC Choir attendance ended. It was very sad for her and for the group. She had been writing songs and poems and was highly motivated. Here is one of Sydney’s songs that also identifies the choir as being her “family”:

And I’m opening up  
Trying things that are new  
Trying things I would never do  
And I’ve got all these faces staring at me  
And I’m getting scared, but they don’t care,  
Cause they’re here to support me  
Like one great, happy family

I think this concept of a “choir family” has been true for many of the past students of the GLC Choir. Many of them come back to visit and tell us what they are doing, or simply to sing with us for a day, mentioning not having anywhere to sing and not having sung much since they left school. Many of the former members of the GLC Choir are still friends and have supported each other after graduation from the GLC. Judging from the above evidence I would say that the GLC Choir is a stand-in “family” for some of these young people who don’t have a family or are estranged from their family. Reviewing Masten’s List of Resiliency Factors, the GLC Choir in combination with the GLC school are meeting several of the listed needs of these youth in their
path towards resiliency: positive relationships with adults, friends and/or romantic partners, hope and a sense of meaning, bonds to school, and positive self-perceptions. I would also argue that the school and the choir program are addressing to a greater or lesser degree each tension in Ungar’s table of Seven Tensions.

Brené Brown, a research professor at the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work, states that according to her research, love and belonging are irreducible needs. She defines belonging as:

\[
[T]he \ \text{innate human desire to be a part of something larger than us.}
\text{Because this yearning is so primal, we often try to acquire it by fitting in and seeking approval, which are not only hollow substitutes for belonging but often barriers to it. True belonging only happens when we present our authentic imperfect selves to the world. Our sense of belonging can never be greater than our level of self-acceptance. (2013)}
\]

Brown reached this conclusion through her research that the number one barrier to feeling a sense of belonging is an attempt to “fit in.” This is the same process I see happen to the students in the GLC Choir. They arrive at the GLC Choir and try to behave and sing in a way in which they believe will be accepted by their peers, but the true belonging happens when their barriers drop and they show their “real” selves. They belong to the culture of the GLC Choir so much so that they feel like family, and I believe this is because they are encouraged through song and space to be themselves.

**Vocal Expression of Resiliency and Resistance in Past Seasons of the GLC Choir**

Above are some stories of resilience and resistance I have witnessed from the core group. I would like to add to this discussion examples from past years of the GLC Choir. I wanted to touch again on a point I made in Chapter Two about the mandate of this choir program within the
larger structure of the school: it is not only for music education, but is also — knowing its popularity with the students involved — a leverage strategy if they are not attending school regularly. The school also uses it as a draw to stay in school and graduate; students are told that to attend choir they need to be attending the rest of school regularly. On several occasions we have had to inform and/or remind students of this structure and then wait and see what the impact is on their attendance. One spring a couple of years ago we had to have an intervention with Kylie, knowing she would not graduate if she didn’t complete two courses. Rino (her Social Studies teacher), Ravi (her English teacher), and I sat down with her and told her that she could easily finish if she set her mind to it and from then on she could not just attend choir, but needed to attend every other day as well. Kylie graduated, and in her yearbook she thanked Rino, Ravi, and I: “To my true force of inspiration: Anna, Rino, and Ravi; you believed in me when I didn’t, you changed everything I knew about the school hierarchy.”

The first group of students I had in the GLC Choir were very musically talented, having had quite a bit of musical experience prior to attending the GLC Choir. As I mentioned before, they were also more mature in many ways than the group I have had in the last couple of years — perhaps “street smart” is the term I’m looking for. We had a couple of big successes during this time and lots of small successes during our two years together.

Collectively they wrote an original song for a Social Justice Conference at Kwantlen College in Surrey. A few students from Guildford Learning Centre and from the GLC Choir were taking a course on social justice with college students and the organizers of the conference asked us if we would be interested in performing at the conference. The youth were excited by the prospect and we agreed to it. I thought it would be an amazing opportunity for them to write something original with my facilitation. As I outlined earlier, we brainstormed together and then
with a mixture of individual, small group, and whole group work they composed a song called

“Light of Equality” with the following lyrics:

Sydney:
Always left behind,
no one hears her cries,
tears fall from her eyes,
always standing on her own

Samuel:
Growing up, treated different
I was living the wrong way,
Racism made it hard for the long day
Disrespect and spite was the wrong play
But that’s my life so listen to the song say
The thing I went through, the thing I’m going through
If you seen what I seen you would feel the pain too

Celine and Lanora:
(CHORUS)
In life there are things you cannot change
There are things you have to fight
Just look up to the sky and see the light,
The light of equality and eye to eye sight

Lanora:
Have you ever had those times,
Where it seems too much?
Your soul just gives you those signs
It’s time to go and leave the past behind
And sometime you’ll know, it’s the chance to grow

Celine and Lanora:
(CHORUS)

Celine:
Day by day, just hold your head up high
Thinking and wishing, oh why, oh why can’t I
Stand up, sing out loud and face the rain

Samuel:
Living in the struggle, standing on a lifeline
Trying do things better, waiting for the right time
Dreams of my father, seems like the right time,
For better days while we get into the night time
Trying practice life better?
Wondering when its my time
Living to death, while I’m looking for the bright shine?

Lanora:
Cause you know its better than for you to make excuses for the guilty
Only to give up your pride
I’ll just let you know that one day you’ll see
It’s worth the fight, to be in the light

Celine and Lanora:
(CHORUS)

Celine:
(CHORUS - Rubato)

The gig went really well and many people complimented the choir, telling them they were the highlight of the event. They definitely felt proud of themselves, even though they were extremely nervous before. From this event the Surrey School Board heard about the group and invited the group to perform at one of their meetings. This further affirmed their voices are being heard and the power of their words are being felt by their community. The school board was also very impressed by the group. I see that the combination of the power of music and the honesty and forthrightness of this group can be almost startling to many adults, but one can’t help but admire and respect their sometimes naïve public display of vulnerability, as they are essentially singing about a common human experience.

This group also wrote a song for their graduation and performed both this one and the “Light of Equality” for their graduation ceremony. They were even more nervous for this performance than they were for the Social Justice Conference as it was in front of their peers, family, and immediate community. They made a mistake and stopped in the middle of “Light of Equality” but got back on their feet and finished the song. This was a big day for them and me as
it was our final event together as one group before they disappeared into the world. I have had visits from members of this group occasionally and I love to see them. Sometimes they even come to sing with my present group, and once in a while I get a message from them on Facebook. We definitely shared some powerful experiences together, and as the school had hoped, the choir program supported their graduation.

Hu’ng also sang a song at his graduation ceremony and unfortunately I couldn’t be there, but Rino told me that he performed with so much heart that he started to cry a bit in the middle, composed himself, and then carried on. I think the GLC Choir was an emotional outlet for Hu’ng in many ways and in this way was a resiliency tool. At the same time as he was emoting his own personal worries and feelings, he was also in active resistance to the injustices he saw in the world and needed a space for those concerns to be heard.

As I recorded in Chapter Three, Hu’ng expressed in a humorous way his acknowledgement and discontent with racial stereotyping of Asians in the Lower Mainland. In spring 2012 I encouraged the group to write their own songs. We had been writing a song together and I had given them collectively and individually songwriting instruction. Hu’ng had come to class several times obviously angry and disgruntled, and when I asked him what was bothering him he told me that he was “pissed off with the way the world is” (personal communication, 2012). I encouraged him to write about it, and he wrote a rap for the middle of the collective song that expressed his political views and his deepest hope. We were all blown away when he rapped it for the first time in class — powerful lyrics combined with a passionate performance:
“Hu’ng’s Rap”

This is a song about us  
For us  
About what we think as impossibilities  
Religion, politics, and society  
Tellin’ us what to think  
What to believe  
While they sit up on high  
Treatin’ us like cattle

We sing this  
So we can be free

Take it guys

After witnessing Hu’ng’s passion for justice, I invited him to an event I was attending that featured youth dialogue on ways to use compassion to transform the injustices in our world and specifically in our own communities. I had been quite distressed during our roundtable discussion because the adults at the table, one of which was a School Board Trustee, had hijacked the conversation and the two youths at our table — Hu’ng and another girl who was passionate about animal rights — didn’t speak until the end of the conversation. When they did muster the courage, however, they were powerful and Hu’ng’s point of view in particular brought tears to the eyes of the adults at our table.

After the roundtable discussion each table was instructed to give a summary of the table’s discussion. After quite a bit of negotiating, as the School Board Trustee didn’t seem to want the two youths at our table to give the summary (ironic on multiple levels), Hu’ng volunteered himself. He was remarkably powerful, honest, and heartfelt, surprising many people there. He spoke to how adults/educators/parents “never ask us (youth) what we really want to do with our lives and why we want to do that” (personal communication, 2011). What I heard him saying...
was that he doesn’t feel that many adults are interested in the real dreams and lives of our youth, which had been demonstrated moments before at our table. It was a very powerful experience of resistance and resilience for him and for me to witness, and even though this experience wasn’t directly related to singing, his voice was heard that day — a call for justice that he had first expressed through the above rap.

I have had an ongoing musical mentorship relationship inside and outside of school with Chantel who has been a member of the GLC Choir on and off for the last two and a half years. She is smart, extremely kind, talented, and also very powerful. When she first came into the program she was really struggling with her mental health and had regular breakdowns during class. Through the school counsellors and myself helping her with coping mechanisms, as well as a work/study program through Starbucks called Baristas — in which they do a lot of self-knowledge work, learning coping strategies for stress and trauma — Chantel’s wellbeing began to improve. What was really interesting to me and reaffirms my prior findings is that her technical difficulties (vocal pitch and phrasing issues, guitar technique) seemed to resolve themselves as her mental health improved. Chantel began this school year with us, then disappeared for the last three and a half months due to issues with family, her boyfriend, and mental health. The group missed her, as she is a natural energetic and musical leader in the group. She returned last week, telling us she was only here for a few weeks and then she was moving to her sister’s for a while to get away from everything. In her brief time with us she sang Rihanna’s “Stay” in master class with a great amount of emotion, probably because it related directly to her present situation. Like many other GLC Choir members over the years, she has found great solace and catharsis in singing her own original songs, as well as cover songs she feels particularly connected to musically and lyrically. The other youth are also soothed by
Chantel’s emotional release, Lila telling Chantel how much she loves it when she sings: “You put your whole self into it” (personal communication, 2013).
Chapter 5: Conclusion

It is the margins that provide a position of strength for community musicians. The edges of the metaphoric circle afford community musicians the space to question and challenge dominant forms of practice. This is a vital position to protect if those who work in community music wish to remain connected to its history and continue to challenge through innovation and resistance. (Higgins 2012: 6)

Review

In this ethnography of the GLC Choir I have shown the relationship between youth cultural identity construction and increased resiliency by providing stories and reflections about individual and group expression through voice. I have discovered through my research that it is not only vocal expression through song that supports identity construction and resiliency, but also the space of shared intimacy that is created through musical/vocal agency. As the examples from my thesis have demonstrated, these two factors — song and space — are symbiotic and at times I found it difficult to ascertain where one began and the other ended. Not only does agency through song support resiliency, but inadvertently space created by song also supports resiliency.

As goals and expectations inevitably change in the research process, my first surprise (as I will discuss below) was the omission of a chapter on the vocal expression of gender/sexual identity, much like the chapter on cultural identity. The second surprise was an element that seemed to be intertwined with resiliency — an underlying tone of resistance through voice. The examples of resistance are part of the identity construction through voice that many students in the GLC Choir, past and present, are presently engaged in. From my observation this agency through resistance builds strength of character — a self-knowledge that results from knowing themselves as distinct from what they are pushing up against — and it inevitably supports resiliency. Paradoxically, as the youth gain self-knowledge and resiliency from their individual
and collective vocal expression, they also seem to become more aware of the world around them and the inherent injustices that are evident, and thus react to this consciousness through expressions of resistance. As Schöpflin, a researcher on nationhood, identity, and political power, suggests: “Reflexive processes can accelerate and relativise the sense of identity, making it less secure, but they cannot eliminate it; they can add to a sense of unease, a sense that the world is not as it should be” (2001: 1).

I focused my research primarily on the vocal expression of cultural identity, as it seemed to be the most evident form of identity expression in the GLC Choir; however, I am fully aware that there are many more building blocks present in identity construction. For example, I began this research intending to also look at gender/sexual identity through voice in the GLC Choir. I decided against this after I had written a preliminary chapter on this subject, as it seemed to lack sufficient research examples resulting in a disproportionate amount of data in relationship to the data gathered on cultural identity through voice. This could be due to my orientation and education as an ethnomusicologist and the propensity for me to focus on music in relation to culture. I also felt there was excessive speculation on my part due to my lack of education in gender studies. At times I found it hard to decipher identity factors in particular examples, as they often interweave and overlap in vocal expressions of self and group.

At times I questioned whether some of the examples I was reporting on had anything to do with music, understanding that I am working within the discipline of ethnomusicology. This is where the lines get blurry for me and, as I have read and witnessed, also for others in the field. There have been discussions in my ethnomusicology classes about whether a piece of work was actually about music because it focused so much on other cultural elements. I have experienced how confusing these lines can be and how anthropology and sociology particularly impact our
ethnomusicological discussions. However, throughout my work I am always consciously or sub-consciously aware that music is the container that holds and influences the relationships and work within — informed, encouraged, and facilitated by music.

As I was distinguishing between the collective and individual vocal expressions of cultural identity, resiliency, and resistance, I again struggled for clarity: “Collective and individual identities exist and impact on one another reciprocally. In this sense, there is a continuous construction of self both explicitly and through doxa, the world of implicit meanings” (Schöpflin 2001: 1).

**Identified Areas for Pedagogical Improvement/Education**

Through reflection on my research, I realized that my inherent and learned interpersonal, musical, and teaching skills are the most effective parts of my facilitation. I also confirmed my need to address the class structure and organization in more detail. While I wouldn’t want to always blindly adhere to a fixed structure, it is increasingly important for me to provide a consistent framework for the youth so that some sense of predictability and safety are maintained in class. Because the agenda on any given day is constantly changing according to space, performances, and attendance, the curriculum is highly variable. That being said, I believe that for the wellbeing of the group — the youth and myself — I need to create and maintain a more defined structural framework. The youth in my choir have very unpredictable lives, and so the least I can do is provide a space where the chaos is not as palpable as the rest of their world. I believe that if they know what to expect and there is a fair amount of consistency from one week to another, this will aid and further support all of us in our learning and wellbeing.
I have gained many ideas and skills from HOF, as well as other education, to turn this plan into action. Through my research findings I realized that supporting the students’ resiliency must be kept at the forefront of my teaching. To begin with, I would like to have specific opening and closing exercises/songs that I maintain from week to week. I think this in particular is a very important pedagogical framework that supports safety through predictability and aids learning. A solid opening and closing to class is also a container that holds the content. I already employ this teaching method, but not in a consistent manner. As I mentioned previously, the first group I had in the GLC Choir would ask me for a closing song, knowing that this was an important method of completion and brings closure to our time together.

I would also like to have the class structure written up somewhere in the classroom for them to see. Before the closing of each class I would then talk about the plan for the following week in case there is preparation to be done on their part. I previously mentioned my struggle with time management and realize that if I am to include these crucial factors into my teaching, I will need to be much more cognizant of the time. I think this consistency would give the class a more relaxed feel and would allow for deeper learning and connection.

On reflection, it would be beneficial to have an agreed upon Goals and Agreements, created and formulated collectively by the class. It would accommodate both the students who are goal oriented and in class specifically for the musical learning (and not so much for socio-emotional needs), as well as for students whose behavior can greatly disrupt the class. It would enable me to refer to the agreed expectations for group and individual behavior when needed and for the group to keep in mind the governing objectives of our collective vocal mission. For me as the leader of this group, I know that I need to hold the youth in the choir more accountable for the classroom agreements. Sometimes I feel like I am being too militant and authoritarian by
being vigilant about these agreements, but I also know that for those youth who have a high level of anxiety and unpredictability in their lives, they want to know where the boundaries are and what the expectations are for them, whether it comes to curriculum or behavior.

Sara’s one piece of advice to me, when I asked her what she thought I could improve upon, was “You could give a lot more constructive criticism than you do, Anna. Sometimes you are too soft” (personal communication, 2013). I know this about myself and my work; realizing people can be ultra-sensitive about their voices, I tend to be very careful at times with my feedback, not wanting to damage or insult someone. One very useful piece of instruction I gathered from the HOF Training was that as long as you are honest with compassionate and kind intent, you need to hold people capable of handling their own emotions related to and understandings of what you are sharing with them. I know that I need to hold the youth in the GLC Choir capable of handling my instruction and feedback — even my constructive criticism. As they have shown me through the years, they are ready for it and, in many cases, asking for it. That is why they come every week!

When I asked Lila what she thought I could improve upon, she said “More one-on-one instruction” (personal communication, 2013). There have been times over the years when I have conducted a few one-on-one lessons each week at the end of class. This was extremely beneficial for the students, as it allowed them to express themselves differently than they do in class without the same self-consciousness and influences of their peers. They also gained tremendously from individual vocal instruction, as in class it is hard for me to hear each student’s voice clearly or to give the individual instruction and attention each student may need. Besides pedagogical learning, the one-on-one also affords the student and me increased intimacy and trust in our teacher-student relationship, which I believe in turn benefits the group.
I have also at times had the opportunity to help them in their individual songwriting endeavors, and I would like to create more time for this kind of instruction. What I have found, often to my amazement, is that with a little bit of help or sometimes without, these youth are excellent songwriters. Even when their pitch and rhythm are not solid, their original compositions become clear with my help in deciphering pitch and rhythm. Without this little bit of help their songs often lie dormant, un-translated, and at times I have witnessed the frustration that comes with their unrequited self-expression. In workshopping some songs by “musically challenged” students, I realized that they know what the song is supposed to sound like, even though it may sound ambiguous in terms of pitch and rhythm to the outside listener and may sound like they themselves aren’t sure of the particulars. But from my experience with several students, the opposite is true — they hear a complete song in their heads but are simply not able to translate it due to their lack of experience and skill. When I correctly identify their melody, rhythm, or phrasing, they often exclaim, “Yes, that’s it!” I have had this experience with several of the youth. I find it greatly encouraging as a voice teacher and researcher because inside these students who would not outwardly be identified as “talented,” there is inherent musicality.

A wonderful surprise and benefit I gained from the research process was my one-on-one interviews with the core group. It was an incredibly rewarding and validating experience for myself and for the students. I took half an hour to an hour with each student and it was a transforming opportunity for each of us to reflect on the whole process of the GLC Choir. Some of the questions I asked them were: What keeps you coming back to choir? How do you feel about your voice? What do you think you bring to the group? What do you think I could improve on in terms of my facilitation of the group? Where are your areas for improvement in terms of musical/vocal skills? I also had the opportunity to give them feedback on what I appreciated
about their involvement and participation in the group, both musically and socially, which I realized I don’t always remember or have the time or space to do. This interview process was so beneficial that I would like to continue it each semester.

At times during my teaching the GLC Choir I feel a little in-over-my-head in terms of handling the socio-emotional needs and issues of mental health. Inherent in voice work, as I have mentioned, is personal development work, which can be confronting and difficult at times. I often feel as if the work I do is a combination of voice instructor and counsellor, as there seems to be many emotions and personal issues inherent in expressing the self through voice for many people. At times I feel unequipped for the kind of emotional issues the youth may be dealing with, and often I refer them to the counsellor. But at times there is a particular context that I am more familiar with, and sending them to a counsellor almost induces more stress for them than if I were to deal with it myself. These mini-counselling sessions are perhaps not only inappropriate due to my lack of counselling skills and education, but also take away valuable time from the musical content of the class. I am not sure how to resolve this, as many of the students rely on the class as a means of socio-emotional support as much as a vocal education. However, other students I have had become impatient with the amount of emotional processing that can take place at times in the class. I have decided through this self-reflective process that if I choose to keep doing this work (as I’m sure I will), I need more education in counselling and youth psychology to know how to deal effectively and efficiently with the students’ socio-emotional needs.

I have had students in my program who are ready for a much faster pace to the class, as well as more difficult curriculum. As I try to address these needs in the way that I can, I am also committed to not leaving anyone behind. One way that I think I can address the particular needs
of these “ready and willing” students is to give them more responsibility for different aspects of the class, which I already do in terms of leading harmony parts or singing solos. But I believe I could give them instruction/homework to encourage a faster rate of learning, which I’m sure they would be thankful for as well as being helpful to the group process in terms of leadership and modeling.

As I mentioned in Chapter Four, I often face resistance in terms of the selection of ensemble songs. And when we do choose something to sing, there seems to be a dying interest in it the more we work on it. It is likely they want the gratification without the hard work. I have mentioned this to them and they seem to agree, but it doesn’t seem to change their attitude. My music teaching philosophy is that I really don’t want anyone to suffer through music — even in the hard work there has to be a residual passion and joy for what you are doing and learning. I instinctively know, even though I don’t want to admit it to myself, that because of the repeated experience of rejection of the repertoire of my choosing I now feel a fear and lack of confidence in the experience of presenting new repertoire. This attitude of course encourages their rejection of a piece. There are a few things I can think of to resolve these issues: 1) present new material with confidence; 2) share the story/history of the song; 3) share my personal connection to and love of the song; and 4) share with them why I think they might like it. All of this connection and background would hopefully set the context and invoke the spirit of the song, and lead to more student buy-in.

Another part of the defeatist cycle is that because they often reject my suggestions or even their own suggestions, I have gotten into the pattern of not properly preparing arrangements for the songs, not wanting to spend all of the time involved in learning and composing or transcribing arrangements for “selected” songs when I believe that they will eventually (sooner
or later) reject them. I realize that once we agree on a song that I should prepare the above arrangements and that we should enter into the learning/workshopping process with confidence, knowing that this is what we collectively agreed upon and that we need to follow through on our commitment. I also can let them know how much time I spend preparing these pieces/arrangements for them, and therefore we need to be diligent in our selection and more committed to learning, honouring all of our time and the song.

Future Research

Chapter Three included a closing section on the construction of place identity through individual and group vocal expression in the GLC Choir. There is definitely a link between cultural identity and place identity, and some may even say that they are one in the same or that place identity is simply within the context of cultural identity. At the same time as I agree with these arguments, I also believe that in this time of great global cultural flux and urbanization that it is particularly interesting and pertinent to study the human musical reflection of nature and environment. I would like to pursue further investigation into this concept in future research, as I have an interest in how music and place identity intersect. I strongly identify with the high semi-arid landscape where I grew up and I express place-identity through my music. As I briefly described in Chapter Three, place identity through song is especially evident in older cultures with a longer and more established historical connection to their specific land, expressing a relationship and respect for the land. I wonder if this phenomenon of expression and appreciation of land through song could work in a reversal of roles, consciously constructing songs of place to invoke place identity leading to a growing connection, appreciation, and respect for the land we
live on. I guess, in essence, that I am wondering if song and music could help us in our present plight for ecological survival.

Learning and embracing a musical and meditation practice are actions I have taken in my life that have brought me great joy and peace. As I have directly experienced the symbiotic relationship between music and meditation, I would like to investigate further the connections between music and meditation in neuroscience, as well as researching other people’s lived experience with music and meditation. Professionally I would like to start incorporating more curriculum content that utilizes the benefits of song and meditation in combination. Since I have integrated meditation and, more specifically, mindfulness with breath and body awareness into my voice teaching, not only have I seen the benefits for the students, but many of them have given me feedback that the lessons often feel deeply relaxing like meditation. And as I mentioned before, when I haven’t incorporated these practices into a specific day’s agenda, the youth I work with have often asked me if and when we can meditate or do a visualization exercise. I also think that the closing songs can be a form of mediation, which is why they are so effective at bringing completion to the class.

As I mentioned previously, I initially planned on including a chapter on the vocal expression of gender and sexuality in the GLC Choir but decided to omit it. I would like to continue to look at this subject, however, as I think it is a valuable avenue of inquiry for my professional life. I am particularly interested in the western cultural phenomenon of fewer and fewer males participating in collective and individual singing endeavours. This perhaps also has something to do with the western cultural phenomenon of the “non-singer” and the professionalism and perfectionism that people think they need to have before they even attempt to sing (as I discussed in Chapter Three). This supposition requires further research.
I read two articles pertaining to gender and voice in my review of the relevant literature for this thesis. Both Elorriaga (2011) and Hall (2005) primarily focused on male youth, researching how puberty and cultural gender roles influence the way the boys feel about their voices. I found these articles shared many points and elicited interest and inspiration in me for several reasons: 1) as men, they had first-hand knowledge of their common “gendered” vocal experience; 2) they shared roles as researcher/teacher and an intimate connection to their subject/students; and 3) they demonstrated passion and persistence for future research in hope of increased male participation in singing. I mention these two authors because I am interested in their subject matter, hoping to encourage more males to participate in singing, and because I feel an affinity for their research design and their passion for the research.

Elorriaga finished the article by sharing the following: “As a researcher, I found out that I had a lot of work to do in order to evaluate in detail everything that had been done in the previous few months. And as a teacher, I felt absolutely challenged by the new path that I saw in front of me” (2011: 330). Hall ends his article hopeful, yet pragmatic: “In conclusion, this research contributes towards a greater understanding of how boys’ gendered identities intersect with learning to sing and raises awareness about the challenge of finding ways to improve participation in a wider range of musical behaviours early in childhood” (2005: 18). I find inspiration for further research in this area and the above future areas of research by being involved in Teacher Action Research. It makes me feel hopeful that the curriculum can be adapted to better suit our young people and that academia is growing closer and closer to being effectual in the “real” world.

Perhaps my greatest area of interest and ambition for future study is in the area of cultural identity through song and intercultural singing. There are three ongoing questions related to this
joint topic that have been at the forefront of my thinking, song teaching, and academic inquiry:  
1) How can I research and provide an appropriate, informed, and educated context and historical background for the “world music” repertoire?; 2) Am I honouring a particular song and its culture, or am I appropriating it?; and 3) How can I include and focus on Canadian (Settler and Aboriginal) repertoire in the hope of building a common and singable Canadian repertoire?

In response to the first question, I would like to educate myself on what repertoire is licensed and sanctioned by the “keepers” of a particular musical tradition for global consumption and which repertoire has a culturally specific use, inappropriate for singing outside of its particular cultural context. Sometimes this information is readily available, and sometimes I can’t find it. I am always torn with the decision of whether or not to go ahead and sing it anyway until I can find the information, or if I can’t find the information not to sing it at all. Finding the historical background or context in which the song is sung and, if possible, who wrote it are especially important components for me to research and relate to my singing groups before we sing a song. Sometimes I forget, or the youth I teach don’t seem interested, and I end up not relaying the contextual story; I always feel, however, like this is an important factor in the delivery of the song that is missing. I would also like to do more pedagogical research on how to affectively and sensitively deliver context on the cultural particulars of the repertoire I sing with my choirs. I am also interested in researching and learning more about the surrounding cultural context of a song like dance, art, costumes, food/drink, etc.

The second question and answer overlaps with the answer to the first question. I am interested in doing more research on cultural studies and how to properly honour a song (with the above contextual measures), as well as educating myself on the signs and tactics in appropriation as to properly avoid them in my teaching. I would also like to acknowledge that there is an
aspect of this discussion on appropriation that is particularly touchy in our western culture right now because of these issues coming to light more and more in everyday life through education. At the same time as this consciousness-raising activity is entirely appropriate and desperately needed, there is also a propensity for increased emotional sensitivity and insult as the inherent injustices of colonization and racism are more consciously present. There is a need to be respectful and diligent in honouring culture and song, but perhaps also a need not to be exceedingly fearful or careful, something I have also personally experienced which can begin to dampen the light that music brings in the first place.

The last question is where things get personal, and once again I bring it home. I asked myself, “If music is a reflection of culture and environment, what is Vancouver’s music?” My musical experience as a third-generation Canadian (as I described in the Introduction) has been one full of interest and passion and, perhaps paradoxically, also a feeling of musical homelessness. After looking outward to other cultures’ strong musical traditions for many years, I have recently returned my musical attention homeward to Vancouver. Teaching various community singing groups I have observed some characteristics of Vancouver’s musical culture, in particular its great diversity and how in the face of this diversity Vancouverites are grappling with how to participate in collective music making.

There are a few obstacles, nevertheless, that I have observed in our culture that seem to be in the way of a collective singing of Canadian repertoire in Vancouver: 1) the local musical culture is dominated by passive participation (radio, CDs, MP3 players, etc.) rather than active participation; 2) American music dominates pop music culture in Vancouver (and much of the rest of Canada); 3) because there are so many diverse cultural populations with their own distinct musical cultures, it is hard to find common repertoire; and 4) there is a lack of Canadian musical
resources. To re-iterate this point, Hill makes a fascinating observation, one that I have often noticed in my own teaching in Vancouver: “It seems ironic that indigenous and folk resources from nearly every continent and culture, except the one in which I live, are readily available” (2009: 11).

As Vancouver and the Lower Mainland are made up of such diverse populations, I believe it is important that the music we sing together reflect the make-up of the local demographics, and in so doing work as a tool for understanding and cultural literacy. Within the GLC Choir there is often resistance at first to the songs I bring from other cultures and musical traditions that include rhythms, scales, melodies, languages, and phrasing that are foreign to many of them. If we manage to push through the initial resistance, these pieces often turn out to be their favourite songs, the ones they ask to sing.

Hopefully as a result of the above prospective Canadian and intercultural song singing research, I will also encounter information and data that assists me in encouraging and supporting more diversity in my “choirs.” Right now the racial make-up of my choirs is primarily white Canadian, which isn’t entirely surprising due to me being a white Canadian. I am interested in how to market and lead my song groups to include and create a certain level of cultural familiarity and comfort with more ethnicities. Surrey is home to a large immigrant community, including Indo-Canadian, Vietnamese, and Chinese residents. I believe further diversity in the GLC Choir and my other choirs would lead us further and further into Bhabha’s third space — a space of invention and creation by way of diversity.

I hope to use my research to better inform my teaching and contribute to musical curriculum development and pedagogical methods for song leaders and teachers in Vancouver or other areas with similar demographics and issues. Within burgeoning, multifaceted world
cultures, singing individually and collectively may assist us in answering the questions “Who are we?” and “Who am I?” And to end this thesis in the same spirit as Elorriaga and Hall through Teacher Action Research, and in solidarity with community musicians, my hope is for my community to re-engage in the innate biological motivation to sing. And in so doing to be a part of the process of creating a collective musical home.
Bibliography


Wikipedia. n.d. “Cultural Identity.” “Place Identity.”
